



## **Creating The Bikini Office: 5 Clues It's Time to Trim the Fat!** by Jackie Davis

**Just like a body, an office can be attractive, trim and efficient—or, can become overstuffed, fat and sluggish. What's the main culprit of the "overweight" office? Clutter.**

There are many causes of clutter. Items have no assigned home. The demands on your time limit the attention you give to clearing papers. Or, you have a hidden investment in remaining disorganized because it allows you to make excuses for why projects are not completed. Whatever the cause, you can control clutter by putting your office on a "diet" of healthy practices

**Imagine what it would be like if you were more organized.** You could spend less time looking for things, tripping over things and arguing with office mates about where things are located. **You could gain control over your office, your business, and your life.** You could work more effectively and efficiently. You could actually have space to reflect and rejuvenate. You might even have time to smell the roses, kick up your heels, and work on that body!

How do you know if you need to trim the fat in your office? The following clues signal it's time to clear out the clutter and get organized.

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**Clue #1 - Your work environment is so cluttered, just thinking about it makes you uncomfortable.** Your spirits drop when you enter your office. You spend less time working in it and you're ashamed to hold client meetings there. That's no way to run a business—especially if you want to *stay* in business.

Feng Shui, the ancient Chinese practice of placement used to improve health, relationships, career and prosperity, teaches us that **a cluttered space clutters your mind, your body and your life.**

Feng Shui principles aim to balance energy between you and the environment.

How does clutter impact the balance of energy in your office? The root of the word clutter is Middle English; it means "coagulate or clot, a lump." Just as a lump prevents the proper flow of blood in the body, clutter prevents energy, called Chi, from flowing freely within a space. As clutter accumulates your energy stagnates. Stagnant energy clouds your thinking, and eventually your work suffers.

**Eliminate the junk to energize your office and your work.**

Clearing out clutter helps renew the Chi. With more energy flowing, using your office becomes a more pleasurable experience. You grow more energetic, clear-headed, productive, and prosperous. Karen Kingston's "Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui" is a great resource for learning more about how to identify and clear clutter in your workplace.

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**Clue #2 - You have a system but you rarely use it.** Like diets, all systems are not created equal. Some work well for logical, left-brain types while others work better for the creative right-brainers. Using the one that works best for you can make the difference between being organized and productive, or reverting to your clutter-bug ways.

One of my clients, Tara, researched several systems for organizing her office. The one she selected worked for millions of people. Surely, it would work for her. She analyzed, strategized and planned to attack the clutter. But she never seemed to make any headway. The problem was that she'd lose interest after following the first few steps. It all seemed so technical and complicated to her. Following the system seemed to be more trouble than it was worth.

**Choose a system based on your personal style.** We determined Tara was using the wrong system *for her*. I suggested she follow the KISS (Keep It Simple Sister) rule and use a system that fit her personality and needs. She realized that the fewer steps it had and the less time-consuming it was, the more likely she was to use a system.

She decided to sort items according to how she used them, storing similar items together. We created three categories:

Active – These were things used frequently, such as client projects or records. Since out of sight meant out of mind, Tara stored important papers in a cubbyhole system and plastic containers so they'd remain visible. She chose to display and hang supplies she used every day, putting them where she could reach them while seated at her desk. This way they were visible, so it was easy to see when she needed to replace something. They were also accessible—making it more likely she would return them to their place when finished.

Reference - These were important documents such as insurance papers and resale certificates not needed daily. Tara placed these items in a handy vertical storage unit, making maximum use of her space.

Archives – These items such as old invoices may not have been needed for years, but were important to retain. Tara put these in a clear container, labeled it and stored it on a top shelf.

She ditched the elaborate closed filing system she never followed. Using a system appropriate for how she thinks and works made it easier for Tara to put things where they belonged and easier for her to locate them. Now, the office is more organized and she's less stressed.

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**Clue #3 - You've run out of space to work comfortably.** You have a problem throwing things away. You hold onto things that are not genuinely useful because they remind you of events you attended ages ago. The office is so cluttered you're not sure which things in it are important. You push papers and supplies aside to carve out a bit of work surface on your desk. Soon "Clutter" will be the name on the door because it has taken over the office.

I worked with a self-confessed collector, Mary, who had every trinket she gathered from every trade show she attended. Her other love was electronics; she had every laptop, notebook, organizer and cell phone she'd ever purchased – plus the paperwork that accompanied them. She said she had to get rid of them, but first wanted to retrieve the data.

