# Chapter 1

Organization of the Facility

Organizing the work environment is a critical piece to ensuring that work not only gets completed, but does so in a timely manner to meet deadlines. In addition, as projects are in process it is essential that they can be quickly located to make short work periods productive. Organization of the facility also pertains to the entire school environment. It is absolutely amazing how much time is lost when materials for staff meetings are spread haphazardly throughout a building and have to be collected or located each time a meeting is scheduled. Keeping a well-maintained and organized school environment also serves as a positive model for students and teaches them the effectiveness of order and organization. Various aspects related to the organization of the facility are described below under the headings of files, stackable shelves, meeting space, and hallways and community areas.
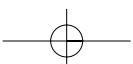
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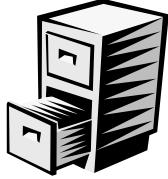
The first step to getting organized with paperwork is determining the main categories to use within a filing system. It may be helpful to begin by developing a list of general topics that you feel will warrant a section for filing. As you develop the list, subheadings may become apparent, which will lead you to decide whether to use more generalized categories followed by subtopics or if you wish simply to alphabetize all topics. For example, "Scheduling" is a main category that leaders will need to establish a file for within their system. But to keep things truly organized for easy retrieval, this category will most likely be too broad, thus developing subheadings within this topic such as parent communication, afterschool clubs or other activities, assemblies, schoolwide performances, sporting events, and the like, may be helpful. Once you have identified the general categories to use within your filing system you can begin the process of organizing your workspace to allow for efficient filing.

Depending on the space in your personal office or workspace, files can be organized in a variety of ways. If you are limited in terms of space, you will find that simply keeping files in a cabinet or drawer within hanging files labeled in alphabetical order is the easiest solution to organizing information and projects. In addition to a basic cabinet in which files are arranged in alphabetical order, it is also important that you develop a location for a set of files that you work with often. Keeping these in an upright file stand on a desktop or counter makes them easily accessible. For me this meant my coaching file, book study folder, general monthly newsletter file, staff bulletin folder, and grade level or course expectations. This information was constantly being referred to and information was added to these folders quite often, so it made sense to keep them in a more accessible location rather than within the general filing cabinets.

If you have the luxury of several areas for files, then you can get a bit more creative with organization. You may wish to have a drawer or separate location in which you have working files for individual staff members, teams, work groups, or departments. Teacher, team, or department newsletters, special projects, grade level milestones and assessments, and team or department meeting minutes and agendas can all be organized within this area. These would be in a location separate from the official confidential personnel files that need to be kept in a locked location.

In our times of heightened accountability and assessment driven instruction, it might be useful to dedicate a filing drawer or cabinet to

assessment. This could contain site and district assessment protocols, guidelines for administration of assessments, assessment schedules, parent letters and informational flyers, and of course data analysis sheets that include the analysis and evaluation of assessment results.

Finally, you will want to start a personal growth file for yourself. This file will be a central location for items that demonstrate your own growth as a professional leader. You may wish to include supportive letters from staff or parents, long-range professional development plans that you have designed with your leadership team or individually, flyers from conferences or seminars you participate in, and personal goals that you have established for yourself. Make sure to include a time line that defines activities you have planned to assist you in reaching your goals. This file will become a wonderful portfolio to share with your supervisor and/or mentor and will serve as a reference for them as they write your evaluation.

Whatever system you design for filing information within the workspace, it is critical that you clearly explain your organizational system to a secretary, office clerk, or other employee who will be designated to support you on a weekly basis with filing information. With that in mind, it may be helpful to label the outside of cabinets or drawers if you do decide to have a more complex system than simply organizing the files in alphabetical order. Of course you will also need to help filers by identifying the main topic area under which paperwork is to be filed. This aspect is addressed in the next section on stackable shelves.

Stackable Shelves

Stackable shelving units provide an effective means for organizing information in an office. Two shelves placed on the corner of the desk directly within the office can be used by a secretary and the leader to move information in and out of the office. The top shelf is for incoming mail and information and the bottom unit is designated for outgoing information. Usually, more comes in than goes out on a daily basis, thus the reason for the top shelf, where more space is available, being reserved as the "in" location. Colored file folders can be used in conjunction with the stackable shelves as a visual notification of specific types of information or mail. For example a green file folder might be used for items requiring a signature, and a red folder might be used for information that needs immediate attention. As with anything, if you expect your secretary or office personnel to use the system

efficiently and effectively, you will need to train them in how the system works. Ensuring that your office staff is clear on the type of information to go directly to the circular file, rather than into your in box, will keep "junk mail" reading down to a minimum.

