



# THE EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

March  
2020

## March Online Seminar

### *Planning for Professional Growth*

Discuss the four stages of professional careers and get tools to develop a self-assessment plan that can lead to your career growth.

Available on-demand starting  
March 17th at  
[www.deeroakseap.com](http://www.deeroakseap.com)

## About Your EAP

### *Life Can Be Hectic. The EAP Can Help You Find Your Balance.*

Deer Oaks, your EAP, is always available to you and your household members. If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline. Counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate care.

## Tele-Health Services

Did you know that the EAP offers structured telephonic and video counseling in addition to traditional in-person counseling?

Call from the privacy of your home or office and one of our helpful counselors will help you address issues that are making it difficult to manage at work or at home.

Helpline: 866-327-2400  
Web: [www.deeroakseap.com](http://www.deeroakseap.com)  
Email: [eap@deeroaks.com](mailto:eap@deeroaks.com)

# Getting Organized

How many hours have you wasted looking for something you had previously misplaced, misfiled, or put down without thinking? How many times have you begun an especially busy day wondering what to do first? You can save hours a month, perhaps hours every week, just by taking a few basic steps to organize your life.

Organizing your possessions and your activities relieves you of the mind-numbing task of trying to remember where to find things—and you'll know what to do next. This simple effort will free up a lot of brainpower you can use to think, enjoy, speculate, and just have fun.

You have two realms to organize: your activities and your things.

Here's how you can organize your activities:

- Create to-do lists, grouping your day's activities by the priority you assign to them. Do the things that you identify as most important first.
- If you have a complex errand or activity, make a detailed checklist of the things you need to do. A grocery list is a prime example. If you're making a run to the shopping district, don't forget to note the dry-cleaning receipt, the library book that needs to be renewed, and that you need kitty litter. At work, jot down the main points you need to cover at a specific meeting
- Create "tickler" files to remind you of things you have to check on or need to do something about in the future, including birthdays, anniversaries, and follow-ups.

Before you put these ideas into practice, it's a good idea to take a step back and consider the activities that you feel you must do. Is there a way to whittle down your to-do list? Especially if you feel overloaded, eliminate chores and obligations that aren't important, given your overall values and goals.

Here's how you can organize your things:

- One of the most useful places you'll discover when organizing things is a special place called "The Trash." Use it often.
- Make places for things, even if they're only piles in the corner. Use labels to keep track of what should be where.
- Never put something down until and unless you can put it where it "belongs." It's a new discipline, to be sure, but it's the single most important difference between a life of reasonable organization and chaos. Devote an hour per day at first (later this will require much less time) to putting things where they belong. That's right. Become your own mom. It's worth it.

## Key Tips

### Tip 1

Put certain things where they'll fall into your hands when you need them. Don't leave your keys on the bedroom dresser. They're easy to forget, and you might lock yourself out of your house. Instead, as soon as you let yourself in, put your keys right back in your pocket or handbag, which is where you can always look every time you need them. Similarly, keep your grocery list handy in the kitchen, where you can add a new item the very second you recognize the need for it.

### Tip 2

Continually refine your filing methods. If you discover that you can't find a recipe because you filed it under "Delia Smith" rather than "leg of lamb," revise your system to eliminate this problem. Perhaps you'll want to make a copy and file the recipe in both places, or perhaps you'll recognize that you think of recipes in terms of main ingredients, not the author.

### Tip 3

Create and use to-do lists, grouping your day's activities by the priority you assign to them. Do the most important things first. You must constantly update your list, resetting the priorities, as you complete activities. Be realistic about what can be accomplished in one day. Consider past experience, and make an honest calculation about how much time you have. Some activities are non-negotiable, such as sleeping, showering, eating, and travel time. You'll end the day feeling satisfied if you accurately estimate the time you have and schedule tasks accordingly.

### Tip 4

Create and use a tickler file that will remind you to follow up on important but unscheduled matters.

### Tip 5

Make a list before you go shopping. That way you won't find out that you didn't get vacuum-cleaner bags when you're back from the shop preparing to vacuum.

