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COLUMNIST

3 Secrets To Streamline Your Work Day

The success of the *mise-en-place* philosophy is based on self-discipline and focus - two skills that are essential for entrepreneurs and managers.



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IMAGE: Getty Images

I recently heard a news story on the radio about how chefs organize their kitchen space to be most efficient. As I was listening it occurred to me that managers can use this to organize their own teams.

The strategy the chefs used was one they referred to by the French term, *mise-en-place*." The phrase *mise en place* means "putting into place," or "setting up." For chefs, a *mise en place* refers to gathering and arranging the ingredients and tools they need for cooking in one central location. It helps the cooks coordinate vast amounts of materials in a labor-intensive environment. A chef who abides by this practice,

everything in your station is entirely organized to use the minimal amount of time and effort to get something done. Very complex, high stress tasks become streamlined and focused .

If a *mise-en-place* approach can simplify the very complicated tasks of cooking fine meals at high speed, imagine what it could do for you in your business.

The thinking behind *mise-en-place*, is to think through an entire system so that the steps and materials are in place for execution, with the highest predictability and the least amount of effort expended. All of the effort goes into the *preparation* so that the *execution* can be flawless.

The success of the *mise-en-place* philosophy is based on self-discipline and focus--two skills that are essential for entrepreneurs and managers. The following steps take the *mise-en-place* philosophy from the kitchen to your office space:

Take control of your office space. Everyone wants to save a little bit of time here and there, and with the *mise-en-place* philosophy you can save a lot. You should be able to sit in your chair without standing up and be able to reach everything you need in one place, the way the chefs prepare their cooking stations. You shouldn't have to get up for anything.

To arrange things most effectively, monitor your actions to show what you need in a day, and organize your office so that those things are immediately within your reach. Can you reach the books, files or binders you need for the day's work from where you're sitting?

You can still make this work for you in a small office space by making sure everything is right in front of you. Think of a sushi chef--they don't need to walk around the kitchen; they have the rice, fish, seaweed, and any other ingredients right in front of them. So if you find that you have to walk across the room to get to the printer, consider getting a tabletop printer instead. If you are constantly running to the supply closet, set up a drawer of the supplies you need most often and stock it so everything you need is right at hand. Be ready ahead of time.

Take stock. Ideally, you shouldn't run out of anything. Either you, or your assistant or office manager if you have one, make sure that you are stocked with everything you need, like pens, paper, or ink. The same is true on a digital level. Files are neat, organized, never cluttered, and easily accessible at any moment. You have enough disc space on your computer. Your contacts are organized and complete. Make a checklist and keep it in mind.

Prepare your day. Prepare your daily tasks for optimum efficiency. Know what calls you're going to be on that day, have hardcopies of what you need for any meetings, and take inventory of your to-do list for the tasks ahead. Once you're prepared, you can press "go" and get started with everything laid out in front of you. You can get right to work, just like a chef at his station.

To fully integrate *mise-en-place*, remember the secret is all in the preparation. Get prepared; set yourself up; try to think of everything; observe where the system breaks down, and make adjustments until everything runs like clockwork. You'll look more professional, and feel more productive too!

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