



This week...

Declutter Your Office and Your Mind

Clutter and mess can increase our stress and anxiety levels in an already stressful day. If you think about it, clutter and mess are often associated with negative emotions like confusion, tension, and irritability. In fact, a study by Princeton University researchers discovered that clutter makes it more difficult to focus on a particular task. More specifically, they discovered that a person's visual cortex can be overwhelmed by objects not related to a particular task, making it harder to focus and complete projects efficiently.

Alternatively, an organized space, like your office and home, tends to produce more positive emotions like calmness and a sense of well-being. By cleaning, organizing, and reducing the clutter, people are able to take control and create a more relaxing environment that helps them think clearer, and focus on the more pressing issues in their lives. Efforts to declutter have been found to improve a person's mood by reducing anxiety, as well as providing a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

There are a number of reasons why decluttering can help you destress:

- It helps you focus better – messy offices are overwhelming making it hard to focus
- It saves you time finding things, making you more productive
- It gives you more space, which helps you relax and feel less crowded
- It improves your immunity – easy access to surfaces means better cleaning
- It boosts your confidence – you can stop feeling like you are lost, or misplacing important items

Most of us put off cleaning and organizing because the task seems way too big to tackle. Instead of expecting to get the entire office in order over a lunch hour, start small and do just a little bit each day while you take your brain break. Commit to doing one thing a day and before you know it, your environment will be much cleaner and less stressful in no time. Just make sure you do not make your to-do list bigger than what you can mentally handle. We want to *reduce* rather than *increase* your stress!

Here are some ideas of how you may want to take a 'productive' brain break by finding ways to clear and organize your work life:

- **Remove and recycle.** The first big step to being clutter-free is to remove everything off of your desk and from your drawers. Clear out old gum, pens that don't work, broken paper clips, and anything else that you don't need. As you start to remove the items, toss them in the garbage or recycling. Even though this step may seem like common sense, it's easy to get distracted by the next phone call and forget to throw something simple away.
- **Return what isn't yours.** Whether your coworker let you borrow a stapler, or your pet left their favorite toy by your chair in your home office, it's time to get rid of what isn't yours.
- **Give everything a home.** This means that all of the items on top of your desk, in your drawers, and in your filing cabinets need a home. Use a variety of items like desk organizers, clear acrylic containers, hanging folders and bankers' boxes to make sure every item you keep has its own place.
- **Get digital.** Using apps like business card scanners, project management apps and Cloud storage can help you get rid of physical paper and objects and clear up more space in your drawers and filing cabinets. As you digitize, make sure you are setting up an organization system as you go.
- **Wipe that desk down.** After you remove all of your items, grab some disinfectant, and get cleaning. Don't forget to clean your keyboard, mouse, and computer screen too.

- **Replace with purpose.** When you start to put the items back on your desk and in your drawers, make sure you organize with purpose. Create a proper workflow by making the items you regularly use the easiest ones to access.
- **Take a picture.** When it comes to our own clutter, we often have blinders on. How many times have you gone into another office, building, or store and noticed clutter that others seem to be unaware of? Take a step back to your door and snap a few photos on your phone. The photos will give you a different perspective and help you spot your trouble spots.

It can also be helpful to declutter your ‘technical world’:

- **Organize your smartphone.** Take a few minutes to delete any apps you never use, sort your latest photos by event or date, and file apps in folders. Shift any apps you use daily to the front screen. And while you’re at it, why not update your background photo? [Click here](#) for more tips to declutter your phone.
- **Update your online passwords every so often.** Best practice is to create a phrase that combines upper- and lowercase letters, numbers, and at least one special character. Try not to use the same password for your email and all your social networks, and keep track of the new passwords using a tool like 1Password, PassPack, or Password Genie.
- **Take 10 minutes to delete emails.** While you’re at it, unsubscribe from 10 newsletters in your inbox such as daily deals or store promotions.
- **Rename and organize your digital files.** Your future self (who won’t have to spend five minutes looking for that document) will thank you.

Remember, Rome wasn’t built in a day, nor will your office be clutter-free overnight. However, do commit to regular decluttering. Consider setting aside 10 minutes two or three times each week to declutter your space, and enjoy feeling more open and less stressed!

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

- [Life Squire | Tips on How to Declutter Your Workspace](#)

- [Living Well Spending Less | Declutter Your Phone](#)
- [Novel Coworking | 7 Simple Tips for Declutter Your Office](#)
- [The Muse | 51 Things to Do When You Need a Break at Work](#)
- [Very Well Mind | How Mental Health and Cleaning Are Connected](#)
- [Work and Money | 5 Easy Ways to Declutter Your Office Space](#)