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“First let me start by saying how much I love this magazine. It is the best I’ve ever come across. Packed with useful information that I have used and shared with others. Thank you for recognizing and helping meet the needs of this profession.”

Barbara Mckee, Executive Assistant & Subscriber, Henry Ford Health System Heart & Vascular Institute

“I would like to say how much I enjoy reading your magazines. The quality and thought that goes into every article is outstanding and truly inspirational. It is refreshing to receive a magazine that doesn’t contain pages of advertisements, but from front to back is a beautifully illustrated guide with advice, suggestions and positive solutions to everyday trials.”

Kerry Grenville, Executive Assistant, Copittrak Europe

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Editor’s Letter

Our friend Bonnie Low Kramen is fond of saying that there has never been a more exciting time to be an Assistant. She’s right! There is so much change in the pipeline and the role is evolving like never before.

As promised, the video we made of Assistants all over the world that we put together for LIVE will be released in time for Administrative Professional’s Week in April. The industry is starting to make its voice heard and the ‘One Profession, One Voice’ film encourages Assistants globally to find their voice and explain the huge contribution that they make to their businesses. We hope you will look out for it and share it with every other Assistant that you know.

Executive Secretary LIVE last weekend raised the profile of the Assistant in a way that is unheard of. With articles generated by our PR appearing in The Telegraph, The Times and Financial Times as well as the CIPD’s magazine, PA Life and an interview on BBC Radio 4’s Women’s Hour, the role of the Assistant is big news right now. Not only that but on the Saturday, our conference hashtag #ExecSecLIVE trended at number 5 in the UK on Twitter with a Tweetreach of over 6 million as Assistants across the globe shared the key learnings and followed all the action from the conference as it happened.

LIVE this year took our conference to a new level. The excitement in the room was palpable and with delegates from 25 countries attending, the diversity of the audience, combined with the surprisingly common issues in the room made for great conversations.

But it’s not only LIVE that is blazing a trail for excellence and change. Bonnie Low Kramen’s Speak Up! Pledge initiative is encouraging Assistants to speak up in their workplaces in order to build more productive, positive, and respectful communication between them, their managers, and their colleagues. Her website at http://www.speakuppledge.com explains why finding your voice is so important. Next week, she and a large group of Assistants will be launching the communication between them, their managers, and their colleagues. Her website at http://www.speakuppledge.com explains why finding your voice is so important. Next week, she and a large group of Assistants will be launching the campaign in time for Administrative Professionals Week at the Today Show Plaza at Rockefeller Center.

And later this year, representatives from every Association on the planet for Assistants will be invited to gather in Papua New Guinea to discuss your most pressing issues. High on the agenda at the World Administrative Summit, will be career progression, job titles and qualifications. We have found 162 job titles for your roles so far and there is no question that if we want to be seen as a profession instead of a support role, this needs to change. Watch this space!

Add to this a couple of superb new research initiatives in the pipeline from both Hays Recruitment and Avery, both of which will not only help the professionals that work in administration but will also keep the conversations about the changes to the role very firmly in the public eye, and we are in for quite a spring/summer.

I will (as usual) be coming to a town near you, spreading the word. Between now and the end of the year I will be in Milan (twice), Paris, Kenya, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Brazil, Cyprus, Vienna, South Africa, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and the USA (for Administrative Professionals Week, APC & Joan Burge’s Conference). I will look forward to meeting plenty of you in my travels.

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Find Your Voice, Speak Up and Let the Awesomeness Begin

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” Marianne Williamson
There’s good news and bad news in the workplace of 2015. The good news is that there has never been a better time to be an Assistant than right now. The bad news is that there is still far too much fear and suffering in silence going on. Too much leading by intimidation. Workplace bullying is rampant in America and all around the world too. All you have to do is ask an Assistant. Or read the jaw-dropping stories on the Assistant LinkedIn discussion groups that go on for pages and for weeks. You cannot make this stuff up.

The remedy? Speaking Up. Silence is our enemy.

For 25 years, I worked as a Celebrity Personal Assistant to Oscar winner Olympia Dukakis and I understand first-hand what it means to struggle to find your voice. Olympia taught me how to handle bullies because it happened to her too. I began my work with Olympia as the Public Relations director at the Whole Theatre in New Jersey where she was the Producing Artistic Director. In my twenties, I was very unsure of myself and my way of dealing with that was to stay quiet. After meetings, Olympia would ask other staffers, “When is the last time you are going to talk?” True story.

Olympia was very encouraging and made it safe for me to speak my mind. In fact, she expected it. Thank you, Olympia. I now know that this is the hallmark of effective leaders. After a month or so, she joked that she couldn’t shut me up. Seriously, what I learned from experience is that the very cool thing about finding your voice is that once you start, it gets easier and it is hard to stop. It’s the getting started that’s hard and nearly impossible for many. Operative word – nearly.

In my work with Assistants all over the world, I believe that the number one challenge Assistants face is to find their voices to speak up to their managers and colleagues. Assistants will say to me, “Bonnie, I can’t speak up. I’m afraid of losing my job.” I say, “If you keep staying silent, I’m afraid you are going to lose you.”

Here’s the thing. If you speak your mind respectfully, directly, and with specific details, you not only will not lose your job, you will mostly likely be setting the stage for a promotion, not to mention improved self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and the respect of others.

The real-life success stories are revealed at our “Be the Ultimate Assistant” two-day workshops. The silence gets broken and there is no turning back. Fears, often irrational and unfounded, are faced squarely and with the support of others, and guess what? Awesome things happen as a result!

Here are 5 reasons to Speak Up. All of these stories are true but some of the names have been changed. You know these Assistants.

1 Exciting new projects – Assistants see things that their managers don’t. Hilary’s executive is now doing speaking engagements all around the country and she is responsible for handling all the preparations. She noticed that there have been problems when he is on the road because her executive is challenged with all the details involved. For example, he almost missed his flight because he lost track of time speaking to people after an event.

Hilary loves to travel and thought that it would be smart if she travelled with her executive on his next trip but she was nervous to suggest it. After all, wouldn’t he have asked her if he thought it was a good idea? She came up with a written proposal and muster her courage to suggest the idea. The boss’ response? “Great! I didn’t even think to ask you. Yes. Let’s do that.” He has not missed another flight as Hilary now travels on most of the speaking engagements. They are both thrilled with the arrangement and Hilary is kicking herself that she didn’t ask sooner.

2 Professional development opportunities – The email response came in less than 30 seconds. Brenda is the 20-year Assistant to a CEO and they have been working together for five years. They have a “great relationship.”

Brenda told me that she thought for two months about how to ask her boss about supporting her to attend the BTUA workshop. She felt afraid. What if he said no? Finally she mustered up the courage, chose her moment and hit “Send” on the email to the CEO with all the information about the training. Brenda nervously watched her monitor as the response came back. It said, “Fine. Approved.” Brenda was over the moon and very proud of herself.

You don’t get if you don’t ask. Speak up! Assistants all over the world are asking for support to get training and they are getting positive responses from their managers. The tide is turning. That is not to say that some managers don’t say “no.” Of course they do. The trick is to keep asking, to keep putting the requests in writing, and to make it clear how important training is for both you and your company. Be prepared to compromise and offer to pay a part of the cost. Putting “skin in the game” is a very successful strategy.

Brenda has now designed a yearly “Learning Plan” which includes several conferences that she discusses with her executive who continues to see the value in investing in Brenda.

3 Bullies back down – “I’m so sorry. I had no idea.” Angela’s executive of three years was moody and often abusive. He yelled, used profanity, and publicly humiliated Angela and other staff. He ruled with fear and intimidation and most everyone was frightened to say a word. The stress level was off the charts because it was getting worse.

One day the executive pushed Angela too far and she snapped. She followed him into his office and closed the door. She told him that he was chasing good people away in droves and that the disrespect was intolerable. She told him specifically what he said and did that was offensive and that it needed to stop “right now”. Angela turned around, left the room, and went back to her desk. She was shaking but had zero regrets.

In a few minutes her boss came out of his office with tears in his eyes and said, “I am so sorry. You are absolutely right. I had no idea my behavior was so bad. It won’t happen again.” It didn’t. The boss apologized to the rest of the team. The kicker? Angela has now been with her executive for 26 years.

We have heard stories similar to Angela’s many times. Some students find it difficult to believe that a bully can be unaware but it is true. Standing up and speaking out directly and in detail is a strategy that is effective and reduces tremendous angst in the office.

The best book I know about workplace bullying is “Taming the Abrasive Manager” by Dr Laura Crawshaw who says that the key to stopping it is awareness. She says that it is very common for bullies to be “oblivious” and “clueless” to the destructive impact of their behavior. If that is true, then the only way to raise awareness is for Assistants and all targets of bullying to speak up. Don’t wait one minute longer to do what you know is right.

4 Get the Raise! Don’t be a 5-percenter – Catherine had been at her company for three years and had not received a raise for the last two. This was bothering her more and more because she always went above and beyond what she was hired to do. Her resentment was growing. She supported three executives who relied on her for most everything. Catherine did her research on what she should be earning and it was at least $10,000 more than what she was making now. Plus, the company was doing really well. Catherine decided to ask for a meeting and prepared a written document outlining the following;
The job description that she was hired to do
- The job description that she is actually doing
- A list of achievements from the past three years
- A list of projects that she is currently working on
- Ideas for a few new projects with brief summaries (for discussion purposes)
- A compensation history with a proposal for a revised salary

To Catherine’s surprise, her manager was very receptive to the conversation and appreciated the document that Catherine prepared. They had a very productive conversation and Catherine realized that her manager thought that the Human Resources department was automatically giving Catherine an increase, which was not true. The manager would remedy the situation. The next day Catherine was informed of her increase in salary which was exactly what she proposed. Her manager told her to please speak up in the future about any compensation issues and everything else for that matter.

Are you a 5-percenter? Only 5% of women will negotiate a compensation package when it is presented. In general, women find it difficult to ask for money and prefer to hope that managers will automatically see their value and give them more money. Women don’t ask because we fear not being liked, according to the Wharton School of Business. Not asking is a major contributing factor to the wage gap between women and men. If you want to make more money, speak up and ask for it. You will be liked and respected.

5 Problem with a co-worker? Don’t quit!
- At least not before you have a conversation with her. Shannon and Kelly work in the same department as peers and they often need to work with one another on projects. They have not socialized very much. Recently Kelly has been abrupt and edgy. She dropped the ball on an important project and Shannon handled it by staying late at the office. Not only did Kelly not say “thank you”, she sent a cold email demanding a follow-up report. Shannon began to feel like Kelly disliked her. After several weeks of this, Shannon was tempted to quit or at least ask for a transfer. The stress was affecting her and she no longer enjoyed coming to work.

Another co-worker urged Shannon to say something to Kelly. One day she took a deep breath and walked up to Kelly’s desk and said, “Can we please talk for 10 minutes? I have something important on my mind.” They found an empty conference room and Shannon voiced her concerns. She saw Kelly’s face change. She said, “I am separating from my husband and I haven’t been able to talk about it. I’m really glad you told me how you feel. I am very sorry.”

This conversation changed everything. What Shannon learned is that when people behave in extreme ways, it is often about them and not you. Too many great Assistants working in terrific companies up and quit because of assumptions and fear from speaking up. Don’t be one of them.

How do you do it? Here’s the 6-step plan to speaking up

1 Prepare. Practice saying the words out loud. The more you say them out loud, the easier it will be to say them. Many Assistants will say that they don’t speak up because they will cry. Practicing saying the words will minimize the chance of crying. The main problem with tears is that they diminish your message.

2 Pick your “battle” and choose your moment. Ask for time alone with the person. No public humiliation. What you need to say is between the two of you.

3 Stay calm, clear, and direct. Be specific and factual in your examples. Say, “It made me feel X when Y happened yesterday and Z happened last week.” Another great resource is Speaking Your Mind in 101 Difficult Situations by Don Gabor.