Sadly, the equipment was around so long she couldn't remember if there was any information worth saving. Her office looked like an

electronics warehouse in Las Vegas. Something had to go! She needed help to get started, so I asked her to work with these tips:

**Think thin - take in less, burn more. Don't hold on to the fat!**

Ask yourself the following questions:

Have I used this item in the past year? Will it be needed for future projects? Do I need to keep it for legal or tax purposes? What's more important – keeping the item or freeing up space by chucking it?

**Evaluate the usefulness of the items frequently.** Are you holding on to trinkets for sentimental reasons? Do you still need them? Keep your favorite one and toss the others or store them and rotate some throughout the year. Think twice before you buy more supplies or gadgets. Will you use them? How many do you need? Consider quality over quantity. Adopt a rule: When something new comes in, something old must go.

**Institute a clean desk policy.**

Remove everything from the desk and then consider each item one at a time. Evaluate whether you frequently use it and need to keep it handy, or if it would be better stored in another location. Put away all but essential items at the end of the day. *One* laptop, *one* telephone and *one* organizer can stay on the desk. Remove the staple gun, tape dispenser, paper clips and other miscellaneous supplies. File papers in their proper location.

**Streamline your gadgets.** For example, <http://calendar.yahoo.com> offers a powerful online calendar service to store information, negating the need for multiple pieces of paper or techie gadgets.

By adopting these simple steps, Mary was ready to start each day with a clear desk and a clear mind.

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**Clue #4 - You have a system but you still can't find what you need.** You've done all the right things. You researched systems, put everything in containers, stored them according to how frequently you use them. But now you can't find a thing! Successfully organizing your office is about more than putting things away. It's about being able to locate them when you need them.

Jane, another client, was a great organizer. She used the right tools for the job. She determined how much storage was required to hold

her records, supplies, and papers. This helped her purchase the appropriate size containers. Although there was a place for everything and everything was in its place, she still had trouble finding things. Jane had made being organized too complicated.

**Don't go it alone when you get stuck.** Here's what I suggested to keep her going:

One of the best ways to keep track of the containerized items was to create labels to identify the contents. The labels didn't need to be fancy, just legible. Since her handwriting was not the best, she created labels on her computer. Now Jane and others in the office can easily identify and find contents in the containers. This small step increased all-round office productivity and efficiency.

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**Clue #5 -The cleaning people are unable to get to the floors, desk and shelves regularly because of the piles heaped on them.** You're running in and out of the office taking care of business. It's tempting to say you'll put down just one piece of paper. But it never stops at just one. You create one pile and then another. At the end of the week you have piles on every horizontal surface in the office. You tell yourself that as soon as you get time—maybe next week—you'll sort through the stacks, file some and trash the rest.

A bride-to-be, Katherine, was so busy working, planning her wedding and just managing life that she felt she had no time to keep her office tidy. She put things down "just for now" and said she'd deal with them when she had time. When we took a good look at her office she realized that "just for now" had become six months. Business wasn't slacking up and she still felt pressed for time. The more piles she created the more overwhelmed she became. She was already worried about fitting into her dress, now she had to worry about space in the office too!

**Decide to decide.** One way Katherine stopped the behavior was to handle each piece of paper once. When she picked up a piece of paper she read it and decided on the next action. It either went into the trash or was put in its proper place right then. She sorted through her paper mail every day and immediately threw away the junk. She contacted National Opt Out Center (888-567-8688) to remove her name from major lists sold to direct-mail companies. Another option could have been to opt out online at [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com).

Rather than printing all her email messages, she read them, deleted them and immediately addressed the ones that required action.

Tired of so much paperwork, she used [www.freeworks.com](http://www.freeworks.com) to automate routine business processes. Now the office is neat and clean. Katherine went off on her honeymoon without thinking about returning to a cluttered office. And, yes she fit her dress.

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The goal of organization is to *use* it as a tool to help your office function efficiently. Other resources to keep your operations running freely are [www.outpurchase.com](http://www.outpurchase.com) to help make procurement management easier, [www.lowermybills.com](http://www.lowermybills.com) to find cheaper rates for services such as long distance and credit cards, and [www.soho.org](http://www.soho.org) which puts resources for the small office/home office at your fingertips.

I don't know if my body will be in shape for the summer, but my office sure will! Think summer. Think slim and trim. Think bikini. There's no need to panic. I'm talking about getting your *office* in shape for summer. Just like that physical workout, it will make you feel great! But unlike getting your body in shape, removing clutter from your workspace is a lot faster and less painless than you might think.

If you need more help contact the National Association of Professional Organizers at [www.napo.net](http://www.napo.net). Just do it!

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jackie Davis, redesigner and the owner of RoomScape Interiors works with individuals and families that value living in homes that support their lifestyle and work. She specializes in creating environments that help them relax, rejuvenate and reconnect. Jackie eliminates the guesswork and saves time, money and energy.

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