



## What price would you pay to be better organized?

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In a previous column I discussed entropy in the working world and project management strategies others and I have used to limit the effects of universal chaos and disorder. While preparing for an upcoming project I took a conscious look at how I work. This introspection was triggered by a comment made to me by a General Manager from another consulting gig. “Brian I don’t usually tell people why I hire them. In your case, I’ll make an exception. The reason I hired you was because of your methodical approach to everything and I really need that in my organization now.”

I wasn’t sure whether that was a compliment or a veiled slight inferring I was just this side of obsessive-compulsive. After a few brief moments of thought I accepted the compliment, as I believe he intended it.

While preparing for this project, I knew I was going to have to be really organized as I had very little time to spare. I was in need of a serious dose of my own medicine.

What I did may shock you — I did absolutely nothing at first. Well nothing might be stretching it a bit. What I did do was take a closer look at my business. Once I looked at my workflow, my messy home office and the disorganized files, emails and calendar on my laptop I knew that despite the outward appearance, and the results I was achieving for others I was out of control. I had been so busy getting others organized; I had forgotten to work on myself.

As any self-respecting methodologist would do I searched for the problem along with approaches that were out there already that had proven to be successful. Like so many things in life the answers are usually right in front of you.

I started to really examine the tools I had at hand and discovered that I really had most of what I needed in my software cabinet or on my computer. I just needed to start using it, integrate it with other applications or install it. So, during the first part of every weekend and during the last hour before I call it a day I’ve been literally retooling my business by upgrading my computer and server.

What I found truly of value to help control my business life was a small application called Business Contact Manager (BCM) that comes with Microsoft Office. BCM links most of the information flow you have on a daily basis together in a useful manner. Coupled with Microsoft Office Accounting you have your own small business infrastructure. It is an integrated business system that most large corporate IT shops would kill for and has most of the same functionality, only scaled down to a personal level. Even if you’re an employee at some large corporation it’s worth looking into.

As I do my day-to-day work, documents and emails are organized and cross referenced by projects and/or accounts; my time spent on projects, calls, and other tasks is accounted for and even tracked so I can accurately invoice and bill my clients as BCM sends over my time charges both billable and non-billable to MS Accounting so I can invoice and track projects. This enables

me to determine profitability on my various projects while they're in progress.

So what does all this organization cost me and how does it benefit me?

The price of the software isn't cheap, even for an upgrade. Add the time to install, customize, the learning curve to use, developing the routines and habits to integrate into how I do business and it is quite an investment. So how do I justify such an investment?

Remember, I'm the methodical type so I must have a fancy way of doing such a thing. I do. In years past, I assisted in the development of a methodology to quickly create business cases for Microsoft called REJ. I went through my own personal REJ study, and the end result was more business in less time. Senior executives typically discount technology investments based upon getting new business or revenues — they prefer to rely on cost savings, which are easier to measure. What's it worth these days to have another two hours per day and your weekends to spend with your family? What's the price of organization worth?

This month I am spending an hour every night, back entering all my data from years past into the system. It's a lot of data in electronic form or paper that I'm scanning with the objective of getting rid of most of my paper systems. Is it worth it?

Several of the projects I did 20 years ago have relevance today. Had I not taken the time to transcribe this data into electronic form, classify and catalog it, I would have had to rely on my own memory to find or recreate this information. This alone has saved me significant dollars as well as proves out my estimate of probabilities for new business.

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