4 Allow the other person to save face. Say “I know that you might not know how this impacted me so I felt it was important for me to tell you.” Speak only for yourself and not for others.

5 Prepare something in writing to clarify what you are saying. Putting these ideas on paper communicates the seriousness of the issues.

6 Once you speak your mind, be quiet and wait. Tolerate the awkward silence until the response comes. Even if the person does not come around all the way, your relationship is forever changed. You are now known as a person who will not stay quiet when there is a problem and that is a very good thing.

Awesome things happen when you find your voice to speak up about the things that matter. Most of all, you matter. I am rooting you on. Please send me your success story to bonnie@bonnielowkramen.com.

about the author

Bonnie Low-Kramen’s voice is one of the most respected in the administrative profession. The author of the bestselling book Be the Ultimate Assistant, she is known for her passionate commitment to all professional Assistants and to effecting positive change in the global workplace, believing that the way to do this is through speaking, education, training and writing. Bonnie travels the world teaching her “Ultimate Assistant” workshops. With trademark honesty and humor, she pulls the curtain back so that we can all lean in and take big bites out of those elephants in the room.

Turning Your Stress into Success

When the pressure is on, great leaders are at their best. Whatever is inside them comes to the surface. – John Maxwell

A story is told of actress Carol Burnett who got out of a cab one day and caught her coat in the door. The driver was unaware of her plight and slowly began to edge out into traffic. To keep from being pulled off her feet, the comedienne had to run alongside down the block.

A passerby noted her predicament and quickly alerted the driver. He stopped, jumped out and released Miss Burnett’s coat. “Are you all right?” he asked anxiously. “Yes,” she gasped, “but how much more do I owe you?”

That light-hearted story shows a humorous way of responding to what could have been a not-so-funny outcome. In our world as leaders we can find ourselves in stressful situations. It’s how it’s handled that matters.

It’s not a secret that stress in the workplace is on the rise. In a recent study by Harris (http://bit.ly/1CUMamt), 80% of US workers said they can identify at least one thing that stresses them at work. The stress factors include low salaries, intense workloads and taxing commutes to name a few.

Great leaders are those who, when under pressure, step up and deliver in spite of the stress. Of course this is easier said than done. So what should a leader do when he or she is in the pressure cooker? Here are three approaches:

Put your stress into context
At times we can be our own worst enemy when it comes to stress. For instance, we procrastinate on an important deadline and are now scrambling to complete at the last minute. We allow our imaginations to run wild with scenarios we create that adds fuel to the fire. Our workload is doubled without warning and no extra help. We speculate in “what ifs” and get worked up over hypotheticals. It all adds up to one thing: stress! Can you relate?

The best thing you can do as a leader is to put your stress in context. You may be overwhelmed or feel that your current “crisis” is about to sink you. Allow me to make a suggestion – take a step back and take a deep breath. Look at the big picture. It may not be as big a deal as you think. If it is...keep reading.

Get a game plan
Establishing context about your stress is essential. A game plan is a way out. Here is a simple formula to help you get your game plan ready: W (What am I stressed about?) + W (Why am I stressed?) + W (What can I do about it?) = S (Success). Get some paper and begin to work on your plan. Here’s how.

First, identify your stress. Is it a personnel issue? Is there a breakdown in organizational structure or communication? Is it a personal issue? How is this stress impacting your ability to lead? Regardless of where it takes you, figure it out.

Second, now that you know what it is, you need to figure out why it is stressing you. What are the immediate consequences of your stress? Is this stress an imminent threat to your organization or personal life? Etc…

Finally, write out what you can do about it. What are the top two or three action steps you can implement immediately that can help? Is there someone who can help you? Do they need to? Keep in mind, there may not be anything you or anyone else can do about it. In such case, you have to change your attitude toward it. Now that you have a plan – work it!

Apply your lessons
Smart leaders are out-front leaders. You will never avoid stress as a leader so learning how to deal with it will make a world of difference. Smart leaders know how to manage their stress and the negative impacts it can make across the spectrum of their organization.

Every stressful situation is a test and whether you pass or fail depends on your approach. Not all stress is self-inflicted, and not all reactions merit the same response. Smart leaders apply the lessons and learn from them.

Success over stress is all about your context, your game plan and your attitude. Choose wisely!

about the author
Doug Dickerson is an internationally recognized leadership speaker and columnist. He is the author of the books Leaders Without Borders, and Great Leaders Wanted. Visit http://dougdickerson.wordpress.com for more information.

www.executivesecretary.com
The How and Why of Creating a Career Portfolio

Including bonus tips by Jasmine Freeman

Many people think a career-focused “performance brief” as something they either once did to obtain their current position or as an annual “ho-hum” requirement. The Career Portfolio is not about job hunting. It is a professional journal created to detail how “You, Inc” have capably and measurably demonstrated professional contributions to your organization and leader’s overall successes. The Portfolio captures current-and-building skill levels, recognition by others, shows career enhancements, development activities and accomplishments.

Whether you decide you want to move up in your chosen field, move out of the profession, or stay where you are, a Career Portfolio will be a valuable asset to you. It’s not enough to just “tell” people what you do; or to give them a resume. Especially in today’s job market, where you might be competing against 10 other top-notch Assistants interviewing for one job!

Let’s say you have a great position, work for a good leader, like your environment – you probably think you can get by simply by continuing to do a good job and excelling at what you do. The truth is, that isn’t enough today. With organizations working meaner and leaner, every employee must consider that they are working every day to keep their, or even compete for, their job!

Why would it be beneficial to create a Career Portfolio?
• Shows you are proactive
• You’d have a hard and soft copy of your accomplishments; permanent career history catalogued
• “Shows” people what you are capable of doing
• A tool to receive higher levels of recognition
• Shows your creativity

When and where can you use/introduce your Career Portfolio?
• During your performance review
• When writing your professional development plan for the upcoming year and tracking accomplishments
• Competing for an internal position
• Updating a new leader of your skillset/talents and experiences
• Asking for additional responsibility
• Outside work – especially when trying to obtain a leadership role
• When being considered for committee work
• External interviewing

Ways you can build your skills and add value to your Career Portfolio
• Constant updates to your Career Portfolio
• Think of it as a showcase of “You, Inc”
• Be a catalyst for change in terms of job descriptions and salaries
• Encourage feedback from several people in your organization with whom you regularly interact
• Know your strengths, use them
• Know your gaps, work on them
• Be a generalist or a multi-specialist
• Take people you admire to lunch
• Always continue to learn and grow in your craft – stay current

Now that you know the importance of why you need to build your Career Portfolio, let’s talk about how and what you can include in your Career Portfolio. Remember, this is just a listing of suggestions. Don’t feel obligated to put everything you see listed here in your portfolio and certainly don’t let it limit you to only putting these items in your professional portfolio.

What can you put in this portfolio?
• A professional 4 x 6 or 3 x 5 photo of yourself
• Record of any outside work; volunteer or committee work (including examples of leadership roles or other areas of your expertise)
• Thank you notes from customers or clients on a job well done
• Thank you letters from internal divisions and executives on a job well done
• Examples of your work: graphic work, spreadsheets (be careful not to divulge confidential company information)

Here is an example listing of what Assistants have included in their portfolio:
• Points of excellence
• Who am I or my brand?
• What I bring to your company
• Credentials
• Development
• Profiles
• IDP
• Performance reviews
• Volunteer for special events
• Values
• Personal philosophies
• Things that show motivation, that you are a go-getter
• Long-term goals – keep near the back of the folio
• What others have said (about you)
• Special projects
• Past evaluations (no more than three years back)
• Your personal mission and vision statement
• Resume (keep extra copies on hand)
• Emphasize results and accomplishments versus job duties
• Copies of Certificates of Completion from learning courses relevant to your profession

What should you use to display your Career Portfolio?

Be sure to place this information in a nice binder or casing. Many Assistants have gone above and beyond by getting a leather portfolio embossed with their initials on it. You may feel more comfortable using a three-ring binder. Remember the outside packaging also represents you and will send a message to the person viewing your portfolio. Think clean lines, professional-looking, and quality products. Also think about the font style and size you will use — again keep it professional. Consider the details right down to the type and color of paper you will use. Sheet protectors will provide your portfolio protection from the hands that will be reviewing it as well as easy access to update your information.

For ease of browsing, it is recommended that you tab your portfolio. This is another way to add your own personal touches to your portfolio. Some creative terms or tab names used have been:

• Employee Advocate
• Credentials
• Strategic Partner
• Visual Identification (photo)
• Career History
• Specified Training

Extras can include a Table of Contents, cover letter, an informational CD or a link to the soft copy version of your Career Portfolio.

This is a tool to showcase your talents and create conversation with your leader or interviewer. Give them a chance to ask you questions — you don’t need to put every detail in the portfolio (think “at a glance”) as your reader will likely thumb through the pages. Avoid text-heavy pages.

Note: Do not leave this portfolio with the interviewer or others reviewing your portfolio. That is why you may wish to keep a copy of your Career Portfolio online.

Having a physical representation of your Career Portfolio is important and it shows an executive that you are serious about your career and you care enough to take the time to nurture this portfolio and showcase your work professionally. You won’t want to make a new portfolio with each interview or chance the possibility of the reviewer losing or damaging it. Yet, you do want to have a way to showcase your work to someone who wants to have more time to review your portfolio. The perfect way to “leave” your information with someone is to keep a digital version of your Career Portfolio; available online or in PowerPoint as a soft copy.

Keeping a Digital Career Portfolio
Jasmine Freeman, Vice President and Chief Executive Assistant

There are multiple ways of showcasing your work in a digital format for your reader. Here are just a few examples:

Blog
• Link directly to your work on the World Wide Web
• Your own space, you aren’t relying on another site owner

LinkedIn
• Great space to house testimonials of your work
• Online resume
• Excellent search-ability of your resume if you are looking but a necessary tool for all business professionals (searching or not)

Beyond.com
• Online placement/job search site
• Excellent visual representation of your resume with Career Portfolio Tool

SlideShare or Prezi
• PowerPoint style presentations
• Work with other sites such as LinkedIn

Be careful when using sites that don’t belong to you when showcasing your information. If they change their terms of use or even shut down the site you could potentially lose your portfolio and all that hard work you put into it will have been for nothing. I do recommend that you use tools like LinkedIn or Beyond.com but I recommend that you don’t limit yourself to just one for this reason (don’t put all your eggs in one basket, so to speak).

Start simply with a PowerPoint presentation that you can link to testimonials featured on your LinkedIn profile (Recommendations & Endorsements) or directly to your visual Career Portfolio on Beyond.com. You can also hyperlink your reader directly to your written work (blogs) and video work (YouTube) if applicable. The options are endless and it’s all unique to your own skills and abilities. To house your slideshow online you can utilize such tools as SlideShare or Prezi. LinkedIn also works with such presentation sites to add your online portfolio directly into your online resume.

For the more advanced user, I suggest keeping a blog with your own portfolio showcasing website. This can link to your profiles on sites like LinkedIn or Beyond as well as show off your design/website management abilities (which can come in handy, especially in smaller offices that keep a web master on staff).

With all of these tools comes a certain amount of maintenance. My recommendation is to keep a folder for portfolio updates in your follow up.

Make updates to your preferred tools and hard copy version 3–4 times per year when you aren’t currently on the market and more frequent attention when you are job searching.

Wishing our best to you in the creation of your very own Career Portfolio!
Want to “Get Along”?
Take the Other’s Side

Why doesn’t everyone just get along? We hear this all the time. Whether it is differing values, conflicts or simple misunderstandings, some people have a harder time than others “just getting along” with others. And even worse, when they aren’t getting along, they’re the ones who expect the other person to change, so that they do get along!

Now, I don’t know about you, but over the years, I have had absolutely no success in getting others to change.

Think of it this way… Have you ever tried to change something about yourself? Diet? Habit? Phrases? It is extremely difficult to change yourself, much less anyone else, right? So why are people trying to change others, when they can hardly change themselves?