## Specifics

### Organizing Activities: Daily To-Do List

In addition to the above-mentioned tickler file, use a daily to-do list. This is a complete list of everything you have to do today. Divide the list of activities into four categories: things you must do, things you'd like to do, things you might do, and things you're thinking about but not ready to do. As you accomplish the "must-do" activities, adjust the priority of the remaining activities on your list:

- Don't forget checklists, which are more detailed than your to-do list, to remind you what to accomplish on a specific errand, trip to the store, telephone call, or meeting.
- Because to-do lists change so much, it can be helpful to use an app on your smartphone or other electronic tool. Index cards, which can be color-coded and shuffled by priority, also work well.
- Do only what's on your list. If you find yourself wanting to do something not on your list, put it on your list. This way you'll be organizing yourself more as you go.
- As soon as you've completed a task, cross it off your list, or tear up the card on which it's written. The satisfaction you'll get is immense—more than enough to help keep you organized despite all the pressures to backslide into disorganization.

### Organizing Things

Once you have enough extra places—like filing cabinets, bookshelves, and storage boxes—to put things, you'll want to arrange the things you put there to make finding them again somewhat easier.

If you have extra cash and the time, get some nifty containers for some of the things you want to be able to find again. You'll be surprised how much more stuff per square unit of horizontal space you can pile into an appropriately sized box than onto a bare shelf or floor. To provide even more storage space, put up extra shelves near the ceiling, place boxes under the bed, add hooks to your fitted wardrobe walls, and add new bookshelves or furniture with cabinets.

You can organize things conventionally, putting them in alphabetical or chronological order, or even size order. Under this strategy, albums go alphabetically by title or artist, and Dr. Gaskill the dentist gets listed under G.

You can organize things more personally, according to how you naturally think of them. Under this strategy, you'll group albums by type of music, or perhaps by the year they were recorded, and Dr. Gaskill the dentist might get listed under D for Dentist or M for Medical. Because it reflects your natural way of thinking, using this second strategy is far more pleasing—but be careful. If your mind tends to be a little scattered, you might never think of Dr. Gaskill twice the same way, and after you've organized it you'll have a very hard time finding his business card again.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What if I fail to organize myself one day?**

Don't worry about it. Organizing your life should be a positive experience. Don't make it a chore. During the first few weeks or months, you might enjoy a day or two off from keeping yourself organized, but you'll come back to it. After a few months of getting used to finding things on the first or second try, remembering appointments, and not straining to keep track of everything in all those piles around your house, you'll feel uncomfortable throwing your keys on the sofa and leaving the mail on the coffee table. You'll want to put things where they belong.

### **How can I be sure that organizing myself will take less time than being as disorganized as I am now?**

Take it on faith, for now. You can logically consider the obvious advantages of searching for things or going right to where they should be, or you can perform one or two simple experiments. The simplest experiment is just to carry a pencil around with you, and put a dot on everything you touch while you're looking for something else. After a while, your entire home will appear to have broken out in measles, and you'll realize how much time and energy you are wasting through disorganization.

A more elaborate experiment requires a stopwatch. Just start the watch every time you can't find what you're looking for on the first try, and keep it running until you locate the item or give up. Write down how much time you waste in this manner each day. Add in the time (plus the mileage, plus the money) you've wasted by forgetting to bring your receipt to the dry cleaner, missing the concert you purchased tickets for, throwing out all the now-rotten food you bought but didn't eat, and so forth.

### **My mind just isn't disciplined enough to organize. What should I do?**

Start very small. Organize just one aspect of your life, such as your night table or your underwear drawer. After a while, you'll so much enjoy this organized haven amidst all the chaos that you'll want to organize your sock drawer, too—and so on. Don't worry. You'll never be overorganized. That's not your problem. However, you will gain the benefits of organizing your life, and you'll enjoy them, too.

*Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2019). Getting organized. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

## Emotional Wellness Toolkit

How you feel can affect your ability to carry out everyday activities, your relationships, and your overall mental health. How you react to your experiences and feelings can change over time. Emotional wellness is the ability to successfully handle life's stresses and adapt to change and difficult times.

### Six Strategies for Improving Your Emotional Health

#### **Brighten your outlook.**

People who are emotionally well, experts say, have fewer negative emotions and are able to bounce back from difficulties faster. This quality is called resilience. Another sign of emotional wellness is being able to hold onto positive emotions longer and appreciate the good times.

