Peak Performance

Organization Overhaul

Being organized is one of the best ways you can improve your job performance. If your desk is covered in Post-it® notes or you're constantly misplacing things, keep reading for some organizational tips.

*Use a calendar or planner.* Don’t rely on your memory; write everything down. Pick a system that works best for you: writing it down manually in a Franklin Planner or entering it electronically (and then synching your computer, phone, and other devices). Then be sure to check it regularly for meetings, due dates, and other activities – and avoid scheduling conflicts.

*Keep your workspace clear.* Only keep items on your desk that you use regularly. If you have a stapler that you only use once a week, put it in your drawer. Some say a cluttered desk leads to a cluttered mind. The same is true for your computer desktop – too many icons can be overwhelming. Try creating folders to group documents together or delete shortcuts you never use.

*File items away.* How much time do you waste looking for things each day? It’s been reported that the average person spends almost two weeks a year looking for misplaced or lost work items! Come up with a filing system that works for you. It might be color coded by project or by due dates. It can be paper, electronic, or a combination of both.

*Limit how much you keep.* Some people blame disorganization on not having enough space for their things. But is it possible you just have too much stuff? Set a limit on how many drawers of files you’ll keep. Once it’s full, it’s time to toss out the old. Most likely once it goes into a storage box, it’ll never come out. If there is a document you aren’t sure about, scan it and save a copy on your computer or an external hard drive. These take up much less physical space.

*Make it a habit.* Once you get organized, it’s just as crucial to stay organized. Make an appointment on your calendar to go through your office on a regular basis to de-clutter. It could be weekly, monthly, or quarterly depending on how much you accumulate.

At the end of every day, no matter how rushed you are, spend a few minutes tidying up your desk. You’ll feel better in the morning when you walk into a clean, organized, welcoming office.
Healthy Relationships

Fighting Fair

Conflicts are inevitable. Everyone experiences them from time to time. They can occur between close friends, family members, co-workers, romantic partners, and even strangers. Whether the differences are trivial or more significant, conflicts can stir up strong feelings and lead to people feeling angry or hurt. What’s important is how you deal with these conflicts.

“Fighting fair” is a way to effectively manage a conflict and the feelings that go along with it. With a few guidelines, you can help make sure disagreements you have don’t become too destructive or out of control.

Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means. - Ronald Reagan

Conflict Guidelines

The next time you find yourself in a conflict, remember these guidelines:

Try to stay calm. If you don’t overreact, people are more likely to consider your viewpoint. If you start to feel like you may lose control, take a time-out and remove yourself from the situation. Take a walk, practice deep breathing, or do something that can help you to feel in control again.

Be specific. When it comes to talking about what’s bothering you, vague complaints aren’t useful. State the problem clearly and stick to the facts. Don’t get caught up in the symptoms of the problems instead of the actual issue.

Don’t get too personal. Personally attacking the other person creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability. This environment is not optimal for working through issues and can make problems worse.

One thing at a time. Make sure that the first issue is fully discussed and resolved before bringing up new topics or complaints.

Don’t hold grudges. Bringing up old grievances or letting hurt feelings build up over time is not productive, especially if they don’t belong in a particular argument. Don’t let old grudges steer your discussion off course. Instead, deal with problems as they arise.

Avoid accusations. They can cause the other person to get defensive rather than trying to understand what you have to say. Instead, talk about how the other person’s actions made you feel. Try saying something like, “I feel angry when...” instead of, “You always make me angry when...”.

Change perspectives. Try to see the problem through the other person’s eyes. Invite them to share their point of view, and don’t interrupt. You may not agree with their viewpoint, but it can still make sense to you.

Set a time limit. Attention spans are notoriously short. Dragging out a discussion rarely helps to reach a resolution. It just wears you out and can lead to saying something you’ll regret. If the conflict is not resolved in 30 minutes, continue it later.

