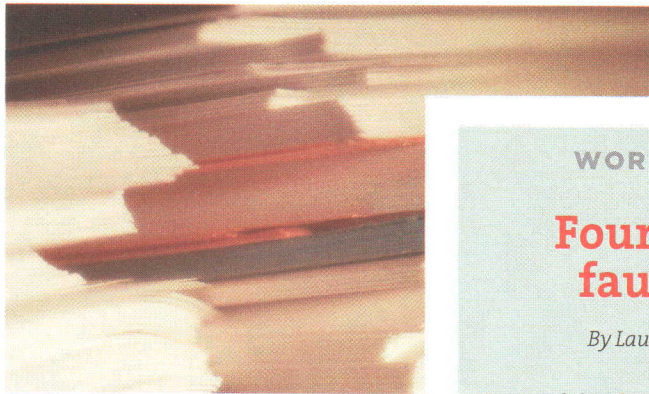
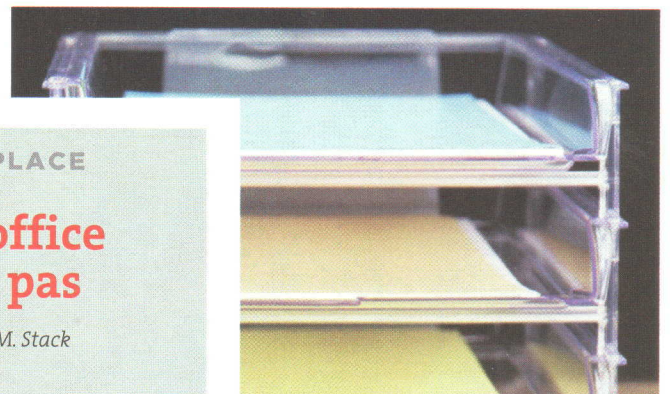


**1. Piling instead of filing.** If you have a cluttered office, you will spend valuable time trying to find information, and you'll have a harder time focusing on the task before you. If your system is in your head, it will tax your memory, resulting in higher anxiety levels, and it could impede your career progression, as people perceive people with sloppy desks to have sloppy work. An organized desk sends an important message: I've got it together. Visualize your desk. What does it say to others? The next time someone walks over to your cluttered desk and makes a joke about the mess, you might want to listen and learn to file correctly. Your newly organized desk will now say that you are professional, competent, decisive, efficient, productive, and in control.



**2. Using stackable trays.** Stackable trays are great near a printer to store frequently used letterhead, envelopes, and paper supplies. They are horrible, however, for active work, as they simply become storage areas for mystery piles. Once something goes into a stackable tray, it's typically "out of sight, out of mind." You'll end up with lower-priority items mixed in with high-priority work, and project files mixed up with reference information. Instead, use separate vertical "step" files with clearly labeled colored folders for each category of information you keep, such as projects, ideas, and clients.

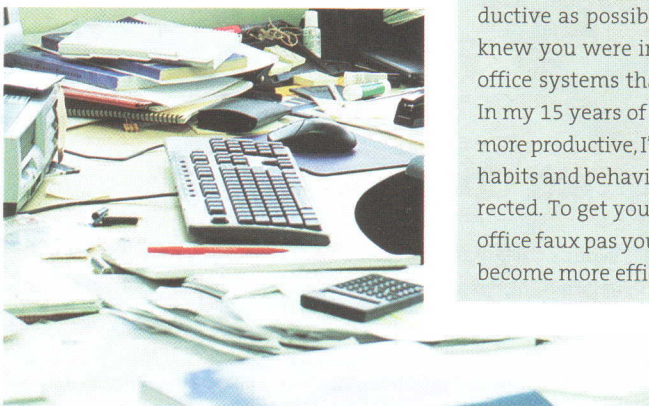


WORKPLACE

Four office faux pas

By Laura M. Stack

You work hard and want to be as productive as possible, right? What if you knew you were inadvertently creating office systems that slowed you down? In my 15 years of teaching people to be more productive, I've observed many bad habits and behaviors that are easily corrected. To get you started, here are four office faux pas you can fix and instantly become more efficient.



**3. Keeping future work on your desk.** Where do you put an agenda for a meeting two weeks away? Where do you put an invoice so you remember to pay it in three weeks? If you're like most people, you put it on your desk. The piles of papers grow around you as if you poured fertilizer on them. So what can you do instead? You need a system that will remind you which papers require your action today and allow you to forget the rest until their time. The answer: a tickler file. Get 43 hanging folders, label them 1-31 and January-December, and hang in a drawer. Arrange them so the current month and day are first and the rest fall behind chronologically. File items on the day or month you need to see them again. Check your tickler file each day.



**4. Using sticky notes as to-do lists.** Have you ever found yourself unable to understand your own scribbled notes or unable to even locate a message taken earlier in the day? Do you ever have trouble remembering if you returned a phone call or if someone called you back? Some people miss appointments or forget to return phone calls because they cannot locate the original message. Sticky notes are great to write down a fax number, mark a textbook, or to remind you to pick up dry cleaning. Sticky notes should not be used for phone calls or anything requiring your action. Instead, use the "tasks" or "to-do" function of your email/calendar software, or use an old-fashioned paper planner to write a list of things to do each day.

© 2006 Laura M. Stack, MBA, CSP. Laura Stack is a professional speaker and the president of The Productivity Pro, Inc. She's the author of *Leave the Office Earlier and Find More Time*. Contact her at 303-471-7401 or [www.theproductivitypro.com](http://www.theproductivitypro.com).