



"If we keep everything, the cream can't rise to the top"

TIPS TO REDUCE JUNK MAIL

- Register with the Mail Preference Service of the Direct Marketing Association (DMAconsumers.org).
- If you choose to place an order through a catalog, advise the company or organization not to make your name available to others.
- Contact 1-888-5OPT-OUT if you wish to reduce solicitations for credit card offers.

THE DISAPPEARING ART OF COMMUNICATION

There is a lot of communication that we look forward to: a phone call from a friend or a handwritten letter in the mail, for instance. The latter, though, seem to be virtually disappearing from our mailboxes. In its place are text messages and e-mails.

The pro: efficiency.

The con: our inability to spell properly or use correct grammar.

We are losing the art of communication. Our children aren't learning, or at least aren't practicing, the beauty of the written word. By texting "cu later," they can slowly convince themselves that words can be reduced to single letters and that proper spelling is optional. To combat this, encourage your children to write a letter to a friend or family member and then mail it. Of course, children often follow by example so let them see you taking a few minutes to write that thank you card to Grandma.

Feature Article

Communication Overload

by Nicole Quattrociochi

The average American consumer receives over 560 pieces of junk mail annually. Add to this the numerous periodicals that we subscribe to each month and our mailboxes are overflowing. Then the children come home, folders bulging, with notes from school, graded papers, lunch menus, etc. The communication overload continues at work via paperwork and e-mail. The average office worker spends over 12 hours per week on routine handling of mail, filing, and searching for things. An overwhelming amount of paper passes through our hands daily. How can we decipher what is important and what deserves our attention?

Lisa Montanaro, a professional organizer and owner of LM Organizing Solutions in Warwick, teaches her clients the FATS approach to dealing with mail: **File**, **Act** on it, **Toss** it, **Shred** it. As we gather the day's mail, take immediate action with it. By keeping a recycle bin, garbage can, and calendar nearby, you can sort the mail as it enters the home. Junk mail should get thrown away or recycled immediately (see sidebar). If the mail contains bills, mark the date and amount due in the corner and place it in your bill envelope; if it is an invitation, mark the calendar immediately and file by the

RSVP date in the bill envelope. In this way you only handle a piece of mail once, reducing repetitive shuffling of papers.

As for periodicals, Lisa recommends eliminating them or reducing them to one subscription per year. Why? In general, we work on one major project at a time. For instance, perhaps this year we want to expand our landscaping. Focus on a magazine that will help you do so. Time doesn't allow us to expand our landscaping, learn photography tips, re-decorate our home, learn how to knit, etc. Once our project is completed, cancel the subscription and move on to another periodical. Be sure to pass on the periodicals to a friend or recycle older issues. An added bonus to reducing the number of periodicals to which we subscribe is a reduction in stress. How so? Often, we subscribe to magazines as a way to provide relaxing reading. When the journals pile up unread, though, they become another source of stress. Eliminate the volume and thus eliminate the stress.

With regard to the bulging backpacks filled with letters from school, graded tests and assignments, and various artwork, the adage, "the best defense is a good offense" applies. Take immediate action

and this will aid in avoiding an overwhelming volume at week's or month's end. Look over your child's graded papers, review any problems they may have had, and then discard. If a note needs to be written to the teacher regarding a homework sheet, for instance, consider writing it directly on the graded paper and highlight it so the teacher will better understand what you are addressing. Any other correspondence from school should also be handled immediately so you are only touching a piece of paper once. For the creative artwork from our budding artists, keep a picture du jour on the refrigerator or bulletin board, perhaps rotating it weekly following the "one in/one out" rule. Lisa also suggests creating a memory box of our children's artwork using photographs of the items discarded, thus preserving memories without the bulk. "If we keep everything, the cream can't rise to the top," says Lisa.

Communication overload seems inevitable in the 21st century, but there are ways to tame it. By taking a few minutes each day, we can reduce the volume of paper we receive down to a minimum and avoid being overwhelmed.

For more organizing tips, visit Lisa Montanaro's website at www.LMOrganizingSolutions.com