My point: if you want to improve relationships with others, one tactic is for one of the people to change the way he or she communicates. That person is not the other guy or gal. It’s you.

Why? Simple. Because the other person won’t. You are in control of you, so if there’s any adjusting to be made, the only adjusting that you can control is adjusting you.

Why is this important? Because we need to communicate to move forward. Leadership is needed to help move our companies and businesses forward. The only way to get people moving is by communicating. And to move people forward, you’ve got to connect with them.

So let’s say you’re very friendly, talkative and outgoing. You walk into a room, and you see a very reserved person working quietly. You want to start a conversation with that person. Which of these scenarios has a better chance of “working” for both of you?

1. You charge over to the person, lunge into a handshake, speak loudly and laughingly, and sing, “Hi, my name’s Pat, how the heck are you doing today? What’s the bottom line on that project?”

2. You settle yourself down, you become focused on the person, you notice their demeanor, and, knowing you have a tendency to be loud, you consciously lower your voice, smile, and say, “Hello, how are you? My name is Pat. May I join you? Is now a good time to talk about the project?”

Of course the second scenario has a better chance of working for both participants. You’re giving Pat a chance to be himself or herself, rather than dominating or intimidating him or her with your own personality type. You are opening the door for an exchange of communication, rather than a one-way communication. And we all know that when people participate, they are more likely to embrace the topic.

So, back to why changing the way you communicate will help you influence your business, organization, or even family. Your ability to adjust your communication style to that of the person with whom you’re communicating is directly related to your ability to gain understanding, commitment or agreement from that person. In this fast-moving world, it is important that people develop and use these practices.

So what can you do?

• The next time you are in conversation with a person, put yourself in his or her shoes. Try to see things from their perspective, rather than yours.
• Observe the person to understand his or her communication style, then adjust your communications to work with that style.
• Ask questions, and sincerely await and care about the answer.
• Never interrupt. Interrupting indirectly tells others that you think what you have to say is more important than what they have to say.
• Repeat the information shared, digesting it, before responding.
• Strive for a win:win, where both of you feel you have contributed to a solution.
• Value your differences. Seek out different frames of reference, and different strengths.

Without trying to understand or appreciate different communication styles, you can open yourself up to misinterpret others.

In the end, we should value our differences. But to value them, we need to understand them and appreciate them, rather than judge them or see them as an annoyance. Because people with differing strengths, knowledge and frames of reference can create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Understanding their “side” can help you get there.

about the author

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How Technology Can Help Your Event Be a Success

Organising an event is complicated and it might not be a daily job for you. Of course there are a lot of professional event planners around with valuable experience to assist you. And there’s also a lot of technology that can help you deliver a top notch event. Technology changes the way we work. Often it opens new opportunities and adds new dimensions.

Because of the diverse nature of events (small, big, business, social etc) every event has its own needs. However, in every event organising process there are parts where technology can be of great help. Let me walk you through several areas in event planning where technology can help you streamline your workflow, reduce paper waste (go green!), or add value in another way.

1 Registration and invitation

The utmost important part of an event is getting people to your event. And, preferably, the right people. Without attendees, no event. One of the biggest challenges is managing the process around registration and invitation. Traditionally there’s a lot of email and Excel involved to keep track of the submissions, cancellations and RSPVs, which changes, preferably, last minute.

However, a lot of the event’s actions evolve around the amount of attendees, so it is crucial to have a few direct insights. How many attendees have registered or are invited? Do we need to push event marketing? How many do we have to pick up from the airport? How many vegetarian meals do we need to order? And so on.

There is an enormous amount of online event registration software which makes the event planning process a lot easier and efficient, from webforms to logistics support and detailed reporting. Often there is a possibility of integrating directly with your company’s CRM software.

2 Communication

Once you’ve taken the registration hurdle you want to keep communicating with your valuable attendees. You want to inform them, inspire them, create some buzz around the event (if applicable). In general the communication around events boils down to: who, what, where and when.

Email is the most obvious channel to communicate with event attendees. But how about social media and apps? The latter is gaining enormous amounts of traction. Event apps can be considered the digital equivalent of the traditional event guide or paper booklet, but they have some big advantages: they’re dynamic and more environmentally friendly.

With event apps you keep your audience informed about the event in real-time. Because nowadays everybody is carrying around their smartphone, your content is literally in the hands and pockets of your attendees.

Recently there was a report published with a comprehensive overview of event app providers worldwide, www.eventmb.com/evmobapp2. Event apps come in all sizes and, depending on your type of event and needs, there should be a solution for your event too.

3 Interaction

Before, during and after the event there’s potential an incredible amount of interaction. Let people interact. An event is a great opportunity for people to network, and if your company can facilitate that, it’s a huge plus.

To facilitate event networking there are numerous software solutions that do just that. Networking via apps, live polling and voting during sessions, event communities, etc. Remember that true interaction remains a real-time, human-to-human experience. Technology’s main strength is to increase the chance of people finding each other in the first place.

A nice new piece of technology to increase interaction, energy and fun during sessions is the phenomenon of the throwable microphone, www.getcatchbox.com. It is a foam interruption microphone that can literally be thrown around by the audience. A different way to “spread the word”.

4 Get to know your audience better

While you have all those people walking around your event, you might as well pick their brains with a survey to collect valuable feedback about the event. Of course via an online service like Google Forms this is already quite easy to do. Or collect feedback on a topic regarding your company products. For example product research to collect more information about your customers’ needs and wants.

Events are perfectly suited to collect leads for the sales team(s) in your organisation. By setting up simple, traditional yet effective games (like “guess the number of marbles in the bowl”), you can collect contact information for your sales team. With electronic forms or business card scanning apps, linking to your company CRM, it will be much easier to collect prospect data.

To conclude

Organising an event can be a tough and time-consuming project. Make use of all the technological solutions to optimize your workflow and simultaneously add extra value to the event.

Derrick Stomp has been an entrepreneur since 2007. He loves to bridge the gap between people and technology. Due to the seemingly odd combination of having studied Physical Therapy, Human Health Sciences and Business Information & Technology (“in the end it’s all about people”), he’s capable of exploring problems and solutions from very different angles. In 2009 he co-founded www.twoppy.com, a self-service event management and communications platform.
What is your background?

I am from the city of Leeds in Yorkshire in the North of England. I have lived in various parts of Yorkshire over the years and have now settled in Leeds city centre among the hustle and bustle of city living. People tend to find it strange that a woman in her forties is a city dweller; some thought I was having a mid-life crisis. But I say life has just begun and I love my forties!

What is your background?

I am number six in a family of seven and was brought up in a single parent family from the age of six. My nearest brother in age is six years older than me and my little sister is six years younger. I was looked after well by my older siblings growing up and there was always someone cuddling me at some point being one of the youngest. My Grandad lived with us too so I never thought anything of having just Mum there when Dad left. However, as a Catholic family there was a stigma attached to being in a single parent household.

It was difficult for my Mum as a Catholic single parent which must have been awful for her but to be honest it never really bothered me when the taunts started at school. I couldn’t understand what the fuss was about as I had my Mum, brothers and sisters, a large family of cousins, other family and my wonderful Grandad who took me under his wing and treated me as a daughter. I guess looking back he was my first role model and gave me enough love and attention to last my lifetime. He died when I was 14 and I was devastated. However, I always live with the love in my heart received from him. He was an amazingly selfless man who taught me morals, dignity, warmth, kindness to others and passion for life. He had exceptional qualities that I try to mirror to this day. I also had contact with my Dad intermittently as I got older and I never felt too different to my friends who weren’t from a single parent family.

Now as an adult I realise how tough it all must have been for my Mum. My Dad had gone to the other side of the world to Australia and she was left with seven kids and no career, with no financial support or benefit system in those days. She had her Dad who helped immensely in bringing us up and she trained to be a social worker while being a single parent family of cousins, other family and my wonderful Grandad who took me under his wing and treated me as a daughter. I guess looking back he was my first role model and gave me enough love and attention to last my lifetime. He died when I was 14 and I was devastated. However, I always live with the love in my heart received from him. He was an amazingly selfless man who taught me morals, dignity, warmth, kindness to others and passion for life. He had exceptional qualities that I try to mirror to this day. I also had contact with my Dad intermittently as I got older and I never felt too different to my friends who weren’t from a single parent family.

Being a social worker’s child on a very poor council estate was not the most pleasant of experiences. We were bullied and had air rifles shot at us and dogs set on us by the other kids around. The council moved us after a year due to the terrible time we had there and I will never forget that sprint I used to do up our street to get to the door without an air pellet hitting me. I am still terrified of dogs too after being mauled by an Alsatian dog and having to have hospital treatment but we got by and we were moved to a nicer council estate.

My Mum saved like mad to buy a house so we could be settled and by this time there were only two of us left at home so things changed and we were now living in a nice area with a bit more normality. Mum became an outstanding social worker and having been a single parent of seven children herself, she could relate to her clients so well. She was a great role model and showed us that anything is possible if you put your mind to it.

I was studious, quiet and shy at school. Being number six in the family meant there was a pecking order so my views were way down the list! It never bothered me; I enjoyed listening to the banter and the house was never quiet. I still to this day prefer to be around people and probably because the house was never empty.

However school was a different issue. I was bullied often at primary and middle school for being a “geek” and having hand-me-down clothes but once I got to high school I got away from the girls who had been the main culprits and finally enjoyed education. I did well in my O levels and started studying as expected for my A levels. I was told I should go to university and actually wanted to be a social worker or a teacher. Life decided differently and I really disliked studying at A level. I knew it wasn’t for me but knew Mum would be cross with me if I left. So I secretly looked for a job and was successful at getting an Administrative Assistant role in the Civil Service.

My Mum initially was disappointed but very proud of me for finding a good administration role and soon got used to it. I was earning a good salary for a 16 year old and soon discovered life outside. I became more outgoing and got a steady boyfriend.

At 17 I discovered I was pregnant. I was terrified of telling Mum, Dad and my Nana. It wasn’t in the plan; it wasn’t how it was supposed to be. My Mum was furious, my Dad was going to kill my boyfriend, my boyfriend’s Dad insisted on an immediate wedding, my friends said I was stupid to have a baby and my Nana, the one I was most scared of telling, was actually fantastic. Funny how you imagine certain reactions but they turn out not how you expected.

I had my brothers and sisters to support my decision and everyone calmed down. My Mum let me live with her until we found a house and my beautiful boy Matthew was born a month after my 18th birthday. My boyfriend and I eventually got married when I was 20 and had another gorgeous baby boy, Liam, when I was 24. I was lucky to have a mother-in-law who looked after the children so I could go back to work at the Civil Service and I rose through the ranks of the admin world in...
the years to follow determined to support my children as my Mum had supported us.

My marriage was not the best. We had met too young and had different views on most things. I didn’t want to be a single parent so we tried our best to make it work. We stayed together for 16 years and then went through a terrible and upsetting divorce. It was tough all round but as life has taught me over the years – things happen, the going gets tough and then eventually things settle down again and normality returns.

It took some years but my life was back on track. I was “me” again and as a single parent made sure I supported the children. This meant working full time and living in a council house for a while but it was all okay. Good friends and family got me through a dark time in my life. And as all good stories should have – there was a positive outcome. I met the love of my life and my life was on the up. I met Jon Lowrence and after five years I remarried to someone I truly loved, respected and cherished. Jon made me feel life again; he became a great step-father and role model to my children and I became a step-mother for his.

Now the children are grown up and living their own lives and we have a two-year-old grandson. Life still has its ups and downs but we are on a road of contentment in a place that I could never have imagined all those years ago.

How and why did you become an administrative professional?

As I mentioned above it was a matter of chance in the beginning. I wanted to leave school and this was a job that looked interesting with full training provided. It was 1985 and the Civil Service was known for being a great employer and trainer. At the time it seemed a job for life. The training was an intensive six-week course which really did set me up for life as an administrative professional. It is a shame we don’t do that anymore for our youngsters as it was intense, thorough and a great set up for my future career.