Here are some tips on developing a more positive mindset:

- Remember your good deeds. Give yourself credit for the good things you do for others each day.
- Forgive yourself. Everyone makes mistakes. Learn from what went wrong, but don't dwell on it.
- Spend more time with your friends. Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
- Explore your beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life. Think about how to guide your life by the principles that are important to you.
- Develop healthy physical habits. Healthy eating, physical activity, and regular sleep can improve your physical and mental health.



### **Reduce stress.**

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Stress can give you a rush of energy when it's needed most. If stress lasts a long time, however—a condition known as chronic stress—those “high-alert” changes become harmful rather than helpful. Learning healthy ways to cope with stress can also boost your resilience.

Here are some tips to help manage stress:

- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly. Just 30 minutes a day of walking can boost mood and reduce stress.
- Build a social support network.
- Set priorities. Decide what must get done and what can wait. Say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Think positive. Note what you've accomplished at the end of the day, not what you've failed to do.
- Try relaxation methods. Mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or tai chi may help.
- Seek help. Talk to a mental health professional if you feel unable to cope, have suicidal thoughts, or use drugs or alcohol to cope.

### **Get quality sleep.**

To fit in everything you want to do in your day, you often sacrifice sleep. However, sleep affects both mental and physical health. It's vital to your wellbeing. When you're tired, you can't function at your best. Sleep helps you think more clearly, have quicker reflexes, and focus better. Take steps to make sure you regularly get a good night's sleep.

Here are some tips on getting better quality sleep:

- Go to bed the same time each night, and get up the same time each morning.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet, comfortable environment.
- Exercise daily (but not right before bedtime).
- Limit the use of electronics before bed.
- Relax before bedtime. A warm bath or reading might help.
- Avoid alcohol and stimulants such as caffeine late in the day.
- Avoid nicotine.
- Consult a health care professional if you have ongoing sleep problems.

### **Be mindful.**

The concept of mindfulness is simple. This ancient practice is about being completely aware of what's happening in the present—of all that's going on inside and all that's happening around you. It means not living your life on “autopilot.” Becoming a more mindful person requires commitment and practice.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Take some deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for 1 second, and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat often.
- Enjoy a stroll. As you walk, notice your breath and the sights and sounds around you. As thoughts and worries enter your mind, note them, but then return to the present.
- Practice mindful eating. Be aware of taste, textures, and flavors in each bite, and listen to your body when you are hungry and full.
- Find mindfulness resources in your local community, including yoga and meditation classes, mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs, and books.

**Cope with loss.**

When someone you love dies, your world changes. There is no right or wrong way to mourn. Although the death of a loved one can feel overwhelming, most people can make it through the grieving process with the support of family and friends. Learn healthy ways to help you through difficult times.

Here are some tips to help cope with loss:

- Take care of yourself. Try to eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep. Avoid bad habits—like smoking or drinking alcohol—that can put your health at risk.
- Talk to caring friends. Let others know when you want to talk.
- Find a grief support group. It might help to talk with others who are also grieving.
- Don't make major changes right away. Wait a while before making big decisions like moving or changing jobs.
- Talk to your doctor if you're having trouble with everyday activities.
- Consider additional support. Sometimes short-term talk therapy can help.
- Be patient. Mourning takes time. It's common to have roller-coaster emotions for a while.

**Strengthen social connections.**

Social connections might help protect health and lengthen life. Scientists are finding that people's links to others can have powerful effects on health—both emotionally and physically. Whether with romantic partners, family, friends, neighbors, or others, social connections can influence our biology and wellbeing.

Here are some tips to build healthy support systems:

- Build strong relationships with your kids.
- Get active and share good habits with family and friends.
- If you're a family caregiver, ask for help from others.
- Join a group focused on a favorite hobby, such as reading, hiking, or painting.
- Take a class to learn something new.
- Volunteer for things you care about in your community, like a community garden, school, library, or place of worship.
- Travel to different places and meet new people.

*Source: U.S. National Institutes of Health. (Reviewed 2018, December 10). Emotional wellness toolkit. Retrieved 21 June 2019 from <https://www.nih.gov>*