

From Keith Lowry
Keith Lowry Seminars, Inc.
www.keithlowry.com

Overcoming Disaster Desk Syndrome...



Developing a Tickler File

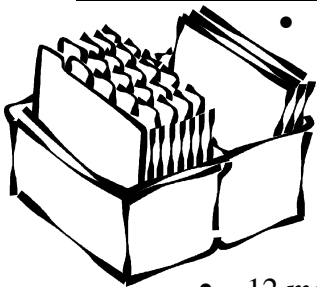
Does your office look like they filmed the movie “*Twister*” in there? Do you have *pilot* training? You know... “pile it” here, pile it there, pile it everywhere... Have you ever been heard to say, “I know where everything is on my desk”, and then spent the next 30 minutes looking for it? Did you know that the average person with a cluttered desk spends 1 ½ hours a day looking for things that are within reach!? *That’s 7 ½ hours per week!*

Well, a tickler file is designed to help you with this! It is designed to give you a place to *PUT* all those things you’ve been *STACKING* on your desk! They will be *OUT OF SIGHT*, but they *WON’T* disappear! *AND*, they will actually *POP UP* when you *NEED* them!

A couple of important notes...

- A tickler file needs to be *in reach* of your *chair* to be effective. If you have to *get up* from your chair to reach it, *you won’t use it!* I suggest a hanging file system in your desk drawer (best option), or credenza, or a free-standing file frame somewhere within reach.
- A tickler file is a *system*. Like any other tool you have at your disposal, you have to actually *use it*, or it will be of little or no value. It takes practice to get used to one, but if you’ll develop and adapt it to your use, it will free up your desk and your time.

Here are the components:



- 1 *five minute file* (items which could be completed in short 5 minute or less blocks of time, but which are not urgent)
- 1 *to be filed file* (items which you can file later in the main filing system. An activity which is best completed in your low energy time of the day.)
- 1 *to be read file* (items I need to read later... only the article, not the entire magazine, remember?)
- 31 *numbered files* (for the days of the month)
- 12 *monthly files* (Jan, Feb, Mar...)
- 1 *next year file* (self explanatory, right?)
- And one extremely important component of your tickler file system – your TRASH CAN!

The first 3 files are self-explanatory. Behind them you will find the month file for this month. It's empty, and serves only as a divider. Behind that you find the numbered file which corresponds to today's date. The rest of the numbered files follow it in order. Behind those are the remaining monthly files, and the last file is the Next Year file.

The key to using your tickler file well is *daily upkeep*. Any piece of paper you find on your desktop can go in a tickler file. I might need this next week; I'll need this for the staff meeting next month; this goes in the trash; I might need this next year; I need to reply to this letter, I'll do it when I have five minutes sometime; etc, ad infinitum.

This simplifies the decision making process with EVERYTHING that comes across your desk. *EVERYTHING!* There is no longer a reason to STACK stuff on your desk! *It can ALL go in your tickler file from now on!*

Update the file at the end of each day. At the end of the day, take out today's file and empty it. If there are items left in it, either place them in another file to do another day or decide they weren't worth doing and trash them. Tomorrow's file is now up front. Take it out and see what's on tap for tomorrow. Build tomorrow's list and you're ready for the day..

Now, tomorrow when I arrive at work, the items which I need for my to-do list are right there in my Tickler File instead of sitting out on my desk; the letter I need to reply to; the notes for my staff meeting; and so on.

At the end of the *month*, the *numbered* files are empty and have recycled back into the right order. Take out this month's empty month file and move it to the back. Take out next month's file and empty it and sort through the items there, placing them in the daily files as you need to.

When you've done so, place the now empty current month file in front of the daily files as a new divider, and start your month over again.

If you ever let it get out of order, perhaps after having been out of the office for several days, or letting your desk pile up for a while, it's ok. Just take a few minutes and empty out the files you've missed or clean off your desk and re-distribute the items throughout the numbered files where they go, *remembering the key importance of the trash file! (Remember, if it was really important, it will come back!)*

**That's the basic system. Adapt it as you need, then use it to win the...
CLEAN DEAK AWARD!**



Some adaptations I've seen:

- Instead of 31 numbered files, only 12 monthly files. Put stuff in each month's file basically in order, front to back. Less files. Not quite as effective, but not quite as cumbersome, either. It can work if you work it.
- Add a few files for other categories of stuff you tend to stack: monthly reports, etc.
- A "red hot" file, or "Immediate attention" file. The danger, of course, is that it will sit there forever. Of course, if it does, just consider this file an intermediate trash file, and then throw it away from here!

The key is to *USE IT!* Don't let it become your *permanent filing system!* This is not a FILING SYSTEM, but rather a *reminder/temporary storage system* to help you keep your desktop clear for workspace! If you have questions about utilizing a tickler file system, call write, or email me! I'll be happy to offer further suggestions!

Good Luck, and "Stay Off The Lily Pads!"

Sincerely,

Keith Lowry

Keith Lowry Seminars, Inc.

(817)467-7797

keith@keithlowry.com

www.keithlowry.com

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