I am still friends with a lot of the people I met back then. We were a young workforce and had a great social life out of work too. It seemed the perfect job for me. I loved working there and there was also a programme to work through to gain promotions. I was working in the punching room as an Administrative Assistant. We literally typed in lots of information all day every day and there was a huge computer which covered a whole wall. The information we typed in literally “punched” holes onto a reel of tape which you then fed into the big machine and that was transferred to head office! It is incredible to me how technology has moved on in a relatively short space of time, or am I just showing my age?

I had been there six months and was told I was ready for a promotion and was invited to go for an interview to be an Administrative Officer in the main office. I was successful and given a date to start. It was 1986 and I
was told to go and see my new manager on the Friday before I started my new role. I knew I was pregnant but had wanted to wait until after my scan to tell people. As I had been officially offered the role, had accepted and had an offer letter I felt safe telling him on that Friday that I was expecting a baby. He just said “You silly little girl! I am afraid that means you cannot start in your new role on Monday! We cannot pay you for a promotion that you won’t even be here for.” I was shocked and said I would be coming back after the baby was born but he refused to listen. It was at a time when I really would have benefited from the extra money and I would still be at work for another four months. There was uproar in the office. But to no avail – I lost my promotion for being pregnant! The union got involved but unsurprisingly my papers got lost and when I reappeared they said it was too late to appeal. I lost the battle.

However, I was determined to prove myself. I took five months off work and then returned to work as the main earner as my boyfriend didn’t have a job. It was heart-breaking to leave my baby but I knew he was in good hands with my mother-in-law. Money was tight so I went straight to the manager who had taken my promotion off me and asked if I could have an Administration Officer role now I was back. He said no as expected so I kept an eye out for jobs in the various departments.

A few months later one came up in our department and the manager I had was replaced by a female manager. She was fantastic. She agreed I should never have lost that promotion and interviewed me there and then for the job and gave me the chance I needed to escape the punching room! My career had begun and she became an unofficial mentor and someone for me to aspire to. I haven’t seen her since those years but I will be forever grateful for the opportunity and the advice she gave me. It was my first promotion and I threw myself into it! I have worked in many admin roles throughout the years and at one time was in charge of a team of 18 staff. I got to the point where I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do anymore and really began to think about what I could do next.

You recently gave up your role as an Assistant for Yorkshire Universities to run The PA Hub full time. Tell us a bit about why you set up The PA Hub.

In 2009 I was not sure I wanted to stay in the administrative world. I had got to the top of the scale as PA to the CEO and Office Manager at Yorkshire Universities. With the encouragement from my CEO at the time I started a degree so that I could go for management roles within the university. Without the degree I couldn’t climb any further. As I had been a teenage mum myself I wanted to change my career path and move into a role where I could help young mums. I started a BA course in Childhood Studies at the University of Leeds in September 2009.

However, life events came along again and changed everything dramatically. In December 2009 my brother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer after developing jaundice. He died seven weeks later leaving us all in extreme grief. It changed my life. It made me re-evaluate what I was doing and I was also ill myself and the same week we said goodbye to my brother I was admitted to hospital for a routine operation. During the operation there were further complications and I had to have some major surgery. I caught an infection and was off work for six months. My CEO left when I was off and I got a new CEO who was part-time and I returned to work with a new boss, a role with extra responsibilities as I was now in charge of HR and financial procedures. I threw myself into work and helping my new CEO settle in. It helped me get through the grief but then as it all started to look up my Dad died.

What can you do? Life is hard and I just got on with things. I worked hard to make my new boss’s life easier at work and helped him settle in. He in return became a great mentor to me and was the first person to explain how I would benefit from a dedicated mentor. Professor Roger Lewis became a big believer in my abilities and helped me realise them too. He put me forward for Yorkshire PA of the Year in 2011 and I won. It was life changing – I realised this was the career for me and could not believe I had doubted it! I loved being a PA so why change it?

I didn’t carry on with my degree and he also put me forward for a national PA award where I was runner-up. This was when I discovered the true benefits of PA networking. I started being invited to London PA networking events and I travelled back and forth as often as I could. I found a couple close to home but they were mainly in the South. I loved attending them and through social media was networking on Twitter and LinkedIn and met my mentor Victoria Darragh. Victoria has been fundamental in me setting up my networks and I will be forever grateful for her encouragement and persistence to help me do this.

I came home from London and realised that I was networking with London PAs and didn’t really know any in Yorkshire. With help and encouragement from people in the industry I came home and started to research setting up a PA network for PAs in the universities of Yorkshire that worked with me on a regular basis. There were 70 PAs that worked directly with me helping me set up the Board and executive group meetings and I set up the group to enable days of learning, networking and development. It was very successful and word got around. PAs from around the universities were asking if they could join but the budget could only cater for the PAs that worked directly with us. Word spread further and external PAs were asking if they could come along or asking where they could access a network like this. It became apparent Yorkshire was crying out for this type of network and The PA Hub idea was born. I set it up as a limited company in September 2012 with my husband Jon while working full time at Yorkshire Universities. We launched officially in January 2013 and I genuinely was not expecting it to take off as it did.

By May 2013 I had to make a decision and I decided to take a leap of faith and hand in my notice to concentrate on The PA Hub. I did some VA work to make ends meet and also had some regular project work to fund the new business. I was suddenly in a world of being a Director rather than the Assistant. I had a steep learning curve ahead.

What advice would you have for someone looking to set up a PA network, whether internally or externally?

I get asked all the time “How did you set up the network?” And the simple answer is a lot of hard work. The not so simple answer is it depends on what you want to achieve from your network, how much you are willing to give and how often you want to hold events. You need to have a clear vision of what you want to achieve, who you want to be involved, whether it has a social element or is only development, how you are going to fund it, who you think will attend, why you want to do it. You need to be motivated as it is difficult to start with but well worth the effort.

At Yorkshire Universities it was development only twice a year for half a day with networking and a mix of external and internal speakers that were relevant to the PA role. The events were held at different universities around the region and the Vice-Chancellor of the university that was hosting always attended to say a few words which was hugely encouraging to know they approved of what we were doing. It was a great way to meet my colleagues throughout the universities whom I had only communicated through phone and email previously. It made our working lives better, we all had a common purpose and we helped each other within our day-to-day roles. It is astounding how much easier it is to work with your fellow PAs once you have met each other. It takes the relationships up to another level and we agreed it was much better to have that group to turn to knowing someone could help.
The PA Hub runs 10 events a year in both Leeds and York with five development events and five social events all held on an evening. This means it doesn’t affect the working day and has the benefits of the businesses of Yorkshire meeting on a regular basis. The relationships that have formed within the network are incredible and I am still in awe of the power of networking especially PA networking. Because we meet regularly there is a great family feeling to the group and the benefits are many. The PAs are the hub of the companies and the power of a PA network is immense. I love my role of bringing our profession together on a regular basis. I feel honoured to be part of it and will continue to promote our profession and help make our role recognised.

What inspires and motivates you?
I am inspired by mentoring others and motivated by my mentors. I believe everyone has the power within themselves to be amazing. Sometimes they just need someone to encourage them to do so. I believe in mentoring and continue to grow in my role and want to be the best I can be – my mentors help me achieve that. I also want people to realise their own potential and if I can release that in someone there is no greater motivation for me than to see them succeed. I mentor six PAs and they are all fantastic. I am inspired by watching them improve and it is a two-way relationship. Only you can change you but sometimes you just need that whisper in your ear to help you achieve your goals and make that first step.

I believe the two things that have helped me achieve my goals are mentoring and networking. Networking is the biggest and best tool for success. Keep in touch with people – you never know when you may need them or indeed when they may need you. Networking works and, of course, it is now also my business. If you had told that young teenage mum all those years ago that she would be running a successful business and helping others she wouldn’t have believed you. Once I started believing in myself things changed. My two sons Matthew and Liam both encouraged me to take the leap. They were both self-employed before me and that really helped me to make that decision to set up the business. I taught them to be self-sufficient and work hard and it took them to return the favour to help me believe in myself.

What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?
Winning Yorkshire PA of the Year was definitely one of the biggest highlights as it changed my belief in myself and gave me the confidence to grow and achieve things I never thought possible. Public speaking was probably one of the biggest hurdles I had to jump over. I was literally petrified of doing it and shaking in my shoes. Learning to control the nerves was the hardest thing and thanks to others I now look at speaking as an opportunity to spread the word of how great our profession is.

Thanks to those who made me do it – you know who you are and I will always be thankful to you for pushing me way out of my comfort zone.

The PA workload is usually high with long hours and conflicting deadlines and it is not unusual to be supporting more than one manager. It can be a stressful role and the pay packet does not reflect this in my opinion. Multi-tasking and having multiple directors to support is a talent and one which should be recognised more.

What advice would you give someone just starting in the role?
Listen to others who are already doing the role and get a mentor. Network as often as you can and keep in touch with people. Believe in yourself and don’t be afraid to ask questions. Experienced PAs were once in your shoes and most will be happy to help you develop. Shadowing a PA for the day is a great way to get a feel for the role and take the opportunity to attend conferences or training courses as often as you can. If there is a local PA network or a company one do not be afraid to attend. There will be so much expertise in that room for you to plug into. Ask the organiser to introduce you to someone so you don’t stand on your own panicking. Be up to date with technology and be active on social media. Twitter is a great way of networking and LinkedIn has so many relevant groups for PAs to learn, network and develop. Do make time to learn – even without a budget for training there are plenty of free resources out there such as articles online and webinars. Push yourself out of your comfort zone. It will be worth it.

So what’s next for Marion Lowrence? Where do you want to be in 5 years’ time?
I have so much I want to do! This year will see the first PA Hub Yorkshire PA awards which I am very excited about. We want to help PAs achieve and this is a great way for assistants to be recognised by their companies. We will be holding the awards on 2 July 2015 and look forward to rewarding our PAs for their hard work and dedication.

We also would like to expand. At present it is Jon and I running the company and we would like to grow and help as many PAs realise the benefits of networking. I love my project work such as running the PA days at Conference and Hospitality Show and The Meetings Show, and I would really like to have our mentor scheme up and running this year so our PAs can benefit from the expertise in the group. On a personal level I would like to do some voluntary work to help teenage mums and I am working on that at the moment.

In five years I hope we will have helped more assistants believe, improve and realise their own potential. The power of the PA is phenomenal and I want to see a change in how our role is perceived. I think we have made a start in the industry but there is a long way to go. I want to be part of that and will continue to be a voice for the profession.
Getting Unstuck! 5 Guiding Questions to Point You in the Right Direction

It can be one of the most difficult challenges you face during your career. You just feel “stuck”. You may not even be able to explain why or pinpoint the specific reason. When you do try and define how it feels, no one really seems to understand or relate to what you are saying. It can be frustrating. You may be dragging your feet to the office and feel unchallenged and not motivated to be your best, or you may just have that unsettling feeling in the pit of your stomach that is telling you it’s time to make a change. But what change? And where do you even begin?

What’s an administrative professional to do? The idea of being stuck means different things to different people. In my travels meeting many administrative professionals at conferences, workshops and training seminars, no two assistants define what feeling stuck means the same way. It’s personal. We experience it at different times in our careers for different reasons. I have found, however, there is usually a common theme: it feels uncomfortable, emotionally exhausting and often creates unproductive side effects that can manifest in a plethora of ways.

What defines “being stuck” for you? Do any of these ring true for you?

• Your routine has become mundane.
• You are working with a challenging manager or executive.
• You are dealing with stressful family issues that make you feel out of control.
• You have a lack of desire and motivation for your work.
• You feel trapped.
• You just “feel” stuck.

One of the number one factors in getting unstuck is the fear we face in dealing with it. It’s just easier to remain in “stuck-ness” (is that a word?) instead of taking action to address the underlying issues. We just don’t know what to do. We talk a lot about feeling stuck and share lots of sticky stories with our family and friends, but we really don’t take sensible action. It’s a conundrum to be sure. One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves at this point is: “Who is working on the problem?”