A second set of stackable shelves can also be a valuable resource to the leader in managing and organizing information within the office. A set of four stackable shelves together located in close proximity to the leader's primary workspace, most often near a computer, can be labeled to organize information as follows:

Top Shelf:	Daily Projects
Second Shelf:	Long-Range Projects
Third Shelf:	Waiting for Response
Fourth Shelf:	Waiting to Be Filed

Daily Projects: This shelf should contain projects to be completed that day. For those individuals who are used to making lists, this location is for the Must Do activities for the day. Of course it would be wonderful to empty this tray each and every day, but this may be an unrealistic expectation. Things will come up that force a change of pace and an adjustment to plans. This is the reality of the job. A key piece to making this system work is to evaluate the projects to be done at the conclusion of each day. By reviewing incomplete tasks remaining in the *Daily Projects* tray, as well as upcoming priorities, you can make sound decisions regarding what needs to be placed in the *Daily Projects* shelf for the following day. This daily review takes only a few minutes (no more than 5) and will save precious time the following day when you will be organized to hit the door running. A large number of leaders will tell you that they waste the majority of their time first thing in the morning as they slowly move about their workspace determining exactly what they will focus on for the day.

Long-Range Projects: Throughout the year, leaders will face a number of long-range projects to complete either independently or in a collaborative manner with staff members. It is these types of projects that are organized in this second shelving unit. If a leader has more than one long-range project to work on at a time, the projects can easily be separated within this shelf using colored file folders. The actual organization of tasks for completing long-range projects will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this text.

Waiting for Response: Often leaders will complete a task or project only to be left waiting to get additional information or approval from a third party. This third shelf is a location designed to keep track of those projects or tasks. It can also serve as a reminder file for checking back with people who fail to respond to initial requests or proposals. By looking through this shelf on a weekly basis, leaders will keep on top of things that are currently out of their hands.

Waiting to Be Filed: This shelf will grow the fastest and can become quite unwieldy if left unattended for long periods of time. A number of the items that a leader touches will at some point end up filed. This shelf is designed to temporarily house those items until time is available for filing to occur. By attaching a small sticky note with a file label on the top of an item before placing it in this shelf, anyone who is familiar with the filing system can perform this timely task. If attacked weekly, the filing can usually be handled by another trained staff member in less than 15 minutes. This is a nice contrast to a leader personally spending five hours filing information at the end of a quarter. Keep in mind that some things simply don't need to be kept. In other words, the circular file may be the most appropriate location for an item that you will not need to refer to in the future.

Meeting Space

Regardless of where meetings generally take place, maintaining a set of essential materials for meetings in a central location will save you an enormous amount of time and energy. For those lucky enough to have a designated staff meeting room, keeping a stocked cabinet complete with critical consumable items is a simple way of ensuring that everything that might be needed is available and ready on the spur of the moment. Below is a listing of items that may be useful to keep stocked in the supply cabinet:

- Sticky notes of various sizes
- Wide colored markers
- Pens and pencils
- Writing tablets or notepads
- Sentence strips
- Masking tape, glue sticks
- Highlighters (set of 6 containing different colors)

- Extra overhead transparency sheets
- Staplers (2 should suffice) with a backup pack of staples
- Scissors (3"-5" adult size)
- Note cards
- Name tags (1 package for meetings with parent groups or community members)

In addition to the items mentioned above, it is also important that a meeting room location contain an overhead projector, computer, and LCD panel, where available, screen, flip chart, and pad of chart paper. If space in a building is limited and a separate room to use for meetings is not available, then keeping the consumable items listed above organized separately in a couple of plastic containers and housed in a specific location in the main office or in a supply closet will work just as well. Make sure to designate a materials collector within the group to routinely pick up these supplies and bring them to scheduled meetings and then return them to their designated location in the office at the end of each session. Leaders may also wish to designate a media or technology person to be in charge of making sure the necessary A-V equipment, computer, flip chart, and chart paper for recording make it to the meeting room ahead of schedule. By identifying A-V needs on a weekly events calendar, those designated to support the leader will know in advance what is needed, and as a leader you will always be prepared.

