

FAIRFIELD COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

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Cara Brook, owner of Strategize. Organize. Simplify. LLC.

SOS for office clutter

BY RYAN DORAN

Cara Brook is a self-proclaimed personal trainer for your overfilled filing cabinets.

“If you take your hands a foot apart and go into your closet you’d probably come out with five items of clothing; five decisions. But if you went into your filing cabinet and did the same you’d have about a ream of paper,” said Brook, who as owner of Strategize. Organize. Simplify. L.L.C. is coming up on five years in business. “That’s exponentially more decisions that need to be made, it’s time consuming and it’s what people hate to do.”

Brook of Stamford says she has always been an expert in efficiency.

“I have a background in corporate health care primarily,” Brook said.

Brook was working for a project manager at Oxford Health when she decided to go off on her own.

“I was a business liaison helping develop a new system to make our contracts with external clients and vendors work better into our systems,” she said. “That was challenging, but it was also a lot of fun for me actually. I was left thinking I really enjoy doing this, I’d love to be able to do it more; and why do it for just one company, why not do it for whoever needs it?”

Depending on the client, Brook may consult once a week or once a year.

“As much as I’m in business to make money as we all are, I want to see my clients succeed and become more efficient. When my clients tell me, they don’t need to see me as much, it’s great.”

According to the American Demographics Society, Americans waste 9 million hours per day searching for misplaced items; 25 percent of business paper documents are misplaced and will never be found. The average office was also found to have made 19 copies of each filed document.

According to Brook, in even the most efficient offices be improvements can be made.

“We have a gathering of the minds, give everyone an idea of what it’s going to look like and then implementing them,” Brook said. “Everyone thinks differently, so things like how to name things are important.”

Brook often creates for her clients office-wide directories, set up in multiple ways such as alphabetical and departmental.

Brook said an advantage of having an objective person is it takes any unintentional disrespect out of the equation.

“Many of these people take the office structure very personally, maybe they designed it themselves,” she said. “You need to be cautious with them and come up with something that works for everyone. For me there’s no emotion attached to it, so it’s easy for me to make changes and switch gears. I lead them through the process.”

Brook equates her job to a personal trainer because in many ways it is that push of motivation that many offices need.

“Many times they want to make a change, they tell you they want to make a change, and then you start making the change and gradually they get a little resistant and identifying that often brings out the core of the problem.”

Brook usually works in offices of up to 20 people and much of her work comes to her on a referral basis.

“It’s such a nice compliment to know that my clients are happy with the progress that they’ve made and what I’ve been able to help them with enough to refer me on to other people.”

Brook said the files on a computer should ideally mirror what’s in a filing cabinet.

“I work with people a lot on time management because I can do everything to set up a system for you but if you’re not going to take the time to maintain it then you’ll just go back to where you were.”

Brook is currently hunting for junior organizers to expand her operation from her one-woman force.

Also, Brook and fellow organizer and Fairfield resident Betsy Krobot of Betsy K have put together four separate training classes for people who want to get into the organizing business.

“The physical clutter gets into your mindset and clutters up your mind,” said Brook. “You need to free yourself from that.”