Be willing to compromise. There may not be a perfect solution that pleases everyone. Instead, work to find common ground in which both people feel like their concerns are being heard and needs are addressed.
County Focus

Grief and Loss

Losing someone or something you love is one of life’s most painful experiences. What follows from that loss is called grief, and it’s a normal process. Normal, but not easy. Normal, but not quick. Normal, but not fun. Normal, but not the same process for everyone. Grief is hard work and everyone grieves in their own unique way.

The experience of grief is complicated. Its course varies from person to person. Most of us are familiar with the face of grief that looks like sadness. We feel sad, cry, and believe life after a loss must be so diminished that we can’t imagine feeling joy or happiness again. But grief has other faces, too. Grief can look like anger when we lose our marriage through divorce and are facing a future as a single person. Grief can look like relief or joy when someone who has been suffering is released from their pain. Grief can look like fear when we realize that all of us are mortal. Or it can look like despair when someone who has been struggling with the Alzheimer’s-related decline of their long-term partner and is feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and hopeless to the point of wondering if life is worth living anymore. Yes, grief can feel that painful.

The Employee Assistance Program offers counseling to County employees and their eligible family members. Often, they seek counseling for the very first time because of an experience with loss. Examples might include:

• The death of a family member, friend, or co-worker.
• The loss of a marriage, a break up, or a separation.
• The loss of health from a disease, accident, or from aging.
• The loss of a job resulting in financial stress.
• A loss from a natural disaster, trauma, or accident.

So, is there hope? Where can we turn? Can we recover from grief? The short answer is, “Yes.” While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the process begins with awareness and respecting the grief process. Accept support – whether it’s from a friend, family member, co-worker, religious leader, or a professional like the counselors at the County of Santa Clara’s Employee Assistance Program. You don’t have to go through it alone!

Consider giving the EAP a call at 408-241-7772 or browse the website at scceap.org to learn more about our offerings, including:

• Confidential counseling – up to five sessions per calendar year
• Grief and Loss class
• Critical Incident Response Services offered to departments affected by loss or crisis
• Trainings by departmental request
Sound Finances

Money Saving Meals

Are you throwing money away? Chances are your first response is, “No.” But think about it; any time you throw food away, aren’t you really throwing money away?

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the average family of four in America throws out over $2,000 worth of food each year. If you’re trying to tighten your household budget, a good place to start is with your groceries.

Making meals at home is a great way to save money. Here are some ideas to help you get started.

Create a menu. Having a meal plan for the week will make it easier to shop. And it can ease the stress of wondering what’s for dinner when you’re rushed after work.

• Base meals around in-season produce, food that’s on sale, or coupons you have.

• Find recipes that use the food you already have. If there’s a recipe that calls for an ingredient you don’t normally use, find another recipe that also uses it so it any extra doesn’t go to waste.

• Plan meals for several nights, but use leftover veggies or poultry in soups, salads, and casseroles to reduce cost and increase your kitchen creativity.

Make a list. And then stick to it!

• Double check your fridge and pantry before you write down an item that you may already have. That way you can be sure to use it before it goes bad.

At the store. Make sure you’re not shopping on an empty stomach – it leads to impulse buys and unnecessary spending.

• Buy generic foods. Many stores buy national-brand products and simply put their own label on it. They’re cheaper, but taste the same.

• Buy in bulk if it’s an item you use regularly, and it won’t go bad before you can use it all.

At home. Prepare and eat the most perishable foods first. Put the new food from the store behind items from your last trip. This way you’ll eat the oldest food first, and save money by not throwing away food you find hidden in the back of the fridge.

• Make enough food so you have leftovers for lunch the next day.

• Cook in bulk. Make one lasagna for dinner tonight and one for the freezer to use in a few weeks (a time and money saver).

Eating on a budget doesn’t mean that you need to sacrifice on taste, even if you don’t consider yourself to be a great cook. There are plenty of cookbooks, magazines, and websites that have simple and easy recipes to help you get the most out of the foods you buy. Remember, the most expensive food you’ll buy is the one you don’t eat, so start making the most of your groceries.