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Clear out the clutter

Streamline your business and your life in 2007

We all attach various traditions to the ushering in of a new calendar year. They may be grand or trivial. They may be quite public or kept secret in our hearts.

A few years ago, I wrote about the ritual of Osoji, which the Japanese practice during the time leading up to the New Year. Osoji is a thorough cleansing of all the stains of the year past - physical, spiritual, mental and emotional stains. I feel lighter just reading about Osoji.

Most of us need a ritualistic cleansing to "de-clutter" our lives. Doesn't make a lot of difference if we're prone to being slobbers or neatniks, the stuff of life can begin to hem us in, and before we know it, office clutter, mental clutter and even relationship clutter is draining our energy.

So why not use the first month of the new year to pause, look at your life inside and out, and jettison the useless clutter. If it doesn't add beauty or function to your life, it probably needs to go.

As far as the physical clutter in your office, or your entire building for that matter, think about a determined transfer to the dumpster. If you don't have a dumpster behind your building, rent one for this process. You may have storage rooms filled with old computer parts or other "stuff" that can be recycled and put to good use by someone else.

Once, we ended up with about 2,000 binders that had an outdated address beautifully printed on the back covers. The kids at one of our city schools were

grateful to have them. In your organizations, you may have someone with a feverish recycling bent and that is the person to put in charge of finding the proper place for your clutter that qualifies for a second life in other hands. In this de-cluttering process of my office or home, it helps me to think, "Now, would I keep this if I were moving?"

You have to be decisive. Either keep it and put it in its proper place, recycle it (immediately) or - the dumpster.

While making decisions about the physical clutter, examine also if there are employees who are cluttering up your business. Like friends or relatives who drain your energy, there may be people collecting paychecks from your firm who are contributing less than zero to productivity. We all make buying mistakes and we all make hiring mistakes. If someone is a bad fit, they usually know that. You usually know that. And they cut into the overall productivity because everyone around usually knows that as well. If you've done your best to provide coaching, you've given consistent clear feedback and you still know in a corner of your brain that someone is a glaring misfit on your team, do yourself and the employee a favor and find a way to part company, with grace and truth.

As business owners, the most expensive clutter is mental. The circuitry of the mind is downright amazing - and that's based on the little we know of it so far. Still, there is a tendency for useless material to get stuck somewhere in our minds and take up too much of our time - day and night. In my family, there is a ridicu-

lous predisposition to perform perfectly, and I've worked to consciously change my mental habit of every now and then touching the memories of times in school when I didn't have the right answer. That kind of thinking is such a waste of time and based on that irrational belief in perfection. Golf has helped me diminish the silly attachment to perfection, and I'm grateful!

So I recommend you use this turning point to scan your own habitual thinking. Is it useful? Is it helping you solve problems? Does it add pleasure? Is it fear-based? Or is it attached to irrational beliefs, as some of my thinking was? Then replace the mental clutter, the garbage, with cognitive behavior that you choose. Believe me - it is possible.

I wish for you a streamlined 2007, free of the mental and physical barnacles of clutter. I've shared this quote of Emerson's before, and it is worth a second go-round:

"Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too much spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense."



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