

The Tickler File: What It Is, and Why You Need One

By Justin Baeder

How do you get paper that you'll need in the future off of your desk for now, without losing track of it? How can you have a clean desk and still make sure you have the documents you need in front of you at the right time?

Inevitably, you will have paper that you can't use yet, but that you will need at a specific time in the future. For example, if you need to bring a report to a meeting, you don't want to stick it in the file cabinet and forget to bring it, but you also don't want the report sitting on your desk for three weeks – it'll clutter your workspace, and it might get buried under something else in the meantime. If you want to ensure that you have the right documents in hand at the right time, you need a **tickler file**. Your secretary probably knows how to set one up, but here's a quick description.

First, get 43 regular manila file folders. Label them Jan-Dec and 1-31 (one for each month, and one for each day of the month). If today is June 25th, for example, the folder at the front, containing the papers you need today, will be "25." After this will be 26-31, the next month's folder (say, July), then 1-24, then the rest of the months (August, September, and so on). This morning, you'd take out the contents of the "25" folder and put it after "24" to represent the 25th of next month.

This whole series of folders should be in a file drawer that you (or your secretary) keep close at hand. Whenever you have a document you don't need today, but will need at a certain time in the future, put it in the appropriate folder. This will keep it out of sight and out of mind until just the right time. All you have to do to find your documents for the day is open today's folder. The whole system will probably only take three to six inches of space in your file drawer, but here's an exploded visual:

