

# File Starter

By Sarah Welch and Alicia Rockmore



Maybe something like this has happened to you. It is 8:15AM and you are running out the door, coffee in hand and already fifteen minutes late for work. Suddenly you realize that you have once again forgotten to give your son immunization records to the school office. Without them, he can't go on the class trip. You run back in the house, quickly open your filing cabinet and start searching frantically. Is it filed under his name? Under immunizations? Under the doctor's name? Or is it just not filed? You stumble upon your last five years of electricity bills, that article on travel to Bhutan, and even the roster from last year's little league team, but no immunization records. Then you wonder why do you have a filing cabinet in the first place?

If you've ever "temporarily misplaced" (i.e. lost) a paper, not filed a paper away, or filed it away and lost it in the morass of file folders, you're not alone. If you would prefer sitting with your mouth open and your legs up in a nice comfortable seat in the dentist's office to the torture of dealing with papers and a filing cabinet, we hear you. There is, fortunately, a solution much less painful than the dentist's chair.

## Alicia on "The Filing Cabinet Myth"

According to the National Association of Professional Organizers, people waste an hour a day—roughly twelve weeks a year—searching for information they know they have but they cannot get their hands on. One of the biggest offenders is the filing cabinet. By purchasing and then loading up a formal filing cabinet, we give ourselves the illusion that we're keeping our important information in order. Unfortunately, it's usually only the beginning of a bigger organization mess, as we simply stuff everything in the cabinet, hoping that it will magically organize itself when we close the drawer.

## Sarah on "Identifying How You File"

Before figuring out how to fix your filing issues, it's smart to recognize how you currently organize your important information. Are you someone who files away so much information that it is difficult to find what you need? Or do you file nothing and keep everything in piles, stacks, and boxes? (One study has found that "pilers" encompass nearly half of the workforce.) Or are you someone who has adopted a filing system that is just too cumbersome and complicated to find important information quickly?

**No matter what kind of filer you may be, we've found that one of the keys to locating information quickly is to limit the numbers of files you have in your active or daily filing system to just ten. Here's how to set up your essential filing system. The rest should flow easily along when you're done.**

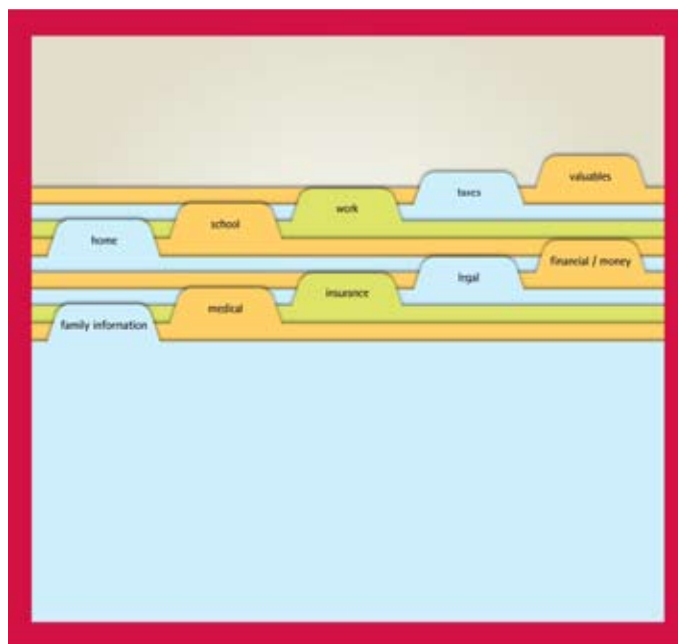
### 1. Get basic filing materials

Start by finding an empty file drawer or buying a filing box. Then get ten hanging folders with labels. See, that was easy.

### 2. The first nine

Label nine file folders as follows:

- Family Information
- Medical
- Insurance
- Legal
- Financial/Money
- Taxes
- Home
- School
- Work



### 3. The catch-all

The tenth folder is up to you. It can be anything except miscellaneous or everything else. Examples of what some people have chosen include valuables, auto, real estate, travel, or even emergency planning. Believe it or not, for most people, these categories are sufficient to file all of their most important information. This is our 80/20 rule in practice and if you give it a try, you will see that it works.

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*We are the co-founders of Buttoned Up, inc., a company dedicated to helping stretched and stressed women get themselves organized (along with everybody else they're responsible for too!). We welcome your thoughts! Please send ideas and questions to us at: yourlife@getbuttonedup.com or visit us at www.getbuttonedup.com*