Next, we don’t take action if we perceive the alternate solution as being “too difficult.” Let’s put difficult in the right perspective. You might consider having a crucial conversation with your boss about your responsibilities or his/her lack of appreciation for your work as very difficult and on some level it might be. However, not addressing the fact that the conversation needs to happen is going to result in a more difficult situation to handle. Just spending time worrying about a problem is not working on it! It requires focus and dedicated attention. It requires pulling out those high-level administrative problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Let’s think of it like a taco salad. You have to dig through the layers of cheese, lettuce, olives and beans to get to the meat! It’s the same with feeling stuck. It requires the taco salad approach! We have to be willing to dig deep and get to the meat of the issue. And that takes a big fork and a firm grasp!
Additionally, it can often be true that we haven’t made a firm commitment to take the action we need. A dear friend once gave me some simple yet profound and true advice when I was dealing with some serious flypaper. She said, “Lisa, you have to decide to decide.” Those three words sunk in and stuck (the right kind of stuck!) and I have never forgotten them. The fear of change can be debilitating. The options appear as unfamiliar territory and we just aren’t willing to take the risk. This initial phase of recognizing our level of being stuck and our commitment to getting unglued requires being consciously competent versus subconsciously incompetent. Which would you rather be?

Self-sabotaging behaviors that keep us stuck

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-sabotaging</th>
<th>Getting unstuck</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look for someone to blame (for anything from their height to their income!)</td>
<td>Accept responsibility for your feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Send out invites to the pity party!</td>
<td>No more victimization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never listen to anyone with logical explanations</td>
<td>Take sound advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use words like “never” and “always” which makes it impossible for others to disagree</td>
<td>Accept that there are few absolutes in life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make problems into obstacles</td>
<td>Problems are not always negative and are the catalyst for personal and professional growth</td>
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<td>Make negative assumptions (no one likes me)</td>
<td>Remain positive</td>
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<td>Be in control and in charge all the time</td>
<td>Learn to let go and see all sides of the situation – have a healthy perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimize the effort; cut corners and do as little possible</td>
<td>Means working hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Go for the jugular!</td>
<td>Requires being gracious and diplomatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s you against the world. No one speaks your language</td>
<td>Unite with others – seek advice and counsel from those who have experienced a similar situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act impulsively</td>
<td>Be willing to dedicate the time for critical thinking</td>
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There are no shortcuts to discovering the perfect job, manager or workplace culture – there is just the journey. It requires 3 key elements:

**Discipline:** Daily documentation and awareness of personal choices.

**Candor:** Honesty with yourself and others and a willingness to have crucial conversations.

**Courage:** Commitment to preparing yourself to make tough choices and empowering decisions.

Sometimes, we know what we want to achieve, give up, improve, triumph over or resolve. Walking through the exercise below and perhaps writing your answers below each section, can help identify your roadblocks – and blast through them. (Based on work done by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey from Harvard University.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Choose the right goal</th>
<th>2 Acknowledge your part in the problem</th>
<th>3 Discover your competing commitments</th>
<th>4 Identify your underlying assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our goals are often disguised as chronic complaints; basically your biggest gripe contains information about what you most want. Start by thinking about what’s bothered you this past year (you’re stressed at work, you don’t get enough recognition; you and your boss don’t mesh etc.)</td>
<td>List what you do that works against this goal. Ask yourself “What am I doing (or not doing) to undermine my progress?” In this column be as honest and precise as possible, and avoid self-flagellation.</td>
<td>Ask yourself: “What fears come up when I think of doing the opposite of what I wrote in Column 2?” For instance, someone whose goal is to delegate more work might realize what she is most worried about is others doing tasks better thus causing her to be a control freak.</td>
<td>Start by looking at the secret fears you wrote in Column 3. These are driven by assumptions you’ve made. To unearth your hidden beliefs, answer the following questions: What have you convinced yourself will happen if you overcome your bad habit? Is this true?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Now think about how you might turn that general dissatisfaction into a specific goal as in “I want to delegate more at the office” or “I want to build a partnership with my boss.”

Consider how your current behavior (Column 2) reflects your determination to keep what you fear most from happening. Competing commitments are often rooted in secret anxieties. (ie “I want to delegate” vs “I don’t want to give away all my work.”) Can you explain how you’ve used competing commitments to manage your life or emotions?

Identifying the thoughts that sustain our immunity to change is important, but insight alone will not result in lasting change. Most of us operate as if our assumptions are facts. Write ways you can test whether your beliefs are true, starting with smaller experiments (“I will delegate one task”) and moving on to more significant examples.
Getting unstuck is not so much about effort as it is about moving forward with the natural flow of things. Think about great swimmers like Michael Phelps and Dara Torres. Their success in the pool is often measured in hundreds of an inch or seconds. In a recent Olympic race, Michael Phelps won a race by less than a fingernail’s length! What can we learn from this? It’s not the kick, but the reach that keeps us moving forward. Kicking provides energy and momentum, but just kicking makes the water an obstacle. When the focus is on reaching and stretching, the water then becomes a vehicle to move the swimmer forward. The same principle applies when we feel stuck.

**Best practices for getting unstuck:**
- Recognize your accomplishments.
- Be willing to expand your scope.
- Keep up with trends in your field.
- Diplomatically share ideas.
- Be aware of what you may be avoiding.

### 5 questions to point you in the right direction

Take time to reflect and honestly answer the following 5 questions. Consider each one individually based on how you currently feel. Getting unstuck may not require drastic changes, just some tweaking, small adjustments and new strategies based on your honest answers.

1. Does this job allow me to work with people who share my sensibilities about life or do I have to put on a persona to get through the day?
2. Does this job challenge me and otherwise make me smarter – or does it leave my brain in neutral?
3. Will my current job open doors for greater opportunities?
4. Does this job represent a considerable compromise for my family’s sake and, if so, do I sincerely accept all of its consequences?
5. Does this job and the things I actually do day-to-day touch my heart in meaningful ways?

My suggestion is to write each question on a separate page in your journal or a notebook and read it several times before writing anything. Then, come back to the question and provide at least a paragraph or more on the response. Do the same with each question.

Once you have done that, go back to your responses and focus on the answers carefully.

What themes do you see? Then, take time to consider whether your answers justify a more serious assessment that might require life changes and a plan for action. Your answers may provide you the insight you need to make simple yet defining adjustments in your routine, attitude, communication skills or time management that will help; you just didn’t recognize what you needed to do until you took the time to honestly answer the questions.

The questions will resonate differently depending on where you are in your personal sticky world. For many people, Question #4 is uniquely powerful because it addresses the challenges of values and choices. Those are very personal. However, if you are committed to getting to the root of why you feel stuck and want to begin a journey of self-discovery, it’s paramount to a healthy outcome that you honestly evaluate this question.

For me, this occurred when I was a young mother. One of my non-negotiable values was that I wanted to be home during the day when my children were young – yet since my husband was self-employed my job provided the health insurance for our growing family. This meant in order for me not to feel stuck working full time during the day and being away from my kids, I needed to find a position during different hours. I was able to find a great 36 hour per week job working 4pm to 1am at the hospital in the Medical Records department. My husband came home at 4.30pm so my kids were with the neighbor for 30 minutes in the afternoon. I did that for six years until my kids started school.

Was it hard to work that late and then get up early? Yes. I napped when my kids napped instead of diving into that new novel I wanted to read. But I didn’t feel stuck and I gained valuable administrative experience at that job and later transferred to the Human Resources department to work for the Director. From there, I got opportunities as a corporate Executive Assistant.

The reason this question is so important is not everyone can make the same decision I did – nor should they. Getting unstuck is not about what all the other Assistants are doing or not doing. That’s what makes this exercise challenging – it requires an attitude of non-judgment on yourself and others. The truth is, if you feel stuck, and want to get unstuck, but aren’t willing to get to the “why” and the “how”, most likely you will continue to feel stuck and you need to be OK with that and dare I say… here goes… stop complaining about it. Or, do what you need to do to remove yourself from the flypaper.

When these powerful questions are answered with thought and honesty, they can point you in the direction you need to go to make changes – subtle or extreme. Either way, the outcome will be empowering.

We only get one chance at life. It’s not something we can redo. We will, however, have more than one or two chances at a workplace choice during that life. To be our best, let’s focus on how we are living our lives within the framework of our jobs as administrative professionals, not the other way around. Look forward, not backwards, embrace each moment and generate positive energy that will rub off on the people around you. I can’t think of a better way to get unstuck and free yourself to be the best you can and deserve to be.

*People don’t want to make that move because even though they are unhappy, it’s a known unhappy place. People get stuck in a rut when they think, “at least I know what I’m dealing with.”* Clay Parcells, Right Management Consultants

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**Lisa advocates continuous learning and encourages administrative professionals to expand their potential, take initiative and engage in being “relationship engineers.” She is currently the Executive Assistant to the CEO/Clerk of the Board at the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, a metropolitan planning organization. She is the co-owner of Admin to Admin, presenting fresh, stimulating and creative one day educational events for assistants. Lisa taught at the junior college level and developed curriculum for the Administrative Professional Certificate program. She is a past member of the Advisory Council for the Administrative Professionals Conference and a repeat presenter at the IAAP International Forum, Behind Every Leader conferences, CA Women’s Conferences and the Office Dynamics Annual Forum where she is a Certified Trainer for Star Achievement and World Class Assistant courses. As a faculty member for the Especially for Youth program sponsored by Brigham Young University, she facilitates summer workshops for youth age 14-18 on leadership, integrity, spiritual growth and family values. If you need help with any of the questions, and would like to have further conversation about getting unstuck, contact Lisa at Lisa@adminintoadmin.net."
You Don’t Have to Know the Way

Imagine yourself driving from Land’s End to John O’Groats at night (the length of the UK, 603 miles). In the headlights all you can see is 200 yards ahead of you. And yet you know your destination, and in the headlights road signs show up pointing to your next turn off. You feel confident that you will eventually get there even if you have never driven the road before. Why would you doubt it?

I love this analogy because it shows that you do not have to know the way to reach a destination; you simply have to know where you want to go.

Many people I work with stifle dreams and ambitions because they cannot answer the “How?” question. They have a dream or an idea of what they think they’d like to do or have in their life but it never gets past the idea stage. I always feel that this is such a shame. So many great ideas and dreams never make it off the screen in our imaginations just for lack of confidence. We mistakenly think we have to know the way.

Trouble is, just like the car journey above, it is rare we will know the whole road when we set out. And in fact if we think we have worked it all out then it might actually be to our detriment because we will be so tunnel-visioned as to how it should all be working out. When that happens the most amazing opportunities might be in neon lights to our right but we, in our tunnel vision, will not see them.

The most important thing about going for a new idea, direction, dream, whatever it is, is clarity about the end goal. It is not like you set off from Land’s End and say that you are heading off, but you’re not sure where exactly. If you did that none of the road signs would help you. It would be a total guessing game and you would probably end up going in circles. Sound familiar?

You need a clear destination, that’s the first point. You also need a clear and strong motivation. If you do not have that then you will never make it. Your motivation needs to be a “towards” motivation. By that I mean that you are really wanting what you are moving towards rather than running away from what you do not want. An “away from” motivation will work at first. So for example, if you hated Land’s End getting away from Land’s End would be a big enough motivation to set off and look for the signs north. Problem is that once you’re away from Land’s End, say in the Cotswolds, it would be easy to get seduced by the lovely thatched cottages and pretty villages and you may just stop and never continue.

However if you were in Land’s End and simply loved the idea of being in John O’Groats, and it was the only place you could ever imagine yourself being happy, then the motivation would be so strong. All those nights driving in the dark looking for signs, following this seemingly neverending road would all be worthwhile and you would continue until you got there. The “towards” motivation would keep you going all the way.

