

Member's Quarterly

Winter 2022 Edition

Feature

Make Room for Focussed Leadership

Winning the war against mental clutter

The rise of the minimalism movement and the trend towards removing physical clutter from our living spaces have opened up a generation to discovering new spaciousness in small-dimension homes and a sense of freedom from the burden of too many possessions.

Leaders of organizations and businesses can experience that same lightness of being by ridding themselves of mental clutter. When your mind is crammed full of negative and conflicting thoughts, it is difficult to find space to make the clear, well-considered decisions that are essential to your future.

The most deplorable mental baggage is centered on fear of failure and doubt in our own abilities. As a leader, you cannot expect that others will see their ways clear to follow you if you can't get past the boxes of disbelief in yourself.

Being bogged down in mental clutter means we are more apt to overspend, overextend and underperform in our organizations. Suddenly we feel paralyzed by the lack of clarity in our minds and we find ourselves locked into a bad decision or course of action that we would never have started if we'd been able to see clearly.

How can you weed out your mental clutter as a leader?

Just as you clean your clothes closet by deciding which pieces are the basis of your wardrobe and eliminating those things that are too out of style, too old and dingy or too unrelated to stay, you can clean out your mind by deciding on your intent. Then methodically remove all those thoughts, doubts and disturbances that do not clearly support your intent.

As you remove each conflicting thought, you will find a ray of awareness suddenly has room to shine. By understanding why you are doing something and being aware of what is guiding your actions, your day starts to take on a clearer form and meaning.

Next, remove the wasted thoughts that you exert that are of a repetitive nature. Establish routines that become so automatic that you don't have to clutter your brain thinking about them. Get up at the same time each morning, minimize your breakfast dilemma into three or four nutritious, rotating choices and establish regular exercise times, regular eating times and regular sleeping times.

Minimize your wardrobe to essential workable pieces so you can set up a week's worth of outfits and not have to think about them. Establish consistent work routes and morning routines that keep your mind free to clearly focus on other things.

As a leader, it is likely that you are also an ideas person. While that is an admirable trait, it can lead to too much mental clutter. Get into the habit of capturing your ideas in an app or notebook so the amount of information you need to process every day doesn't overwhelm you. Designate a time of day where you can calmly look over the ideas you have gathered and consider which ones are workable, which ones need to be filed and stored for another day and which ones need to be discarded as unworkable.

Establish your priorities and clear out the wants and whims floating through your mind that don't support what you want to do. There is a school of thought based on research that most of us work best when we have no more than four primary goals at one time.

That does not mean that you can't manage the multiple projects that cross your desk. It does mean that before you leave your work area each day, you should clearly establish which four projects need



Paula Morand
CSP

*Keynote Speaker,
Leadership Expert*

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your full attention the next day and focus on them. If you keep rotating your priorities, you will keep all projects moving forward to complete them on schedule.

Finally, establish a strategy for calmness and clarity when the mental clutter creeps back in and threatens to unbalance you again. For many people it is two minutes of mindfulness meditation; for others it is a five-minute walk in the fresh air or a 20-minute physical workout. Never schedule your day so full that you do not leave opportunities to engage your coping and clean-out strategies when they are needed.

Overall, the best way to keep your mind clutter-free in the long term is to live authentically, focused on the real and genuine aspects of yourself and aligning them with how you lead.

When you are true to yourself and the special talents you possess, you will be less inclined to veer too far away from being who you are and what you have a talent for doing. If your mind is full of doubt and other clutter, it generally means that you are unhappy in your heart because your success and your work do not line up with who you are.

Paula Morand is a keynote speaker, author and leadership expert who helps high potential visionaries and organizations take their brand and their business to the next level. She can be reached via email at bookings@paulamorand.com.