



by Douglas Carlsen, DDS

In 2009 my wife and I moved from San Diego, California, to Denver, Colorado. It took me 40 hours to meticulously wrap and box all the crucial family heirlooms of Waterford, Lennox, and LEGOs. The movers spent 80 man-hours to load and unload a 53-foot semi. I meticulously removed and placed the treasures the next two weeks, leaving 250 empty boxes. A triumph of consolidation!

Am I bragging? No, this is sick! Over-saving of personal items with the resulting clutter has become a major American psychological and physical problem.

According to Howard Mansfield, 23 percent of Americans pay bills late because they can't find them and 25 percent with two car garages never park their cars inside. There are also 2.3 billion square feet of storage space in America, making it possible for every American to stand – all at the same time – under the total canopy of self-storage roofing.¹

1. Howard Mansfield, *An American dilemma: Your clutter or your life*, latimes.com, downloaded at www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mansfield-clutter-20130922,0,5740880.story

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Mansfield continues, "We're crowding ourselves out of our houses. And it's not just stuff... home offices are like small, overcrowded rail yards, heaped with paper and tangled with cords for all the devices associated with a computer (printers, scanners, backup power, speakers). The computer or desk is often in a flurry of Post-it notes in an attempt to remember obscure computer prompts..."²

What's this have to do with dentistry? Everything. Vivid memories persist of visiting a doctor's office for a clinical study club in the late 1990s, finding in a clinical operator "composite drawer" not just a couple brands of composite and one type of bonding agent, but generation III through VII bottles of bonding agents mixed in with composite syringes of all shades and brands with expiration dates smudged out with fingerprints. Ugh! Why weren't almost all of these syringes and bottles in a refrigerator? Because no one dared go beyond the first refrigerator row of Saran-wrapped mystery muffins. The doctor's private office housed a jungle of Dentrix reports overlaid by numerous Journals of Prosthetics, ADA Journals, and glossy dental magazines stabilized on top by several study models.

In *The Science of Disorder* Jack Hokikian, PhD, remarks how dependent our world is on the Law of Entropy. Entropy represents the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work, often interpreted as the degree of disorder or randomness in the system. Entropy always strives to attain a maximum value.³ In other words, the world strives to maximum disorder and we can never stop its relentless mess-making.

Dr. Hokikian continues: "In fact, the... Laws of Thermodynamics explain nicely why people in the United States have less and less available time as they produce and attempt to use a wide spectrum of time-saving devices, which are not only increasing in numbers but are becoming increasingly complex and delicate... Americans are eating up their leisure time by overloading themselves with all kinds of gadgets, until they are worse off than they were before they had all these possessions."⁴

Let's look at both personal and practice tips to attack entropy and the resulting clutter.

Personal

To control basic home clutter, always use the one-in, one-out rule. For each appliance, pot, shirt, or magazine that is bought, put one into the trash, recycle or donation box. To bring clutter into control, use the one-in, three-out rule.

For major clutter, use the two-year rule. If you haven't used or looked at something within two years, the chances of you ever using or looking at it are slim. Rid yourself of it.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Jack Hokikian, Ph.D., *The Science of Disorder*, Los Feliz Publishing, Los Angeles, CA, 2002, p. 29.

4. *Ibid.*, pages 92,94.

Designate one computer as your primary household computer. Do not put it in your bedroom! Name it: The Dominator, Steve, Mac, Sheldon, Hal, Barbie, Terminator, whatever. Use Quicken Premier for everything financial. If you have a Mac and can't get Quicken Premier, buy Parallels and install Quicken Premier. Yes, it's that good. Not only does Quicken Premier follow and reconcile your credit cards and bank accounts, it tracks your brokerage accounts in real time while assimilating capital gains. You also can use the "snap and store" app for recording important receipts.

This primary computer will store all your photos, music, estate and financial documents, your Quicken account and other correspondence. Have cloud backup for all important documents and pictures. Also, have hard drive backup on site. Use "share" and "cloud" options to share with your other computers, tablets and smartphones as needed.

For full financial organizational information, go to www.dentaltown.com and search "Tame the Piles," my 2012 article on personal financial setup.

Let's now look at mind-clutter. Your home is a place of rest, not work. If you absolutely love to do certain house chores, that's great. But dentists work way too hard to have to worry about dry-wall, plumbing, cooking and all the things you were taught to do on your own. Get a cleaning service, lawn service and fix-it guy. Have meals delivered if you like. Pamper yourself at home.

Stop volunteering for causes and groups that cause even the tiniest bit of stress. Many dentists belong to homeowner associations. Why do you torture yourselves? To join an organization that improves one's quality of life is appropriate. A civic organization that promotes your practice may offer benefit to both you and the community; yet make sure your ideals and the organization's match.

Practice

Supplies: intelligent storage systems, such as Henry Schein's Cubex system, monitor availability of supplies with a fingerprint ID touch system. Supply levels are monitored electronically off-site with automatic reordering when supplies reach a minimal

level. At the least, use a barcode system that all major dental suppliers provide.

Staff personal items: provide small lockers if possible. If not, place overhead individual boxes or containers in an unseen or unobtrusive area of the operatories or break room.

Refrigerator: you need two – one for food, one for supplies. The food refrigerator must be completely emptied every Friday – "Take it or it's gone." After one week's whining all will be in order.

Magazines: have a front desk staff member reset magazines twice a day. Back office personnel are to return magazines to the front desk once a day. Twice a month, old issues need to be recycled.

Sound system: have a quality sound system placed in your office. It may cost \$3,000, yet the mood is a big plus for many patients. Play Pandora or Sirius XM. Overall favorites seem to be country and smooth jazz, not the news!

Assigned duties: sterilization monitors, radiation badges, laundry, and other daily tasks need staff assignment.

The doctor's office: a home for wayward study models and magazines. Once a week a doctor-chosen staff member must remove all models from the desk, go outside, and gently throw them on the sidewalk. Alternatively, if the doc really might actually use them someday, place carefully on that shelf where they belong. Once a month, take any magazine more than two months old and recycle. The doc can always retrieve an article online later.

Preventive maintenance: have your supplier perform preventive checks on your major equipment such as compressor, vacuum and dental units once a month. No, they don't normally do much, yet this "insurance policy" will mean you will be first in line when you do have an equipment emergency.

IT support: protecting your electronic data is essential today. Digital Dentist provides data protection and recovery, email and patient information encryption, real-time updates of compliance documentation, and round-the-clock monitoring of your networks. Other companies may offer similar support. Fees may be \$800+ per month, yet having a HIPAA breach or loss of data can be catastrophic. ■



Would you like to learn more from Dr. Carlsen? Visit Dentaltown.com/magazine.aspx to access this article and post your question.



Author's Bio

Dr. Douglas Carlsen has delivered academic-based financial education since retiring from private practice in 2004 at age 53. He has no connection with any company or individual and speaks his mind freely.

Carlsen is very interested in speaking to your study club! Contact at 760-535-1621 or drcarlsen@gmail.com.

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