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Guide For Keeping Inventor Notebooks

Anyone working in a technical or industrial environment has the potential to be an inventor. Many inventions can be highly profitable for both inventors and their companies or organizations if adequately protected with a patent.

In the U.S. the rights to a patent go to the first person or persons who invent(s) the invention, and not necessarily to the first person or persons who file(s) a patent application. For this reason, every person working in an industrial or technical setting should know how to keep records that will adequately protect his or her invention rights. **Failure to keep adequate records could make an invention vulnerable to expropriation by others.**

Fortunately, adequate record keeping is not hard to do. It does, however, take commitment and discipline. A company or organization should establish a record keeping system that is easily accessible to all its employees. Small inventors should also develop a personal record keeping system of their own. For best results, follow these simple rules as closely as possible:

Start Now!

Ideally, a notebook should be started the same day you get the idea for your invention. Some companies have all technical or R&D personnel keep one bound book on all their new developments. If you haven't started keeping your inventor notebook, start today.

Bound Notebooks Only

Use only bound or composition style notebooks for recording your invention. Never use loose leaf or any other type of notebook that has removable pages.

Circumstances

Describe the story and technical details of your invention. The first entry should explain in detail the circumstances surrounding the invention including date, time, place, and motivation for forming the idea leading to the invention. Be specific as to witnesses and/or other parties who may have been present or who took part in forming the idea leading to the invention. Later entries should be added with additional technical details as you develop your invention.

Sign, Date and Witness

Date and sign every page. Each page should also include the signatures of two witnesses – preferably witnesses having no interest or relationship to the invention. The witnesses should read and understand what is on the pages they are signing. The notebook should be periodically notarized at the end of all writing, drawings, and attachments added to some date. Never add information or other insertions to a page after it has been signed and dated or notarized.

Front Side Only

Entries should only be made on the front side of each page. Never write, place marks, or attach items to the back of pages.

No Blank Spaces

Leave no blank spaces between successive entries. Any blank spaces on a page should have diagonal lines drawn completely across them. Crossed out spaces should be initialed and dated.

Drawings

Whenever possible, make drawings of your invention directly on the pages of your notebook. If it is not possible to hand sketch a drawing in your notebook, a printout, photograph, or other representation may be added by stapling it directly to a page of the notebook. Sign your name and date it across the margin of the added item so that portions of both the signature and date are located both on the drawing and the notebook page. Never allow an added drawing or photograph to be unstapled or otherwise removed from the notebook.

One Invention Per Notebook

Although the practices of some companies are to use a single bound book to record all current developments, it is best not to use a notebook for more than one invention. If multiple notebooks are needed for the same invention, number the books with permanent labels on their covers.

No Erasing

Make all entries in non-erasable ink. Avoid making erasures, using whiteout, or scribbling out errors. Make corrections in an entry by drawing a single line through the error so that the error remains visible through the correction. All corrections should be dated and initialed.

Number Pages

You will likely find it easier to cross reference pages and organize your notebook if you number pages on the front side only as you go.

Keep It Current

Record all subsequent ideas, experimental data, and observations at the times they are collected. Never allow time to lapse between an observation or discovery and the time of your entry.

Keep It Safe

Keep your notebook in a safe place to prevent unauthorized access or theft. Remember, the notebook is an important record that protects your patent rights. It cannot be replaced.