Having all the necessary supplies organized and ready in advance is a time-saving strategy that will allow you to spend precious time before a meeting planning and organizing content and processes to be used, rather than running about gathering necessary supplies.

Carefully planning processes and transitions, and establishing routines at the beginning of a meeting will also save time later on. Materials that are needed for a meeting should be placed out on tables beforehand so that individuals are not scrounging around for what they need to complete an assigned task during their precious work time. To assist you in clean up, designate a materials gatherer at each table to collect supplies and return them to the plastic containers or the cabinet in the room.

Considering and planning the room arrangement is another technique to saving precious time during an actual meeting. For example, if you wish to have staff members sit together in grade-level teams or by departments, place table tents ahead of time to designate where they should sit when they enter. This will save transition time later on

after the meeting has begun. Likewise, if you are seeking open sharing of ideas and clear communication during the meeting, then hold the meeting in a location where chairs can be organized in a semicircle or horseshoe without tables that serve as barriers. Of course, this may not be feasible for large group meetings where 70 or 80 staff members will be in attendance. If you are truly after interaction and want all staff members to be able to contribute to discussions equally, you will need to form smaller discussion groups and designate an individual within each group to serve as a recorder and facilitator. Prior to the meeting, facilitators will need to be provided with training and direction regarding the processes for managing the discussions and materials that they will need to gather. Recorders will need to be prepared to share their groups' information with the larger group after discussions are completed, or written records can be posted for others to review.

Finally, think through strategies for grouping or regrouping participants during a meeting ahead of time to make transitions occur quickly and efficiently. Below are a few suggestions for placing participants into groups:

Colored candies: Groups are formed by the type of candy each selects, or groups must contain one of each type of candy.

Playing cards: Distribute cards to all members, then have them suit up (e.g., diamonds, spades, etc.), or have them form groups where all suits are represented.

Birth month: Have participants line up by birth month and then form groups of a specific number starting at either end of the line.

Colored dots: Place colored dots on handouts and have members group themselves according to their dot color. (This technique works well if you want to arrange groups ahead of time to ensure diversity among members.)

Numbered dots: Place a number inside a colored dot on handouts and have members first group according to their dot color and then switch to form different groups by numbers. (Make sure to have table tents prepared to identify where groups are to meet so participants don't waste time wandering around looking for group members.)

A note of caution to the zealous new administrator who walks into his or her first administrative position and begins the first formal

staff meeting by asking all 110 staff members to group themselves according to the type of candy they selected upon entering the auditorium or commons area: We all act and respond based on purpose. If we understand and have been given a meaningful purpose behind a new experience, we will more than likely be willing to give it a try. But without this knowledge, rarely will we leap into the unknown blind. So, the 110 staff members who have just been told to group themselves by candy type may react in any or all of the following ways:

- Happily follow the directions because they enjoy change and diversity, laugh, and simply sit back down,
- Ignore the direction and form their own groups based on pre-established cliques within the building,
- Openly complain about having to do something so ridiculous, or
- Comply only to save their personal venting for the staff lounge later that afternoon.

Unfortunately, the number of individuals who react in the positive manner as described by the first bullet will be in the minority. So, you may wish to begin your first full staff meeting outdoors or in a gym where you can engage them in some nonthreatening and fun game-type simulations to drive home your message of building a cooperative and collaborative staff that works together, remains flexible, and is open to new ideas. Any number of the activities described in team building books such as *201 Icebreakers: Group Mixers, Warm-Ups, Energizers and Playful Activities*, by E. West, can be used to meet this purpose (see the Resources for a list of these types of books). Another option might be to talk with a building physical education instructor or one of the school coaches for ideas that they use with students. One activity that I have used successfully in the past to get at the key concepts discussed above is Moon Ball. The procedures for this simulation are described below.

Procedures/Materials: Form a large circle with all members standing facing one another. Large groups (60+) can be divided and asked to form two smaller circles. Provide a soft ball about the size of a volleyball for participants to work with. (Each circle would need a ball to work with.)

Goal: The object of the simulation is to keep the ball in the air for as long as it takes for each member of the team to touch the ball at
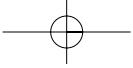
least one time. Count the number of hits on the ball and try to beat the previous record each time the ball is put into play after it has fallen to the ground.

