

# Duke Values



## Case Study: Document Retention

*“Document Retention” is a fictional story about job training as well as document storage and retention. The story reminds us how important it is to maintain accurate and complete transaction records and to comply with regulatory requirements.*

## Document Retention

It's April, and Julien has just been hired as Tamika's administrative assistant. As is the case with most new employees, the first week is spent learning what's expected of him. Tamika's job involves a lot of phone messages and meetings. There are financial reports to be run and distributed, project progress to be tracked, time cards and expense reports to be approved and signed, and personnel issues to be handled. Julien has a lot of questions for Tamika, and she provides him with a website link for the Duke policies and procedures.

“You're a quick study,” Tamika assures Julien. “You'll figure things out. If you have any problems, ask me, or check with Leeza down in the dean's office.”

Julien does consider himself a quick study and doesn't mind taking an independent approach. He reviews the policies and procedures looking for sections that apply to his job. Julien checks with Tamika to ask if there is anything more he needs to know about the files in their office.

Tamika points out the location of personnel records and shows Julien where to file the financial reports, project progress reports and her written correspondence. “I take care of my own email account. I never delete a thing. I like to have a record as a reference if I need it. The paper files are a bit overstuffed at the moment. There's a room at the end of the hall where we store the overflow. Take a look around in there sometime soon just to familiarize yourself.”

Near the end of the month Julien has to compile information from several sources to run a monthly report. Just about every salesperson is late with their input and Julien has to call everyone to remind them.

“My job is to conduct the research,” says Danielle. “Not file paperwork. Nobody's going to care if the report is late, but they'll care if I don't make my targets.”

When the month-end rush is over, Julien finally has time to visit the file room, which is indeed bulging with old files. Julien contacts Leeza,

## Our shared values are more than aspirations...

They are the beliefs and behaviors that we expect of ourselves and our colleagues.

They are the ideals that we must uphold in order to earn and maintain our reputation for quality and integrity, and to inspire confidence with each other and the world which we both serve and rely on for our future viability.

## Excellence

We perform high quality education, research, patient care and community enhancement, and are always mindful of the enduring value of safety and continuous improvement.

## Living our Values

We improve our knowledge, work and community by conscientiously applying our time and talents.

We take responsibility and accept consequences for our words, behaviors and actions, and we commit to promptly correct errors, mistakes or omissions.

We encourage questions and challenges, holding individuals and organizations accountable for their actions and decisions.



who examines the files and explains that anything in the file cabinets older than three years can go to off-site storage, and older than seven years can be destroyed.

Julien sets to work at the filing cabinets, filling archive boxes and recycling bins with paper. In the afternoon he discovers a pile of boxes filled with copies of old progress reports. He determines that they are at least 10 years old, so he pitches them into the recycling bin as well.

One day a few weeks later, Tamika stops in front of Julien's desk, looking perturbed.

"What happened to those boxes in the file room?" she asks.

Julien smiles. "I threw them out. That stuff was more than 10 years old. Leeza told me anything older than seven years was history."

Julien expects Tamika to be pleased but she continues to frown. "Those boxes contained copies of final reports for a government contract. We're obligated to keep them for future reference. They should have been stored off-site but somehow... Did you at least keep any record of what you destroyed?"

Slowly, Julian shakes his head.

Tamika closes her eyes and massages her forehead. "Well, I just got a call that we're about to be visited by the sponsoring agency. Now we've got a real headache on our hands."



## What would you do?

### Q: What could Tamika have done differently to train Julien?

A: Although Duke has specific policies and procedures governing transactions, files and document retention, departments implement differing systems for filing, storing, retaining and disposing of electronic and hard copy information. Many departments must adhere to data privacy and security standards and to document retention practices that comply with regulatory or contractual obligations. Tamika should have taken time to familiarize Julien with the requirements that apply to their activities and provided him with a walk-through tour to ensure he became familiar with how that department stores information.

### Q: What do you think of Tamika's comment about "never deleting a thing" on her email?

A: Keeping information too long can be just as costly as destroying records before the retention period expires. In the event information is requested for a legal case, all information available must be submitted, not just the information within the retention period.

### Q: Do you agree with Danielle's comment about late reports?

A: As with many trade-offs associated with limited time and resources, it depends. Complete and timely information supports informed decision making and sound financial stewardship. However, completing assigned work is also very important. Always discuss time pressures with supervisors to ensure priorities are aligned with their expectations.

### Q: Leeza said it was all right to throw away anything older than seven years. What point did Julien miss about document retention?

A: Transaction records support financial statements and contractual obligations. While Leeza gave him accurate information for financial transactions, Julien did not understand exceptions to those rules that are specific to contractual obligations.

### Q: What do you think will happen now?

A: In a best case scenario, someone else in the department may have duplicate copies of the progress reports. These may exist in hard copy, electronic file or email attachments. The contracting agency may also retain submitted historical reports according to its document retention guidelines. Tamika should contact the contract sponsor to proactively explain the error, rather than wait for the sponsoring agency's visiting official to request documents that are known to have been inadvertently destroyed.

## Duke Values

### RESPECT

We are a community of leaders, students, scholars, health care providers and staff who affirm and encourage open expression, academic freedom, regard for others and respect for laws and regulations.

### TRUST

We are honest, credible and reliable in our words, behaviors and actions.

### INCLUSION

We seek to welcome and fully engage people of diverse backgrounds, abilities and perspectives to advance our work.

### DISCOVERY

We seek to be an innovative community, to improve our individual capabilities and to share knowledge with one another.

### EXCELLENCE

We perform high-quality education, research, patient care and community enhancement, and are always mindful of the enduring value of safety and continuous improvement.



## SPEAK UP

If you witness or are asked to participate in actions that are not consistent with our values, tell someone.

Ask your supervisor, department head, academic dean, residence advisor or ombudsman for advice.

If that is not possible, contact **800.826.8109** to discuss your question or report your concern. The toll-free number is a confidential, and anonymous if you choose, service provided 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

## Key Points to Remember

- *Each work group is responsible for keeping files and document records according to their appropriate life cycles.*
- *Refer to the document retention policies and regulatory/contractual requirements to determine appropriate storage and/or destruction dates for each type of record, file or document.*
- *Elect one person to be responsible for document retention in your work group and be sure that everyone is aware that specific procedures exist.*
- *Be sure that records that may be requested for auditing or by regulatory agencies may be presented immediately, completely and in good order.*

We speak up when words, behaviors or actions are not consistent with our values.

It takes courage to come forward. Retaliation for reporting concerns in good faith is strictly prohibited.