

## **Create Your Own Life R.A.F.T. – and Surf the Paper Wave with Ease!**

Whether it's school, home, or office related, managing paper can be one of the most daunting tasks in the organizing process. If you often feel as though you're drowning in the paper ocean, help is here with my RAFT™ paper management system!

There are 4 things you can do with a piece of paper:

**R** - Read it

**A** - Take Action (includes bills to pay, appointments, to discuss/review)

**F** - File it

**T** - Toss it

Start with 4 baskets or boxes marked with each of the above categories. Begin with a stack of UPO's (unidentified piled objects) and methodically take each paper, one at a time and decide which category it belongs in. Put it into the corresponding box. As you sort ask yourself these questions:

### **I. TO READ:**

- Do I have time to read this?
- Is this out of date material?  
Can I get this from another source if I decide to read it later?
- How many issues behind am I on this magazine?
- Place only the important "to reads" in the basket. Recycle the rest.

### **II. ACTION FILES:**

This includes anything you need to take action on. This will probably be the biggest pile and may include correspondence you must reply to, appointments that need to be logged onto your calendar; bills to pay (Designate a separate basket or folder for bills). As you go through each piece of paper ask yourself:

- Do I really need to do this? Can someone else handle it?
- Do I really want to do this?
- Is it too late to do this?
- Save whatever is important enough for you to take action on - and get it on your schedule.

Action papers may need to be sorted further into specific categories. This will reduce the confusion and make your pile easier to manage. Create separate file folders for different types of Action papers using the following examples (or create your own):

### **Take Action or To Do File:**

This category includes anything that requires action taken which can't be done during the sorting process. In other words, it will take several minutes or longer to complete and can't be done right away. Write down the action needed on your To Do List and file the paper in an Action File Folder or Pending basket.

### **Project Folders:**

This is for any type of special project that involves a series of steps to complete. Anything pertaining to that project goes into that file. (Example: business development, purchasing a new computer, personal fitness program). Once the project has been completed, the information can be filed away.

**Review-Consider-Discuss Folder:**

Anything that needs to be discussed or reviewed (products you are interested in buying, coupons, events you may want to attend) is placed here. You must also write these items on your To Do list so you won't forget to attend to them!

**Bills To Pay:**

It is a good idea to have a separate file for bills, and schedule regular payment dates (i.e., 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of the month).

**Messages:**

Designate a special area for phone messages to insure that calls are returned in a timely manner. You can use a phone message log for this purpose; it works well for logging voice mail messages.

**III. TO FILE:**

This includes paid bills you need to keep, tax records, credit/bank statements, warranties, any business or home documents, insurance documents, etc.

**Remember: 80% of material filed away is never looked at again.**

To process filing efficiently ask:

- Can I get this information somewhere else if I need it?
- Will I have any future need for this information? Can I live without it?
- Do I already have this filed somewhere else?

**IV. TOSS:**

If you don't need it or won't get to read it (realistically speaking) then toss it.

If you just can't get by the feeling that "if I throw it away I may regret it" – try this:

Put all the papers you are hesitant to throw away in a box. Label the box with the date 3 months from now (or less if you are feeling adventurous!).

Store the box and mark your calendar with the disposal date. If you haven't opened or thought of the box within this time, it's a good bet you can probably eliminate the contents.

Every piece of paper you handle should have a place. Management of paper flow means that you can find whatever you need quickly and easily. Sorting through the paper pileup will take time and patience, but the result will be dramatically improved productivity, a well-organized, clutter-free workspace and much less stress for you.