HIGH-PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP NETWORK

HOW TO:

Use the Future File to Keep Your Desk Clear...Without Losing Track of Anything

What It Is

Also known as a "tickler file," the Future File is a set of 43 folders, labeled 1-31 (days of the month) and Jan-Dec (months of the year). You keep it on your desk or in a file drawer. When you have something on your desk that you don't need today, but will need on a specific date in the future, it can go in your Future File.

Why You Need It

The purpose of the Future File is to get things that you're not ready to work on or decide on *out of sight* and *out of mind* until just the right time. It's like a snooze button for hardcopy documents—toss it in the correct folder and it'll appear when you need it. In the meantime, it'll be out of your way.

This lets you rid your desk of clutter and piles, so the only documents and notes taking up space on your desk are the ones you're working on right now. Instead of stacking everything else in a huge, intimidating pile that you'll never actually deal with, the Future File lets you be realistic about when you'll get to something.

It doesn't replace your regular file cabinet; your Future File is only for time-sensitive documents that you want to "snooze." Some examples:
- Driving directions and agendas for meetings that aren't until next week
- Flyers for conferences that are months away
- Flyers for products you may want to buy if you have money left at the end of the year (put in the June folder)
- Articles you might want to have your staff read when they return from summer vacation (put in the August folder)
- Phone messages that you can't return today (put in tomorrow's folder)

How To Set It Up

Arrange the folders in the following order, from front to back (let's assume today is January 4):
- Tomorrow's date (e.g. "5" for the 5th of the current month)
- The rest of the days for the current month (e.g. 6-31)
- Next month's folder (e.g. February)
- The remaining daily folders, in order (1-5), representing those days in next month
- The rest of the months, in order (March-January)

How To Use It Each Day

- Each morning, open the day's folder (which will be at the front) and empty its contents onto your desk. That's your "mail" for the day.
- Put the folder back so it represents the same day next month (e.g. the "5" folder goes after the 4 folder, and now represents February 5 instead of January 5)
- On the 1st of each month, do the same thing with the monthly folder (which will be at the front). After emptying it, place it at the back so it represents that month of next year.

Troubleshooting & Tweaking

- Create an appointment on your calendar first thing every morning to check your Future File.
- Before you leave each day, take every piece of paper on your desk and put it in your Future File (or wherever it needs to go), so your desk is clear when you arrive in the morning.
- If you find yourself repeatedly "snoozing" the same item, write yourself a note describing exactly what you plan to do with it, and stick it on the item.