If you have a dream or ambition or idea that is stuck on the screen of your imagination I encourage you to spend some time with it. It costs you nothing to explore an idea and might cost you an amazing experience if you don’t. I always say to my clients, if you have an idea explore it right up to the moment you have to press the “go” button. Get as much information as you can as to the details of how you might think it will look and feel. Imagine yourself in that new situation, how does it feel, what is happening, what are you living, how does your life feel? You literally want to make this a visceral experience.

Then if you like it, if it feels good you can start looking for the first step on the path. And you may also come up with the second and third but know that you do not have to know the whole route. The next steps will arise as a result of what you have just done. Look back through your life, I am sure you will find evidence of this: people you met along the way, situations that just “turned up” when you started moving forward.

So with that in mind, once you have got this visceral feeling the important question is this – am I running towards this or away from something else? If it is a “towards” motivation – bingo, you’ve hit the jackpot! It might be half and half which is also good but you will need to watch for keeping the towards motivation strong. If it is totally an “away from” motivation divorce the two things in your mind. Don’t make one dependant on the other. Imagine yourself in a situation where you are fine where you are but this other opportunity is there too. Then see how that feels. This is a much better way of seeing if it is truly right for you.

You do not have to know the way – but you do need to be very clear on the What and the Why. The How will then take care of itself. Happy travels!

Jessica is an international Coach, Author and Speaker. She works with people who are at a crossroads in their life and helps them discover their true passions and live them, whether it be in their work or personal life. She coaches people individually as well as running workshops and retreats in the UK and Spain. You can read the first two chapters of her book of The Right T-Shirt, Write Your Own Rules and Live the Life You Want just visit www.jessicamcgregorjohnson.com/signup.html.
The Problem With “No Problem”!

Do you make it seem as though anyone could do your job and do it well? If so, you’re doing yourself, your job and your reputation a disservice.

My husband, Warren joined ON THE RIGHT TRACK full-time just last month. We’ve known for quite a while that he would finish his job as a project accountant at the end of 2014. He gave his employer over five months’ notice. He even gave them some recommendations for a good replacement for him. Very helpful, very nice.

When Warren started at the company 10 years ago, he was the first person in the job. He created it, expanded it and took on increasing amounts of responsibility. He is efficient and rarely needed to work overtime or get assistance from the manager on the more challenging tasks he did. He liked the challenges, and he liked solving them.

He is also a little uncomfortable with compliments (which I’m sure most of us can relate to). Whenever someone would thank him for doing something at work, his response would be “No problem.” He didn’t often brag about finding new and improved ways of doing things. He was happy to let other people take the limelight. When he solved a particularly challenging issue, he would say “Oh, I like stuff like that, it’s fun for me.” He created a challenging job which kept him motivated and always looking for ways to improve the organization. His job wasn’t easy, but it was at the right level of challenge for him.

So when it was time to find a replacement for him, the manager actually thought that Warren’s job was overstated in terms of its qualification requirements and salary. His boss would have never downgraded the job while Warren was in it, but now that he was leaving, the boss thought they could take on someone at a lower pay-grade and save some money. After all, the job seemed fairly easy.

But it was Warren who made it look easy. He gave everyone the impression that with just a little effort (and an understanding of accounting), the job could be done easily.

I’m sure you see what’s coming. The company posted the job, asking for someone with far fewer qualifications than Warren. They thought that anyone with an accounting background could do the job, so they didn’t require applicants to have an MBA or even a degree in math. The job went to someone already employed in a position far more junior than Warren’s.

Warren was really hurt. Hurt that it appeared as if the boss thought that he had been overpaid all this time, because the job was fairly basic.

We need to be aware of the way in which people interpret our words and our actions. I don’t think that means we should complain, or work overtime to avoid making it look like we don’t have enough to do. But it does mean making sure that when a compliment is given, we receive it honestly and don’t give away our credibility in the process.

Example 1

Boss: “You’re very good at calendar maintenance. I don’t know how you manage it with the crazy schedule I have.”

Bad: “Oh, calendars are easy!”

Good: “Thank you. You’re right, it isn’t as easy as it looks! I like the challenge of figuring out the puzzle, but I admit that it certainly can be a challenge some days.”

Example 2

Co-worker: “How did you learn how to use pivot tables in Excel? I just can’t figure it out!”

Bad: “Just ask if you have questions. I love figuring out stuff like that.”

Good: “Thank you. Some days they take me a lot longer than I want them to. I attended a couple of webinars, and watched a few videos on YouTube to figure them out. Once you understand them, they’re a lot easier. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me and if I know the answer, I’ll gladly share it with you.”

“No problem” is a problem.

It’s a problem for your credibility and it’s a problem that could hurt you professionally one day, because it makes things that aren’t easy seem as though they are.

about the author

Rhonda Scharf, CSP, is a Certified Speaking Professional, trainer and author based in Ottawa. She helps organizations feel motivated and educated through her interactive, realistic and fun training programs and keynote speeches. If your team needs a boost by increasing their effectiveness and efficiency, then Rhonda will get you ON THE RIGHT TRACK. www.on-the-right-track.com or call +1 (1877) 213 8608.
So You’re Attending Executive Secretary LIVE – Now What?

Executive Secretary LIVE is, in my opinion, the best conference for Assistants. When you attend a conference related to your profession or area of expertise, you have the opportunity to mix with internationally and nationally known leaders in the field – and Executive Secretary LIVE certainly provides those!

Of course, in a perfect world, you would spend the days leading up to the conference reading the pre-conference material, connecting with and discussing the conference online with your fellow delegates; reading up on the presenters and checking out their websites and books. You would have revisited your business case to remind yourself what learning points you’ll bring back to the office. Business cards will be ready, clothes and accessories for both the day and evening will be packed in advance. You’ll arrive at the conference venue calm and relaxed, ready to learn and network with your peers with all thoughts of work left behind and the focus fully on you.

Yeah, right.

In the real world, you’re running around trying to fit five days work into four and ensuring the office and your Exec can function without you whilst you attend day 1 of the conference. Then, of course, there is organising your personal life so that your home and family don’t implode with you away for conference day 2. Finally, due to the capriciousness of London transport (sometimes amazing, sometimes not) you arrive at the venue barely in time for a cup of tea or coffee before heading into the conference itself (having once again checked your phone to make sure everything is alright at home and work).

Phew!

Even if you haven’t had much time to prepare, all is not lost. You can still regroup and enjoy your conference experience. Whether this is your first time or you are a veteran, there are always new things to learn and new people to meet. But, first things first – it’s time (as the Disney song says), to Let It Go. You have put in place contingency plans for both home and office, so trust them.

Turn off your phone.

The next two days are all about you and your profession.

Take a moment to remember why you wanted to attend the conference. If you haven’t attended a conference before and don’t know what to expect, your objectives could quite simply be “to be open to new experiences and participate to the best of my ability” or “to connect with three people I didn’t know before the conference” or “to implement two new learning points into my daily routine as soon as I return to the office”. Having an objective will help you concentrate and focus.

Remember to take the day(s) one session at a time. Each speaker, and therefore each session, has a rhythm of their own. Be present in the moment. Make notes if it helps, but try and summarise them into one key action. If you like what you hear and want to learn more, you can always buy the speaker’s book, follow them on social media or sign up for one of their webinars or courses post-conference.

Coffee breaks, lunch time and the gala dinner are a perfect time for getting to know your fellow attendees. If you are new to networking, the conference is a great place to start. You are in a room of like-minded people, all of whom are interested in learning and are there because they want to be there. You can start a conversation about the sessions that have just finished or the sessions about to begin and, before you know it, you will have made a new connection.

Of course, the learning doesn’t stop when the conference ends. In order to make things “stick”, you need time to reflect on what you have learned. With the travel home and the scramble back to work on Monday, it is all too easy to put the conference folder on a shelf and leave it to gather dust for another year. However, from your action points for each session, you will have a roadmap of what to do first. Carve out some time at lunch, or on your commute, and embed the learning into your day. If your company has paid for you to attend, this also gives you an opportunity to show that it was worth it. Don’t forget to follow up on any connections you’ve made – this doesn’t have to be done straight away, but it does need to be done.

Finally, spend some time reflecting on the joy of meeting fellow professionals who think like you. You are now part of a worldwide tribe of Assistants committed to moving themselves and the profession forward. Bring on the next conference!

about the author

Kathleen Drum is based in London and currently works as the Assistant to the Chief of Staff at Crossrail. Originally from New Zealand, she loves being a tourist in her adopted country. Kathleen is passionate about the PA profession and is always challenging herself to learn more and do more. www.linkedin.com/in/kathleendrum

www.executivesecretary.com
Fear of Failure Can Damage Your Success

The chances are that it isn’t failure that is holding you back but the fear of failure. Often, we are conditioned to fear failure, as if the lack of it is a guarantee of success. The reality is that being risk-averse can effectively remove you from the world of opportunity that is an essential requisite for advancement in life.

- Do you ever put off doing something because you are unsure of the result?
- Do you avoid situations where you need to justify a concept in front of people you don’t know?
- Do you steer clear of rooms full of strangers although you know that networking is important?

If you have answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, you are not alone. Everyone hates to fail but for some, failure presents such a psychological threat that their motivation to avoid it exceeds their motivation to succeed. That fear can sabotage their chances of success in many different ways.

All of us experience situations that do not turn out as we planned, but these are not failures. Failure is an attitude, not an end result. When something does not work out as you hoped, this is not a failure but rather an opportunity to learn, to adapt and to make positive changes based on that experience.

Are you afraid to fail?
Failure hurts but it serves as a road for learning. When failure hurts, it makes you stronger. Setbacks, in reality, are not the problem, it is how you perceive and manage them that is the secret.

Making excuses
People who fail are often those who make excuses. You may think that something is unfair. Maybe you didn’t get that job promotion you expected and you think you were treated unfairly. You can either feel sorry for yourself or use this situation as one from which you can learn.

You give up easily
Your ambition means going through a series of challenges – some easy and some not but if you give up too early, you may spend the rest of your life in regret.

Unrealistic expectations
You may think that a personal target is achievable when it is not, and the challenge is to accept your limitations. That is not a weakness but a strength. Take one step at a time and make sure that what you want to do is realistic within the time frame specified. Take the first challenge – meet it to achieve success and then you will be in a position to go on to the next one, and the one after that.

Successful individuals are achievers in life because they have learned to expect problems; to acknowledge and then manage them. They know that the biggest error they can make is to go through life being afraid of challenges that are inevitable for everyone. Think of your future and ask yourself “How much further might I be towards the next step in my career if I could manage to control my fear of failure?”

We all need to believe in ourselves and to focus on our goals and not on those which others might want. Never be afraid to fail. Expect challenges, set realistic personal targets and expectations – and never give up, because you can make it happen!

In the words of Henry Ford, “Failure is simply an opportunity to being again, this time more intelligently.”

Key points
- Every successful person you know has experienced failure – they just don’t dwell on it.
- Being risk-averse is a personal attitude.
- Never, never, never give up!

about the author
Motivational Speaker Carole Spiers has spent 20 years as CEO of a UK Stress Management Consultancy, working with equal success both in the UK and the Gulf. She is an acknowledged authority on corporate stress and a BBC guest broadcaster. She is an international Motivational Speaker and is regularly called by the press for comment. She is a past President of the London Chapter of the Professional Speaking Association, a former chair and VP of the International Stress Management Association. Carole is Author of a new book Show Stress Who’s Boss! Book Carole for a motivational presentation at your next conference or in-house event. www.carolespiers.co.uk.
Do You Support A Leader or A Manager?

If you are supporting a CEO, COO or some other “leader” in your company, are you clear about which of the Steve's they are?

What I mean by this is, are they Steve Jobs or Steve Wozniak? Steve Jobs is the visionary leader who was the face of the empire that is Apple. Steve Wozniak was the man who organised the company to ensure that great vision came to pass. Steve Jobs was what we call the “leader” while Steve Wozniak was what we call the “manager”.

