The "Eighth" Habit of Highly Effective People

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We've all heard about knowledge management (KM) and how it's important to businesses and business leaders alike. *CIO Magazine* defines KM as a "process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets." Sounds like a very important process, one that corporations probably cannot ignore.

When KM surfaced in the nineties, some experts thought it was a fad and that it would go away. However, it seems that KM is here to stay, since it's gone through three stages already. The first stage was the realization that organizations have intellectual capital including information technology and the Internet. It was an eye opener to be able to use the Internet to recycle another organization's product, for instance, and underbid the competition (on similar projects) because half of the work was already done for you!

The second stage of KM focused on human resources. This was not a case of "if you build it, they will come." In fact, having technology around without the human motivation to actually use it does not bode well for the organization.

The third stage (the current stage) realized that people must be able to find what they are looking for. (What a concept!). And, now, here's a shocker – records and information management professionals have been promoting "stage three" for years!

You may be surprised to learn that companies who excel at KM also excel in records and information management. That's right. *Records. Documents. Filing. Archiving.* Call it what you like, but it all comes down to one thing: information. Information in that file or document on your desk, inside your computer, in the file cabinet, in offsite storage, in the garage, or wherever you store your information (hopefully, you don't really store it in your garage!). If you can't find the information you need when you need it, then, how well do you think you or your company is managing its knowledge base? All those fancy websites and computer equipment are not worth much if people don't use them effectively.

Storing information on paper, in electronic form, or other means is only effective and efficient if you can find it again when you need it. Yes, we can store that information in our heads but, the human brain can only hold so much for so long. (And, as we get older, our brain's "recall" ability diminishes.) So, stop relying solely on your brain to save your company's knowledge! Start sharing what you know by promoting and relying on your records and information management system, instead!

Here are some things you can do to start organizing your information and improving KM in your organization:

1. Start where the mess starts – your desk!!! Admit it. Your desk can be more organized! (*A desk in chaos reflects a life lived in chaos*). Keep your workspace clear and clean using the "OHIO" method.

2. When you retrieve or receive a record, **only handle it once** ("OHIO") by immediately sending the item to one of five areas:

   - "Filing" (regardless of media – send it to file right away).

- "Reading" (set aside and spend a few minutes each day catching up on your reading – during boring meetings, on the bus, waiting for appointments, riding the ferry, etc.). When you've finished your reading, send the item to file, route or recycle, as appropriate.
- "Routing" to others who need to know (attach a route slip and send it away).
- "Action" (this is your "to do" file for items that need your attention such as preparing responses to correspondence (including email), writing reports, etc.).
- "Recycle" (interestingly, almost 80% of information that we receive is not usable – the other 20% is either filed, read, routed, or actioned).

3.   Avoid placing documents in a "General" or "Miscellaneous" file. You'll never find them again! Trust me on this one!

4.   If you receive an item that you are not sure what to do with, place it in a "bring forward" file to review in one month's time. In one month, if you're still not sure what to do with it, bring it forward to review in one year. After one year, if you have not looked for it and no one else has called for it, recycle it (be aware of recycling sensitive material, though – use shredding when appropriate)!

By following the above steps, you will avoid the "Pack Rat Syndrome" and keep organized to better manage your information. As a result, your good records and information management practices will pave the way toward excellent KM.