

## Save it or Shred it – Organization is Key

### Personal productivity guru teaches brain-based organizing skills

By Eve Mitchell, BUSINESS WRITER

Growing up as a Navy brat, Eve Abbott knows a lot about prioritizing, given that the many moves made by her family to different bases taught her how to pack fast and pack lean.

"If your mom handed you a milk crate, and said put everything you love in here, we're moving tomorrow, and if she did that 10 times before you were 12 years old, believe me you would have great prioritizing skills," said Abbott with a laugh. "Some people think you are born organized. It's not true. Life teaches you to be organized. And who could have prepared us for today's technology saturated work and life?"

Those early years, along with jobs where she started at entry-level positions and used her organizational skills to advance to management, helped form the person Abbott is today – a personal productivity consultant.



improve their workplace and personal productivity. The goal is to end up with more

Although she is the Organizer Extraordinaire on her website, [www.organize.com](http://www.organize.com) Abbott said her expertise is more about teaching people how to use organizational skills to

time that can be used effectively.

"The thing is, I don't tidy up desks. I don't do closets," said Abbott. "When I talk to people individually, I say to them, 'I want to help you get organized so you have more time off.' When I talk to a CEO, I say, 'I want to help your group get organized so they are more productive and your company is more profitable.'"

For the past 16 years, Abbott has held productivity workshops for corporations, small businesses and government agencies, along with one-on-one sessions with individuals. Engagements include Kaiser Permanente, Alameda County, KRON Channel 4 and Hewlett-Packard, along with many smaller firms such as woman-owned Lotus Construction in Emeryville.

Workplace rates range from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for a half-day to full-day workshop, with discounts given for nonprofits. One-on-one sessions are a half-day in length and range from \$400 to \$500.

The 55-year-old El Cerrito resident recently wrote a book, "How to Do Space Age Work with a Stone Age Brain," that is filled with organizational tips. She is on the board of directors of the Northern California chapter of the Institute of Management Consultants and coordinates their Business Speakers Bureau.

But don't look for alphabetized soup cans in the kitchen cupboard of the home she shares with her 14-year-old cat, Misty, and

roommate Sallie Goetsch, who helped edit Abbott's book.

While their sunny apartment is tidy and neat, it has a comfortable lived-in look. "You can't do surgery on my floors," said Abbott. "But we can find everything instantly." Her book cover illustrates Eve's humorous and practical approach.



Finding stuff -- that's the key to saving time in Abbott's mind. "The truth is, you can't teach someone better time management skills if they can't find their car keys," she says.

Some examples cited by Abbott to be more productive on the personal level include getting off junk-mail lists ([www.junkbusters.com](http://www.junkbusters.com)) and getting on the national Do-Not-Call list ([www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)) Do e-file your income taxes, but don't fill out surveys that come with warranty registration cards, Abbott advises.

Workplace tips include color-coding e-mails and placing papers and other clutter behind you, which Abbott said makes crucial information within reach but not a distraction.

An Oakland native, Abbott's father was a Navy Chief Petty Officer and her mother worked as a nurse. After graduating with a double degree in sociology and psychology in 1972 from the University of California, Santa Cruz, Abbott worked as a waitress in the showroom at Harrah's Casino in Lake Tahoe for five years to pay off her college tuition debts.

Abbott started her business at, [www.organize.com](http://www.organize.com) in 1988 after getting laid off from Integrated Automation, a high-tech company in Alameda. There, she started out as a shipping clerk but advanced to management after helping the company with organization tasks.

"I basically reorganized the entire shipping and receiving area," she said. "I went in and told the manager, 'Look I'm spending half my time looking for packages.' So I talked them into buying big shelving and having what I call an office blitz where we rearranged everything."

Prior to working at Integrated Automation, Abbott worked in the Head Start program in the San Diego area, starting out as Teacher before advancing to Site Supervisor.

"I looked back at my previous jobs and noted the ones that were most satisfying and where I seemed to be most appreciated. They all had an organizing component or helping-other-people-work-better component," she said.

When she goes to a site to help a workplace or individual get organized, paper is the first thing that gets tackled in terms of what to keep or toss in the recycling bin or shredder. "The thing about paper is that it's real. When I work with

somebody, we do their paper system first before we work with the computer. Then, we transfer their custom categories into their computing systems."

People hang on to paper for several reasons, she said. "My personal theory is that it is due to information overload. They literally experience fear -- they don't know whether they are going to need it or not -- they're not sure," said Abbott. "The problem is, when you keep everything, then you can't find the stuff you really do need."

It's no surprise that her home has an office shredder. "When I'm done with the shredder, there's no temptation to go back and second guess myself," she said.

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Business Writer Eve Mitchell can be reached at  
(510) 208-6474 [emitchell@angnewspapers.com](mailto:emitchell@angnewspapers.com)

**For more information please contact:**

**Eve Abbott**  
**Organizer Extraordinaire**  
**3020 El Cerrito Plaza Suite 371**  
**El Cerrito, CA 94530**

**510-528-4950**  
[EveAbbott@Organize.com](mailto:EveAbbott@Organize.com)

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