Leadership and management are not competing roles – and neither is more important, or more critical, than the other. For a business to flourish, both positions must be filled as each role has a set of functions that are vital to fluid business operations.

To be honest, ineffective management can have even more disastrous consequences than ineffective leadership.

When supporting these leaders and managers, you should understand the role that your superior plays. You may find it’s not as simple as them being one or the other. In many businesses, the business owner needs to play both roles.

Either way, it is important that you understand the distinction between the different actions of each role, so you’re providing the support they need for the function they are fulfilling.

There are 3 essentials in every business:

1. Deciding WHAT needs to be done
2. Creating NETWORKS OF PEOPLE who can accomplish them.
3. Ensuring these people ACTUALLY DO their job.

Within these three essentials, the “leader” and the “manager” will play different roles:

1. Deciding WHAT needs to be done

The Leader sets the direction of the business and develops the vision of the future.

In your support role, you will need to ensure that they have the right environment to manifest this vision.

The Manager sets targets, creates plans and allocates resources in order to achieve that future.

To support this, you should be ensuring the manager has the right tools to do this, and that the vision is getting communicated from the Leader to the Manager.

2. Creating NETWORKS OF PEOPLE who can accomplish them.

The Leader aligns people and communicates the direction to key personal so they can create leverage and move the vision forward. Typically, the leader comes in to remind people of the vision and purpose and reenergises them at intervals throughout the year.

Supporting this, you should ensure that the communication channels between the Leader and the employees are open and align their calendar to facilitate this.

The Manager will create the organisational structure to ensure the jobs required to achieve the goals are filled with the right, qualified people. They will manage the recruitment and delegation processes.

This means that the support roles around the manager should be helping ensure that these processes are managed to peak efficiency, especially the recruitment process.

3. Ensuring people ACTUALLY DO their job

The Leader motivates and inspires people. Tapping into emotions, they get people moving in the right direction and excited about getting there.

To support this activity, you should help your superior invent ways to encourage the employees and facilitate these activities.

The Manager controls problems and systemises solutions. Monitoring the company’s plans, keeping an eye on reports and trackers and identifying any deviations come under the manager. He or she will then re-plan and re-organise to ensure the business stays on track.

You should support this by ensuring the manager has clear systems to receive reports and trackers from all departments of the company. You should also investigate the latest technology to ensure that your superior has the best tools to make this activity simple, accurate and useful.

Create more focus in your role

I hope you can see now how learning to differentiate between these different roles is as important for you, as a secretary or other support role, as it is for the leader and managers themselves.

With any support role you need to be really clear on the role of the person you are supporting. When you are supporting the top-level of the business, however, you need to pay extra attention because it is easy for leadership or management to slip in a business of any size. Your role is to keep your superior on track and able to do the activities they are meant to do. So consider carefully whether your boss is a manager or a leader in the company, and take steps towards defining your own activities accordingly.

about the author

Shweta Jhajharia, Principal Coach and founder of The London Coaching Group, is a multi- award-winning business coach, recognised both by external bodies and the industry awards panels as the top coach in the UK. Despite competitive economy, her clients across sectors consistently achieve measurable double digit growth (over 41%) and are the most awarded client base in UK. See: [http://www.londoncoachinggroup.com](http://www.londoncoachinggroup.com) Twitter: [http://twitter.com/Londoncoachingg](http://twitter.com/Londoncoachingg) Facebook: [http://www.facebook.com/BusinessCoachingLondon](http://www.facebook.com/BusinessCoachingLondon) Google+: [http://plus.google.com/+Londoncoachinggroup](http://plus.google.com/+Londoncoachinggroup) LinkedIn: uk.linkedin.com/in/shwetajhajharia/
A New and Unexpected Pathway

In a brave and typically positive article, Eth Lloyd looks at how her life after Samoa has taken a very different turn.

After our wonderful year in Samoa, our exciting trip for me to speak at Exec Sec LIVE Conference in Dubai, time with Charles’ family in London and a longed-for visit to our daughter and family in Washington DC, all such wonderful journeys, we were however pleased to be home for Christmas 2014. We needed to stop and take time to re-settle, catch up with friends and do the things we love to do. But, unknown to us, a new pathway was stretching out before us.

As I had a sister who died of breast cancer I am meticulous in having mammograms and before I went to Samoa my results were clear. I was therefore caught unawares when I felt a lump in my lower right breast during the Christmas period. I took a couple of days to think about it – I have had breast reduction surgery – perhaps it was scar tissue? I had cellulitis in that area from an infected mosquito bite while in Samoa – perhaps there was cell damage which had left a thickness?

In New Zealand everything closes down over Christmas and New Year so it was January 5 before I could see my Doctor. We have a public health system in New Zealand, and Charles and I do not have medical insurance – a bit scary at that point. My Doctor suggested and we agreed to pay for the radiologist so that we could be seen immediately and, if required, she would then refer me on to the hospital. She referred me for an appointment the next day with the radiologist for a diagnostic mammogram and ultrasound.

After the mammogram and the ultrasound, the radiologist’s words were “Do you wish me to be frank?” I had seen the nasty black shape on the ultrasound screen so my response was “Yes, but please go and get my husband first, I want a second pair of ears to hear this.” The radiologist was very clear, “This is not a cyst” he said, at no point was the word “benign” used and anyway I knew I had a cancerous lump, so that was that.

Note 1: If possible always have a “second pair of ears” at an appointment. There is so much information you will not always be able to think straight. You can get stuck on some specific piece of information and miss others. Try and write down, perhaps in an email, what you have heard shortly after the appointment and get your “second pair of ears” to read it – that really helps clarify what you have understood.

After a further visit to my doctor that Friday afternoon, a referral to the public hospital was made and then it was sit and wait up to 1-2 weeks for an appointment as cancer is considered urgent. On the Monday the hospital rang, they had an appointment for me the next morning and would do a needle biopsy at the same time – wow, that was prompt!

At this stage I started to advise everyone within my circle of family and friends. I wanted them to know what was happening to Charles and me. I knew I would offer support if it was one of them and I needed their support through this process – and, if everything was OK, that would be awesome news.

Note 2: Do share. Explaining to others really helps you to process and clarify what is happening. Use your networks, at times you might ask one person to let others in that circle know – you do need to talk about it, but sometimes it is too much to repeat the same thing over and over. Do it the way that best suits you, face-to-face, phone, email, social media, whatever works; it is better shared than held inside. Getting all the information doesn’t happen for ages and ages – see Note 3.

The appointment with the hospital was excellent. At no time did I feel rushed and there was some muted excitement as I had a “palpable lump” and “Could one of the other doctors who is just about to do a higher level exam feel it as they hadn’t had many of those recently?” – Wellington Hospital is a teaching hospital and I was OK to share. Through the whole process I felt respected and empathized with by
The biopsy was straightforward and I liked the approach — “we have to open this bottle of local anaesthetic so we might as well use it all” and a big smile — it was painless. I could watch the needle going into the lump on the ultrasound screen and I was left with only a tiny cut (made by a scalpel) and minor bruising. Again I was clear that this was cancer but there were positives; this second ultrasound still did not show any impact on the lymph nodes and the lump was small.

Two weeks later I met with the specialist surgeon. More examination, more ultrasound as the scar tissue from the earlier surgery did complicate things just a little. The results of the needle biopsy confirming cancer were available and then, a real surprise — 1 had to choose what treatment path I wanted to follow! Well the choices were:

1. **Lumpectomy and radiation and/or chemo** depending on test results on lymph nodes — 1 week recovery.
2. **Single mastectomy (radiation and/or chemo might still be required depending on the test results on lymph nodes but high possibility they won’t be)** — 1-2 days in hospital and 1-2 weeks recovery.
3. **Single mastectomy and immediate reconstruction and again, depending on test results on lymph nodes, radiation and/or chemo but likely not needed** — 6-10 days in hospital and 10-12 weeks recovery.

The results of all the above treatment are the same – positive and likely cancer-free. Hmmm well, I am not so sure about this choice lark, life is much easier when someone tells you what to do, however I can’t deny the feelings of empowerment that go with having to make that decision.

### Note: Understand that it is impossible for anyone to give you all the information at once. Each step of the process provides more information which may mean a change in treatment direction. For example until some lymph nodes are removed during surgery and tested, there isn’t clarity about spread and therefore whether radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy are required.

I have a personal reluctance to undergo radiotherapy unless it is essential and so mastectomy and reconstruction to me felt right. However, as I won’t be sure I do not need radiotherapy until after the surgery not having all the information slightly blurs the decision-making process. Losing a breast is a big deal to every woman; some are able to be more pragmatic than others and some can’t envision it at all. For me it is hard to envision. Our relationship with the different parts of our body is very personal, complicated and longstanding. I am finding this decision to remove a breast very challenging so this has also contributed to my wish for a reconstruction.

So I am clear, a mastectomy and reconstruction it is but then the next surprise — I might not be a suitable candidate! Breast reduction surgery nearly 20 years ago has of course left scar tissue which might have an impact on this surgery. Then there is whether the reconstruction material comes from your back (which could make things difficult for me who swims for exercise) or from your tummy – now for me that is appealing. The thought of a tummy tuck to make up for losing my breast has considerable appeal! However two abdominal operations, one a caesarean for a breach birth of my first baby, mean further scar tissue and adhesions so that, too might not be suitable.

Another “Hmmmm, well then what?” moment! The NZ Cancer Society offers up to three sessions of counselling for those with cancer and so I took advantage of one of those sessions and talked this through. Not an easy conversation when it became clear that I just did not want to think about a Plan B as the thought of totally losing a breast was just too hard. We delved around with that for a while and it was really helpful. I have still not yet made up my mind on Plan B. There is always another option of a double mastectomy and using prostheses for symmetry. In addition there is the visual aspect of only one breast and I am hearing from older family members that one breast can lead to a lack of physical balance when older and frailer. If I am not suitable, these decisions may have to be made but I still have some time — I will keep thinking.

This is a pathway which at times will be rocky, at times smooth, at times struggling steeply uphill and at others flying down the slope with the wind in my hair and the sun shining. Charles is having his fourth hip joint replacement on February 12 and we are looking forward to him being pain free and more able to do the physical activities he likes best — cycling and walking. We have a goal of being fit and able to participate in everything.

Eth worked for 30 years as a personal assistant. She has run her own professional development consultancy for the last 10 years, Enderby Associates Ltd, specifically for administrative professionals. Eth has worked with numerous EAs, PAs and other administrative professionals in supporting their successfully gaining national qualifications in the workplace and to enhance their career opportunities. Eth has a Masters in Education where her research looked at the professional development opportunities and career pathways of administrative professionals. Eth is a former National President of the Association of Administrative Professionals New Zealand Inc (AAPNZ), has been a Director and Chairman of AAPNZ Professional Development Ltd and a member and Chairman of their Professional Development Sub-committee which has responsibility for AAPNZ’s Certification programme. She recently spent a year in Apia, Samoa as a Volunteers Services Abroad (VSA) volunteer as an Administration Services Advisor returning to New Zealand in November 2014. She has a passion for the administrative profession and their value in the workplace shown by her commitment to assisting them to gain a relevant qualification and develop a career pathway.

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What Kind of Organised Are You?

For most of the people reading this article, being organised will be second nature – it’s how we ensure that our achievements list grows and grows and how we get to the end of a working day with a sense of a job well done.

Depending on which dictionary you consult it is possible to find varying definitions for “organized” such as: having taken something that is messy, chaotic or unordered and rearranged it logically, into a structured or coherent layout; able to plan one’s activities efficiently; to put oneself in a state of mental competence to perform a task. Those are very interestingly different in terms of their emphasis, either on the objective, the result of the task, or the person.

I have to admit that I would consider myself borderline psychotic on the subject because I cannot bear not knowing where something can be located. When my other half needs a document he can spend a couple of hours turning out files, stomping around the office mumbling about the fact that he knows he put it on that pile… whereas it pretty much drives him crazy if he asks me for something and I open a filing cabinet and pull out the relevant piece of paper within 10 seconds. It has been several years now since I have stopped trying to convince him to put things away immediately so that they are retrievable on demand.