Rules: The ball may not be held at any time. Each person can hit the ball as many times as necessary throughout the game, but individuals may not at any point hit the ball consecutively. If the ball touches the ground, it is considered out of play and the counting starts over.

Facilitation: After three minutes of play allow the group five minutes to discuss and plan their strategy for success. If needed, allow planning to occur after each additional three to five minutes of play until the group reaches its goal or at least beats its highest record.

Debrief: Use the questions in Chart 1.1 to debrief the simulation with the group. The right-hand column of the chart provides you with some target responses that you are hoping to pull out from participants in response to the questions posed.

Chart 1.1

Question	*Target Responses to Pull From Team*
What did we need to do as a group to be successful?	Work collaboratively and cooperate Communicate Remain flexible and open to new ideas Plan and take risks Participate
What helped us reach our goal?	Planning Communication Trying new ideas
What made reaching our goal challenging?	Poor communication Individuals or groups working independently from the group Confusion/lack of direction
How does this simulation relate to the work we do at our site?	Need for planning and clarity of focus Collaboration and cooperation are critical to meet all students' needs Everyone must be on board and willing to try new things and take risks Direction must be clear and planning must be part of the process to reach success

Simulations such as Moon Ball can serve the purpose of setting the stage for the need for staff members to accept and embrace new ways to work together in order to improve communication and collaboration. They give them a viable rationale for actively participating in various groupings and processes as a staff when handling site-based challenges.

Hallways and Community Areas

The first impression formed by staff, students, and visitors occurs immediately upon entering a facility. In some cases, it happens even before an individual leaves the parking lot! Maintaining a clean and orderly environment sends a very clear message that school is a place for serious work!

A building engineer or custodian should be directed to regularly clean and maintain student lockers, restrooms, cafeteria tables, and outdoor equipment to keep them free from graffiti and in safe working order at all times. Some find it helpful to walk through the building at the beginning of the year with the lead custodian or engineer to identify areas or items in need of attention or replacement. In addition, you may wish to sit down with this individual to outline your expectations for building maintenance and cleaning so that he or she can have the opportunity to share ideas and clarify personal responsibilities.

Organization is critical to success for students, staff, and leaders. Hallways should be free of clutter, and rooms and community areas should be properly labeled so they can be located quickly and easily. Students should be aware of where to find the lost-and-found box, where lockers and locker rooms are located, where lunch boxes should be left in the cafeteria, and which doors to exit and enter from during the school day.

Common areas used by all members of the community, such as the media center and technology lab, should be properly maintained and organized to allow for efficient use of materials. A simple example relates to the use of the technology lab in a school. Lab times should be posted on the lab door so both teachers and students are aware of the schedule. This organizational tool can be helpful in the event that technology needs arise during the school day and additional lab time is needed. Without having to track down the technology manager for the building, a teacher or students themselves at the secondary level can simply check the schedule and sign up for an open spot.
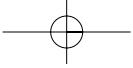
Finally, clear processes and procedures for moving throughout the building should be explained, reviewed, and upheld during the school year. An enormous amount of time can be wasted if students talking excessively in the hallway disturb other classrooms, or if staff members are searching a building looking for a student who left a classroom without a pass for study hall or the restroom. If students are on a closed campus, then those found outdoors should be questioned as to their destination and taken into the facility for direction. Behaviors that are expected need to be modeled and reinforced by all adults in order for them to be upheld throughout a school, and practices should be put in place to effectively monitor school rules and procedures. Setting up procedures for assigning hall monitors in secondary schools or student safety patrols at the elementary level may be an effective way to maintain order within the halls and common areas during the school day. The regular scheduling and overseeing of these student monitors is a task that can be turned over to a guidance team, a counselor, or an upper-level teacher.

Chapter Review

Even the most unorganized of individuals can develop systems to create an aura of organization around him or her. It is important to remember that organization goes far beyond an individual's personal office space, although that is a critical starting point. Effectively utilizing files and having a plan in place for efficiently managing information going in and out of a leader's office is critical to surviving in a leadership role. Beyond the office, it is important for a leader to put systems in place for saving precious time around conducting building meetings. Finally, designing and maintaining an organized work facility that includes all community areas can and will save everyone an enormous amount of time and stress.