

## RRRIPP - Through Your Paperwork and Mail

Papers pile up both because people delay decisions (“I’ll deal with this later”) and because there is no designated place for papers to go. But if you allow papers to PILE up in your work space you’ll eventually pile yourself right out of there, and end sitting at the conference table or kitchen counter just so you can concentrate on the project at hand. If your desk is buried in papers, you’ll love the satisfaction of RRRIPPING through paperwork and mail.

### **WHY DO IT?**

This process solves both of these problems by clarifying the DECISION (the “I” in the process), identifying where the paper goes (the first “P”). It also reduces the AMOUNT of paper you have to deal with in the first place (the three “R’s”) and makes a connection to your time management system to ensure you act on the papers requiring action (the second “P”). The goal of is to keep the work space open and free of papers, direct papers to safe homes based on use, and link actions to your time system. Using this methodology you won’t have to leave papers out to REMIND yourself to act on them...you’ll use your time system (list and calendar) to identify what you have to do and when to do it, and you’ll use a filing system to safely house papers until the time comes to act on them. Here’s how to RRRIPP:

### **REFUSE**

To the extent that you are able, don’t bring paper into your life. You’re not OBLIGATED to take home anything when you go somewhere -- a meeting, a conference, a show, the supermarket. So just leave it. Don’t bring it home with you unless you know what you want to do with it: don’t take something back to the office just because it is interesting or useful, unless you have a specific PLAN for how those data or that piece of paper is going to move you forward toward one of your goals. Get in the habit of not putting things in your binder, your pocketbook, your briefcase, your backpack. Remember, nearly all information can be re-created. If you attend a conference and next year want to contact one of the speakers, a quick call to the conference provider can net you that phone number. So don’t hoard information because “someday you might” need it. Keep only what you know you are going to use for a specific PURPOSE.

### **RECYCLE**

If you picked something up in an indecisive moment and now, upon returning to your desk or home, realize you DON’T have a specific use for it, recycle it immediately. Don’t put it down or file it; recycle it. Similarly, if you couldn’t refuse it because the postal carrier brought it but you don’t have a specific use for it, recycle it immediately. A significant portion of all mail is BULK mail, and much of that is advertisements or solicitations. That information or paper is going to come again whether you want it or not. Don’t hang on to it unless you have a clear and specific use for it.

### **REFER**

If you have paper for someone ELSE, give or send it along immediately. Don’t set the paper down; instead, put it in an envelope and send it out the door. Now you have reached the pivotal point of the process: what to do if you can’t refuse, recycle, or refer the paperwork.

### **IDENTIFY**

Your first job if none of the R’s apply is to identify the ACTION you need to take. You don’t have to actually take action right now, but you absolutely have to decide what action is REQUIRED of you. Be as specific as you can. Say it out loud if it helps you: “Pay bill.” “Call company.” “Write so-and-so.” “Read.” Whatever the action is, identify it using a specific verb. If the paper requires multiple actions, identify the first one. If you don’t have to do anything with the paper, it is a good candidate for discard. Even many papers that seem to need your action can be tossed. For example, if your car repair shop sends you a satisfaction survey, do you care enough to respond? It’s up to you to decide. But do decide. Don’t assume that you have to do everything just because someone asked. Make deliberate CHOICES, and recycle anything that isn’t part of your plan for how you want to spend your life.

## **PUT AWAY**

Once you have identified the action you must take, you are almost done with the process. You continue through your paperwork by putting the paper in a safe HOME. The safe home for paper stuff is a file of some sort. Before you panic, let me assure you that filing doesn't have to be a painful experience. A filing system is nothing more than a safe home for the paper you are going to use. And it doesn't have to be a file drawer, but it must be an UPRIGHT system -- a file rather than a pile -- because access is easier when things are upright. It is easier to slide a paper in and out of an upright file than in and out of a horizontal pile.

## **POST**

Finally, post a link to your time system. Posting requires that you write the action on a list and SCHEDULE time on your calendar to take the action. Simply identifying the action is not enough - a list identifies what you have to do. To get it done, you need to schedule time on your calendar: when are you going to do it? To You need to be sure you keep track of the actions and schedule time for them.

## **NO PILES ANYWHERE**

You have now RRRIPPed through the mail without putting anything FLAT on your desk, table, or counter. By practicing this method, you protect open space, put information and paper in a safe home for future use, and track all the actions you need to pursue in your time system. This leaves you calm and focused, ready to move FORWARD, confident that you can find what you need when it is time to pursue an activity.

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