

The Waste of @Waiting For

December 2011 Newsletter

My friend Kathy recently spent a day with a professional organizer/productivity coach. The coach is a big fan of David Allen's [Getting Things Done](#), so among other things, she told Kathy to make an "@Waiting For" folder in her email.

If you're not familiar with it, this folder is the place where you put emails about issues that you expect other people to get back to you on. Did your colleague say that he'd have the spreadsheet ready by Tuesday? Put it in the @Waiting For folder. Did your husband send you an email promising to set TiVo to record the *Gilligan's Island* marathon? Put it in the @Waiting For folder. The FedEx shipping information for your new set of titanium escargot forks? @Waiting For. Sounds good, right? All those messy odds & ends stored safely and neatly in one place. A perfect example of the [lean concept of 5S](#) applied to information: organize needed information in such a way so that you can find it easily later.

Well, yes. Except.

Let's talk about waste. Specifically, the waste of motion and the waste of over-processing.

The problem with the @Waiting For folder is that it dooms you to committing these two wastes everyday—and sometimes even more often.

See, the @Waiting For folder forces you to open this folder each day to see what stuff is outstanding. That's the waste of motion. And then you have to re-read and re-assess the content of each email to determine what's due and when it's due. That's the waste of over-processing. Moreover, if you don't do this two-step process everyday (or at least 2-3 times per week), you'll very quickly end up with the electronic equivalent of the junk drawer in your house—an ugly hodgepodge of obsolete crap that has long since outlived its usefulness. My friend Kathy barely has enough time to read all her email even once—now she wants to have to re-read some of it? Talk about sowing the seeds of her own demise!

So what's the alternative?

Rather than burying messages containing time-specific actions within the @Waiting For folder, put the email (or link to it) in the calendar and/or taskpad on the appropriate date. If you're a Gmail user, create a task linked to the email for a certain date. Now your calendar or task pad reminds you on the appropriate date that you should really see if your colleague is on target with the spreadsheet, or that you should make sure that your husband remembered the *Gilligan's Island* marathon, or that you ought to check up on the escargot fork delivery.

Instead of looking at those email six times each, you only look at them twice: once when you receive them, and once when it's relevant to follow-up on them. That's it.

Less work, less waste.