

## President's Column

### Get Organized and Get More Done

by Scott Levine

*Scott Levine is CASD's President for 2010. He is a partner in the law firm of Silldorf & Levine, LLP. He represents homeowners in construction defect actions and also practices business litigation, employment and franchise law. Mr. Levine received his undergraduate degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and his Juris Doctor degree from California Western School of Law. Mr. Levine was the Tort Law column editor and then the Legislative Law column editor for **Trial Bar News**. He was awarded the 2002 Legislative Champion Award by CAOC and the David S. Casey, Jr., Consumer Advocate Award by the CASD for 2003. He may be reached by email at: [slevine@silldorf-levine.com](mailto:slevine@silldorf-levine.com).*

***"Every book you read you get to stand higher so you can reach the stuff on the higher shelf."  
Jim Rohn***

This month I am going to review a book that I recently read that will assist in the life-balance agenda set forth as a 2010 Goal. The book is "Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity" by David Allen. I chose this book because I have observed in many of the offices of attorneys and other business people I have visited that most of us don't have any real organizational system. I have seen some offices that look incredibly well organized and have often asked the occupant, "How do you do that?" I have never really gotten the whole formula from any one person, but I found the answer when I read David Allen's book recently. His book is a whole system that is simple to follow (as long as you have some dedication and determination). The reward though is an emptying of your memory as the holder of all information.

What if you hit your head tomorrow and could not remember the events of the last week? Would your organization system be lost as well? I would guess that for most of us the answer would be "yes." Using David Allen's system, you will accomplish the following: (1) you will master the flow of work into and out of your office; (2) you will get projects planned and completed; (3) you will get started in gaining control of the "stuff" in your office; (4) you will have a system in place to capture "stuff" when it arrives in your in-box (paper and emails); and (5) you will have a system of review to permit yourself to always know your stuff will not fall through the cracks.

I would venture to guess that you have a lot of "stuff" that is for later or for reference or something that "maybe I can use someday" on your desk or in a pile. I did. Using David Allen's system, I put it all away into folders that I can easily find when I want to find them and that "stuff" is no longer on my desk in a pile. When I went through the exercise, I threw away a lot of stuff, but I also "discovered" a lot of stuff that I forgot I even had in the pile! This is probably the hardest part of the project and will likely need to be done on a weekend or a day off. But, the time is well worth the price as you will be on the path to regaining control of your desk/office.

I have read from several authors that you should only touch a piece of paper once. One exercise was to put a dot on the paper each time you touch it. That means if you move it from one side of

your desk to another, you put a dot on the page. If you look at it to see if you want to do the work it requires and put it down, you put a dot on the page. Using David Allen's system, you will put a yellow sticky on the front of each thing that comes into your office and identify the "next action." If the task takes less than 2 minutes, you will just do it (like a Nike commercial). If it is something that will take longer, you will put the yellow sticky on the page and you will enter the "next action" into your planner.

The planner even has a separation of areas/topics. Instead of a "to do" list, you will have several different topics that you will use to keep your information separate. That way, when you have some time, instead of looking through your long "to do" list, you will look for a thing you can do given the time and energy that you presently have to perform that task or thing.

David Allen's flow chart is available online if you Google his name. However, the real value of his system is in the book. The steps that you will follow when a piece of paper enters your office are as follows:

1. What is it?
  - a. Is it Actionable?
    - i. If the answer is No, you will either trash it, put it into Reference Materials or put it into a pile for "later" for incubation or "someday."
    - ii. If the answer is Yes, you will ask, "can this be done in less than two minutes?"
      1. If yes, you will do it.
      2. If no, you will ask, "Am I the right person to do this?"
        - a. If yes, you will defer it.
        - b. If no, you will delegate it and put it onto your "waiting for list."

Projects have a new life as well. Instead of keeping the project in your head, you will define the project in five distinct steps. Once you "define" a project, your entire team (even if it is just you) will know exactly why you are doing what you are doing because the goals and reasons are defined – on paper.

Another quote from Jim Rohn is, "Learn to work harder on yourself than your job."

One more thing: how are you doing on the goals that you set last month? This might be a good time to review your goals for the year as the year is moving along. Don't forget to do the things that you want to in life while you still have the chance.