

Small office strategies

“You clutter up your room entirely too much with out-of-doors stuff, Anne. Bedrooms were made to sleep in.” Marilla, to Anne, who wanted to decorate her room with fall-coloured maple branches. (Anne of Green Gables, Chapter XVI, Lucy Maud Montgomery)

by Trudi Down



Elizabeth Verwey,
founder of Home
Office Mentors

THE ABOVE QUOTATION MIGHT SEEM STRANGE AS AN introduction to the report about the November meeting. But all will be made clear shortly! The evening’s topic was “Small Office Strategies” and our speaker was Toronto-based **ELIZABETH VERWEY**, who founded Home Office Mentors in 1997.

When we hear the phrase “small office,” most of us typically think of a spare bedroom, a corner of the living room, or a chilly-in-winter/stifling-in-summer attic space. However, if you were in attendance on November 27, you may have been as surprised as I to discover that more than one of our members has actually conducted an editing/proofreading business from the bedroom!

Whether we work on the kitchen table or the bed, most of us can use some tips on how to organize our time and space. Through her company, Small Office Mentors (www.officementors.com), Verwey assists home-based and small-office business owners in being more effective with space and time management, to save time and money in the on-going operations of their business, and to achieve balance in their lives.

The first step is to recognize your personal space needs and “zone” your space, she advised. Clear out what doesn’t belong, and create the type of work space that ... well, *works*, for you. You may require a corner for



thinking time, separate from your actual desk/work area. Or perhaps you need to energize your work zone by re-positioning your desk so it affords a view of the garden.

Once you have designed the work area, it's time to plan how you will function within that space. An accessible and well-organized filing system — paper or computerized — is a must if you hope to keep your work space free of clutter. Studies have shown we typically lose one hour a day looking for important pieces of paper. Verwey suggested that by tracking the route a printed communications piece takes across your work space — from the time it enters the office to its final destination (filing cabinet or garbage can) — you can determine if the space is functioning at its best.

Paper path tip: Try both the L-shaped and U-shaped desk arrangements, to determine which works better for you.

Computerized record systems, scanners for capturing information from business cards, a daily electronic or bound planner, a computerized backup system, good lighting and ergonomic chairs and keyboards, and a large garbage can (“big is best!”) are great tools for helping with efficiency and productivity.

As a segue to the topic of time management, Verwey reminded us that “saying No to something means saying Yes to something else that is more important”.

Time is a non-renewable resource and, for most of us, it is a constant struggle to find enough time to do all the things that need to be done. Verwey suggested focusing on what works well and problem-solve what doesn't. Identify the methods you employ to procrastinate, and correct or change those behaviours. Plan the most important items of your day and do them first.

Planner tip: Block off time for project, R&D, even family schedules, directly in the planner.


“The tone of your day is set in the first hour you spend at work,” she noted. Apply the WIN strategy — **W**hat's **I**mportant **N**ow. Do it, then get out and have fun! Reward yourself with a treat or time out of the office when a project or job has been completed.

Determine your high energy “power hour” and be certain to do important or difficult tasks at that time. Take breaks.

Time management tip: “You can't be everything to everyone.” Take a micro-vacation, a four to twenty-four hour time period for yourself. Remember to block this off in the daily planner. Then go see a movie, or visit an art gallery. Do one thing that you have wanted to do but felt you never had the time!

Verwey's idea of using a mentor to keep oneself focused and on track may be of help to many freelancers. As outlined in her book, **THE MENTORS CIRCLE: CLEARING YOUR PATH TO BUSINESS GROWTH** (www.mentorscircle.com), the pair who are mentoring each other establish individual hourly, daily or weekly goals; after the set period of time, they communicate by phone or e-mail to report on whether they have achieved their goals.

For those in attendance who found helpful ideas in her presentation and who vowed then and there to declutter their space and better organize their time, our knowledgeable speaker had one final tip:

“Be patient. It takes 21 times for a person to adopt a new habit.” 



A first for our chapter! Thanks to branch co-chair Ken Weinberg, the evening's talk was recorded and streamed live via computer Webcast to chapter members who had signed up to receive the broadcast remotely. Verwey made sure she addressed the on-line audience from time to time and repeated questions for their benefit.

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