



ORGANIZATION *plus!*

P.O. Box 1703 • CLACKAMAS, OREGON 97015
(503) 659-3773

THE CLACKAMAS COUNTY *REVIEW*

The week of September 5 through September 11, 1991

Business

Organization is the key to Milwaukie business

By Jo Ann Boatwright
Correspondent

CLACKAMAS— Imagine an office so filled with “stuff” that there is only a path between piles to move through.

Imagine several years’ worth of business records tossed into cardboard boxes until someone finds time to file them.

Imagine desk drawers filled with old newspapers being saved for the recipes they contain.

Imagine the frustration, wasted time, mistakes and embarrassment a business owner experiences trying to work in such an office.

Now, imagine Susan Hurlbut of Organization Plus! arriving, armed with plenty of organizational expertise and some well-phrased questions about just what it is you would like to accomplish with all this mess.

“People don’t go into business for the paperwork,” Hurlbut said.

“They may be good at what they do, but the paperwork can get away from them. I happen to have a talent for paperwork.”

“It’s been a couple of years now and everything is still working beautifully.”

**— Maridee Piercy
Liepelt & Son**



Susan Hurlbut of Organization Plus!

Hurlbut is hired by companies to come in look, around and either make suggestions for changes or make those changes.

“My being ignorant of a client’s business is helpful,” she said. “When I ask why something is being done the way it is, it makes them think about it. Sometimes they are too close to it to see a solution.”

Basically, Hurlbut devises an organizational system and trains people to use it or she uses the existing system and fine tunes it with suggestions.

“The business owner or manager makes all the decisions,” said Hurlbut, who often acts as a discussion leader concerning efficiency issues or as a sounding board for workers who have new ideas or vested interests in keeping things the way they have always been.

“By the time people call me, they are ready to make changes,” Hurlbut said. “They are tired of the

stress and frustration and are saying to themselves, "If I could just get organized."

Hurlbut's marketing approach is low-key high-visibility. She writes columns for professional organizations' newsletters & newspapers and speaks frequently before civic and community groups.

The most frequently requested topic is paper management and Hurlbut tells her audiences that there are only four choices when dealing with paper.

They include dealing with it now, dealing with it later, trashing it now and trashing it later. "The whole idea is to make decisions about paper as quickly as possible. Most people don't because they see too many choices," Hurlbut said. "Basically, it is trash or file, now or later."

"If they don't want to do it now and postpone it, they will want to do it even less later," said Hurlbut, who offers a variety of simple filing systems and calendar systems to make things run smoothly.

Maridee Piercy, estimator at Liepelt & Son, a Beaverton company which manufactures foil and embossing attachments for old letter presses, said Hurlbut worked wonders when owner Joan Liepelt hired her to make changes in her business.

"Our filing system held everything since the company had started and it was hard to file and hard to find things," Piercy said. "So we didn't bother. We didn't really have files, we had piles. Sue came in and interviewed everyone, made the changes and trained the office workers. It's been a couple of years now and everything is still working beautifully. I don't know what we paid her, but it probably wasn't enough."

Linda Lander, owner and producer at Aurion Video Productions in Milwaukie, hired Hurlbut to get her filing system in order.

"We have a lot of creative people here and we had boxes and boxes that had never been filed, so we made a commitment to tidiness,"

Lander said. "Sue developed an easy system for us and everyone knows where things are. We used to spend a half hour looking for a file so this saves us a lot of time and agony."

Sometimes a solution is as simple as color-coding and buying a hanging file system or using a rubber stamp indicating something is a copy that can be read and thrown away rather than an original that needs to be filed.

"Sue developed an easy system for us and everyone knows where things are."

— **Linda Lander**
Aurion Video
Productions

"Some of what Sue did for us was so simple that I wondered why I hadn't thought of it," Piercy at Liepelt & Son said.

The professional organizer admits her favorite area of problem solving is computers and accounting systems. "My style of thinking is like computers—logical and step-by-step," she said. "Start-up companies are often especially impressed by computer demonstrations, but then they get the system home and can't see how to use it to meet their particular needs."

"There is often a gap between the computer company training and the know-how a small business owner needs to use the system," Hurlbut said. "People can't see the nitty-gritty details of their individual situation but I can go in and help them work it out. After all, the computer is just another tool to make their business work better."

Besides her work with whole business organization, where she does organizing from filing to office layout, Hurlbut works one-on-one with executives of large corporations who need her to organize their offices and set up their project time-frames.

Organizing as an industry has existed for only about the past 10 years, said Hurlbut, who has been in business since 1987. She hooked up with the National Association of Professional Organizers, added what she could learn from the organization to her own efficient, problem-solving talents and now keeps busy helping her clients get organized.

The Clackamas business woman also is becoming a leader in the new, but rapidly growing organizational industry in the Portland metropolitan area.

Professional organizers have recently formed a local chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers and Hurlbut serves as president of the group. Its members include both business and home organizers, events planners, moving organizers, time managers and others devoted to helping people get their lives running more smoothly.

"I just fell into this because I have a talent for being organized," said Hurlbut, who worked her way through school by helping her employers get organized. Later, as a corporate vice president of operations, Hurlbut honed her logical, step-by-step problem solving abilities.

"There is a difference between being organized and being obsessive about neatness," Hurlbut said. "Some people say they can't work if things are too structured, that it takes the spontaneity out of life. But I think that when things are organized and under control there is more room for spontaneity and creativity."

"I'm basically a lazy person," Hurlbut said. "I don't want my time gobbled up by work. I want some time for me and by being organized I can do other things with my time. That's what I try to provide for my clients—time for other things."

And, yes, sometimes the solutions to the messy problems are so simple that Hurlbut's clients ask themselves, "Why didn't I think of that?"
