

A call to order

Organizing your desk clears way to productivity

By Leslie Lindeman
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Kathleen Peterson didn't set out to become a professional clean-desk consultant. She was just a management consultant

"I'd be sitting in some executive's office trying to talk about a problem and his or her eyes would be darting all over the desk. I couldn't get people to stop looking at their piles."

Eventually, Peterson, who had always been good at putting everything in its place, decided to help people face their piles rather than succumb to the tendency to work around them.

"The funny thing was, en route to cleaning the person's desk, we always solved the problem," she says.

Peterson believes a clean and orderly work environment goes hand-in-hand with problem-solving and is synonymous with profit. "In nearly every case, the entrepreneurs I work with wind up making more money," she says, the most obvious case being the man among whose buried clutter she found a check for \$10,000.

"I believe it's all about telling the truth," says Peterson, who practices at Equinox Consulting in Niles. "Inside the stuff you shove to the side are things you don't want to deal with. After you confront it you can move on. You work more productively. You expand your business."

Peterson refers to herself as an "efficiency engineer," but the more common term is "professional organizer." The profession

SEE ORGANIZE, PAGE 17

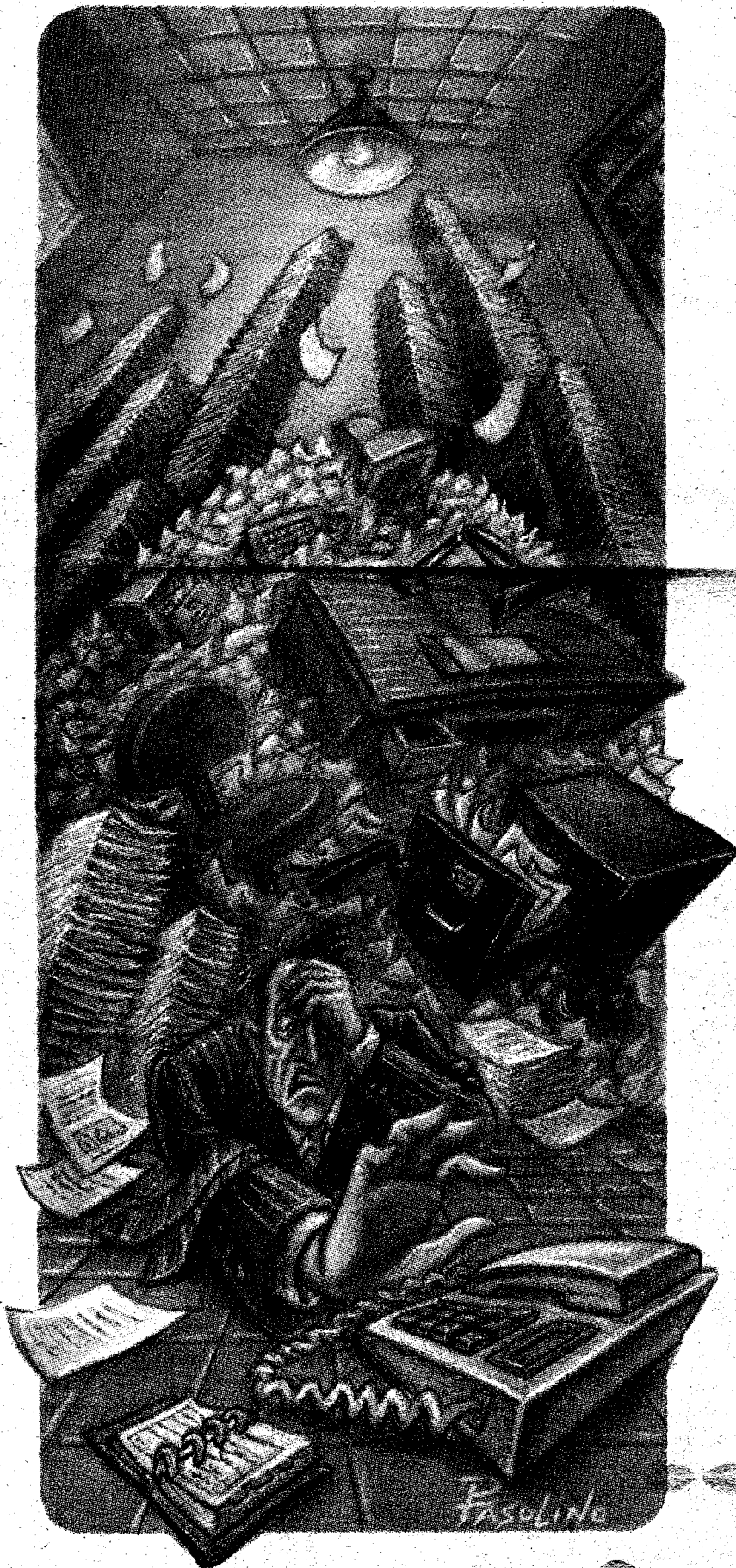


Illustration by Pete Fasolino

CoverStory

Organize

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

was virtually non-existent 10 years ago, but today approximately 800 organizers belong to the National Association of Professional Organizers, based in Austin, Texas. Their information and referral hot line is 512-206-0151.

Some organizers, such as Peterson, work only in the workplace, but others, such as Pat Braun of Braun Strategic Resources in Chicago, work with clients in their office or home.

"If you can't find things, if you aren't organized, it ends up costing you time," Braun says.

So much emphasis is placed on information, she says, "people feel they need to have it all. But there is not enough time to read it, so they make a printout or they save the journal or the report, but it just sits in a pile or a file."

"What goes in piles is the pending stuff," Peterson says. "It's just sitting there, waiting."

That might be fine, she says, if that's all it did. "But while it sits, it's a psychological detriment," she says. "Every piece of paper reminds people, 'I have work to do.' Some part of the brain registers that and it causes stress.

"I believe your desk is your No. 1 tool. If it's filled up with stuff you don't need to do *now*, it weakens you."

"The top of my desk is my work surface, not a storage area," says Monica Friehl, who owns Chaos to Order, an organizing company. "On my desk is where I need to do my work. If I store my papers there, where do I do my work?"

Peterson, Braun and Friehl all relate stories of walking into offices and homes where the clutter left almost no space for the occupants.

"I walked into a home recently," Friehl says, "and shoes, boots and coats were all over the living room. What's in the coat closet? Blankets and sheets. What's in the linen closet? Newspapers and boxes of old records."

"Company is coming so people put everything in shopping bags and jam it in the closet," Braun says. "Then the closet overflows and they fill up the guest bedroom. It snowballs."

"Previously, I could never decide what to throw away," says Karmaleta C. Mosley, vice president for total customer

