

NOTES THAT WORK

Whether recording instructions or jotting seminar notes, whether using pencil or PD, every secretary needs a *system*—an organized method of arranging information so it can be retrieved and used as needed. Most notes are, after all, taken not just for the sake of getting words on paper, but for the purpose of recording data or ideas to be referred to at a later date. We need notes that do more than sit on a page; we need notes that work.

- **GET READY** The first step in this system is simple but essential; Use light lines to divide your note page into three columns. The left column can be narrow, 1 or 2 inches. Make another narrow column on the right. That leaves 4 inches or so for the middle column. Just right!

The *first* column is used to note major ideas or topics. The *middle* column is for points that develop and support the key facts noted in column one. Use the *third* column to jot down how you will personally apply the information. This is the place to record your “memos to self.”

- **ACTIVELY LISTEN** In attending a meeting, your primary objective is to comprehend what is being said. Taking notes should never detract from your reason for being there, to listen and learn. So, first of all, get in sync with the speaker and grasp the intention of the message. This allows you to know *what*, if anything, you want to take away from this meeting. Be sure to note the date, the topic, and the name of the speaker at the top of your page.
- **ORGANIZE AS YOU NOTE** As you listen, jot major ideas in the first column of your page. As these ideas are developed, either by the speaker or by your own thoughts, note these points in column two. Make an effort to enter your notes in outline form. Organization makes notes easier to use later.
- **BE STINGY** Effective notes are as much a result of knowing what to leave *out* as of knowing what to put *in*. Use as few words as possible to nail down what you want to retain. Capture thoughts with phrases, not sentences. Some note takers develop their own shorthand—initials and numbers that denote actions to take or people to notify. Ease into this practice so, though concise, your “cold” notes will not have you wondering, “*What* did I mean by this?”
- **MAKE THE APPLICATION** Use lulls in the speaker’s message to build on the outlined points in column two. As thoughts occur to you on how you can personalize concepts and apply them in your own situation, record these important revelations in column three.

As soon as possible after the note-taking session, go over all three columns and clarify any points that are fuzzy; expand on the ideas most relevant to you. Use a colored pen to underline or highlight ideas to implement.

- **USE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED** Even the most organized and insightful notes are worthless unless they are *used*. Based on the information they contain, keep your notes where you can refer to them as needed. File folders may work well for minutes and the like; looseleaf notebooks are a good choice for office tips or notes on professional growth.

“Everything must be done in a proper and orderly way.” –1 Corinthians 14:40

PROfile Newsletter, March/April 2002, Issue 117, p. 8