So it was something of a surprise to discover earlier this week that I can be blind-sided by the familiar. We have a very large, racked storage cupboard at home. It suddenly occurred to me as I opened the door to retrieve an item that I had been ignoring large amounts of potential, unused storage space – space between the shelves and on the inside of the door. Hey presto, put up a door rack and add more storage boxes and I have virtually doubled the capacity of that cupboard.

But why did it take me so long to realise it? I think the answer is that I had designed the storage in that cupboard in the first instance and – obviously – if I had designed it then it was going to be perfect, wasn’t it? I think it is now perfectly clear that this isn’t the case! I’m not such a megalomaniac that I can’t admit a fault but this incident got me thinking about the ways in which we – the super organised – approach our environments.

If it is true that, having optimised our working and home environments to our satisfaction, we then become completely complacent about them then I think that this is a potential worry and one that I would like to share. It is also true that the super organised have the ability to think laterally about processes, procedures, environments and just about anything else that you care to mention – approach our environments.

If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it. – Mary Englebreit

Organising is a journey, not a destination. – Unknown

If you really want to do something you will find a way. If you don’t, you will find an excuse. – Jim Rohn
Now Hear This: 7 Ways to Boost Your Listening Skills

Listen up executive assistants and office professionals — in almost every aspect of your job, whether taking minutes, planning events, training staff or acting as your boss’s gatekeeper, listening skills are one of your most valuable assets.

Many professionals forget about this crucial element of effective communication. But here are seven tips for mastering the art of listening:

1 Let other people speak. It may sound obvious, but the first step in becoming a better listener is to simply close your mouth. Don’t interrupt or talk over other people, even if what you have to say seems more important. Let them finish their statements, which will allow you to respond thoughtfully to all the points they’ve made.

2 Stay in the present. Often when we believe we’re listening, we’re actually busy composing an intelligent response. As Stephen Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, says: “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” When you’re focused on making a brilliant comment, it’s easy to miss much of what’s being said. And your colleagues and boss can sense that you’re not entirely present. So stay focused on whoever is speaking, and give that person your complete attention.

3 Say no to distractions. During a conversation, don’t answer the phone, respond to a text or start talking to another person. Nothing says “I’m not interested in what you have to say” like changing your focus. If a third party wants your attention, let that person know you’ll respond soon. Then go back to your conversation. This approach not only improves your listening skills, it also shows respect for the person who is speaking.

4 Observe body language. People communicate with more than their words. So “listening” includes paying attention to hand gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice — because they all help you understand someone’s real message. For instance, if a coworker says “fine,” while smiling and meeting your gaze, then he probably means what he said and agrees with your request. But what if his words are clipped, his jaw is tight and he looks away while speaking? Then he’s probably not “fine” at all.

5 Mind your own nonverbal communication. What unintended messages are you sending? Part of being a good listener is making clear that you’re receptive. So indicate you’re tuned in by uncrossing your arms, facing the speaker, leaning forward a little, nodding in agreement and occasionally using affirming words. You also need to maintain positive eye contact. But don’t stare, which can seem threatening.

6 Keep an open mind. Try to see any situation from different points of view. When you make up your mind in advance, you’re closing the door to mutual understanding. Even if you don’t like what you’re hearing, you owe it to whoever is speaking to listen before deciding.

7 Be inquisitive. Asking good questions shows you’ve been paying attention and care about what is being said. Your question can be as simple as, “Is there anything else I should know?” But if you’re unclear on the main points, then good follow-up questions are essential. For example, paraphrase what you think was said, and ask the speaker whether you’ve understood correctly.

Fine-tuning your listening skills will make you a better coworker, supervisor and employee. It’s also one of the leadership qualities that will help you get ahead. So pay attention, listen up and make becoming a good listener one of your career goals.

about the author

Robert Hosking is Executive Director of OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com), the world’s largest specialised staffing firm for administrative professionals. In this role, he manages operations for more than 315 OfficeTeam locations worldwide, which place tens of thousands of highly skilled candidates each year into positions ranging from Executive and Personal Assistant to receptionist and customer service specialist.

Hosking is a frequent speaker on employment issues. He has presented at industry conferences and has been interviewed by the media on workplace topics.
The Event Manager’s Mindset

So you’re organising an event? It might be your first or it might be a type of event you’ve not done before. Whatever you’re organising you need take comfort that, as in life, with the right mindset you can accomplish anything.

When I started my company in the events industry in 1992 I had no industry training and no real idea how to go about organising an event. So when I finally convinced a London firm of surveyors that I could organise a client event on their behalf, I went through quite a bit of head scratching.

The event was a no-expense-spared extravaganza, with all sorts of boys’ toys including clay pigeon shooting stands, an array of different cars and buggies to drive, helicopter rides around the estate and a four-course lunch topped by a speech from celebrity peer Lord Brocket.

I arrived at my desk early Monday morning ready to get to grips with this somewhat daunting new challenge. I’d finally bagged a client; they’d signed my contract and even paid me a hefty deposit. As I was my only employee, it was up to me to deliver the goods… Oh dear, where to begin?

After a morning of deep breathes and sighs, copious amounts of tea-making, a few doodles on a pad and nothing else accomplished I decided that I had to stop being so wishy washy and just crack on!

Once I started to calm down I realise that if I had the confidence to win the client, after six months of failed pitches, it dawned on me that I had the confidence to see this through. I’d also had training in mechanical and electrical engineering which gave me the process to apply logic to overcoming a problem. So I had the confidence and had the logic, what else could I arm myself with?

At the time of starting this new venture I’d beefed up my resolve by reading a myriad of American self-help books. Although they were all individual in their terminology, a theme was beginning to shine through.

1 Confidence – Be confident and self assured, even if you don’t feel it initially. I’m sure in your life you’ve overcome many obstacles that you thought were immovable, this is just one more stretch. The beauty of event management is that you can easily use skills from previous experiences to get this task done.

So I applied these seemingly disparate skills to my first event management project, and in fact they worked so successfully that I have since taught the method to all of the newbies who joined my event company.

So here are my Five Fundamentals of organising any event.

Start at the beginning with what you have. Know where you want to go. Join the dots between where you are now and where you want/need to be. The books also pointed to internalising your process, ie mentally rehearsing what your were going to do, before you actually did it and to build an image of where you wanted to end up.

Unsure you’ve got the right credentials or training? For now push those doubts to the back of your mind. Event management on the whole is about setting out a plan of small logical steps and following through with care and attention. Yes you might need some specialist help but, on the whole, good suppliers will guide you through the tricky bits.
2 Chunking – You may have heard of this before. If you have it doesn’t do any harm to go over old ground. Chunking will help you with all your projects.

Chunking is simply breaking down a large project into smaller segments. You can then decide what to do with those segments, how to prioritise them, delegate them, decide which, if not all of them, you’re doing yourself and then simply diarise them in order of urgency and importance.

The main thing is to get some perspective. You’ve been given the job, you’ve accepted the challenge and now you are breaking it down into more manageable portions.

3 Plans – The best way to start organising your event is by getting the plans of the venue, grounds and areas that you will be using. Print them out, don’t do this online, at least not initially. Physically print them all out and lay them down on an empty desk or pin them up on a blank wall. This is your plan of attack.

Now the fun part, with a marker pen begin mapping out the different areas where you initially feel your event activities, presentations, dining etc will take place. I say initially as nothing at this stage should be set in stone, this is where you are just musing how things could or should happen.

Again, but with a different colour pen, start adding directions of delegate flows and actions. What I mean by this is which way your guests are going to be directed. The position of each portion of your event and the proximity of some areas to others is of the utmost importance. Get activity areas in the wrong place and your event will start to lose energy and, worse, you’ll lose guests.

What do I mean? Well here’s an example: you’re organising a Christmas party with 100 guests. Although that may seem a lot of people it actually isn’t a lot of bodies to keep the party buzzing especially if the food is served in one room, the music in another and the bar in yet another room. In fact what will likely happen on the night is that some guests will stay chatting in the dining areas, some will just chat at the bar and the rest will dance the night away on the dance floor. If the guests are separated into three different rooms or unconnected spaces the energy of that party will fizzle away. So here you’d keep everything in one room.

Different events require different planning, so try it out now on paper, rather than at the event.

4 The Event Mindset – OK here is where I’d like to invite you to take a mental leap of faith.

Some of you will have no problem doing this, some of you may feel this is not a valid way to oversee an important project, others will think they can’t do it.

Take my word for it, everyone can do this, everyone has an imagination. Some use it more than others but we can all benefit from going into our mind’s eye and mentally walking through the entire event from guests parking, to reception to seeing guests safely off at the end of the event.

How to do it? First things first, take your time. This is an essential part of your preparation. Alone or with one colleague (don’t involve the whole event committee or team), find a quiet area of the office, or put a Do Not Disturb sign on your office door. Now sit down quietly with a pen and paper to hand, close your eyes and mentally walk through your event as a guest – use your plan as an aide memoir. Where am I supposed to go? Where are the toilets? Where can I put my coat? Where is the exit? Where can I sit quietly to call the office? Where is the dining, who will I sit next to?

There are a hundred questions that will run through your head when you go somewhere new, so do your guests the favour of mentally rehearsing your entire event on their behalf, before either of you have to do it for real.

Write down all your pertinent questions you’d be asking as a guest and your answers after your mental rehearsal.

Now go through the whole event again but this time as the Event Manager. Who’s doing what and when, where are the emergency exits, where are the fire extinguishers, (and are they all in date?), where will I find the speaker? Etc, etc.

This can be one of the most tiring and difficult parts of the event management process, but it is essential to your success, so please don’t dismiss it. Now diarise time for this work, it is important and it will take longer than you think so you might consider chunking down the mental event rehearsals into manageable pieces.

This is the most useful time you’ll spend on planning your event, so don’t rush it.

5 The map is not the territory – A map of an area, in our example the physical event plan you printed out and spread on your desk or wall, is only a paper representation of your event process.

You now need to go back to the venue and walk through the entire event, footstep by footstep, as you did in your imagination and check that it works in the real world. It’s easy to misremember things or for physical plans not to be as accurate as they should be, so double check it.

Event management has many different facets and degrees of difficulty but it doesn’t have to be rocket science. That being said it does require care and attention to detail especially in the planning process.

Remember – in the events world – you only get one chance to get it right.

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**about the author**

Kevin began his event management company in 1992, in what can only be described as humble circumstances. Armed with a telephone, a one-line typewriter and a gut full of determination he built one of London’s top event management companies. At that time the internet was restricted to a few academics, he had no knowledge of the event industry, no contacts, no client base, no money and no experience organising anything more than a night out with the lads. His story is littered with anecdotes of event failures and successes, stories of shady ticket touts and shady City clients. Overcoming the odds he forged an organisation that still trades to this day. Kevin has an easy way with people and audiences alike, his message, “How to Make Killer Events without the Corpses” is brimming with up-to-date advice and tips as well as signposting the minefields to avoid. He tours the UK throughout the year providing half-day courses in event management. [www.eventmanagementcourse.co.uk](http://www.eventmanagementcourse.co.uk)
A New Look at Project Management

In modern times, project management is a technique utilized in many different fields of application including construction, engineering, industrial, defense (military logistics and organic) and, more recently, the development of software.

One of the earliest and most important contributions was given by the American Henry Gantt, who introduced in the early years of the 20th century a planning technique still remembered by his name (Gantt chart) which is still an essential part of any planning activity, something that all project managers must know.

On the basis of his work many fundamental concepts emerged and were widely used in the practice of project management, such as the Allocation of Resources and the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), used to represent the structure of the activities of a project. But modern project management gained its experience from the management of complex projects while a Manager assistant has to know how to apply this methodology to more simple projects.

We all know that we are in a period of great transformation, the enormous amount of data involved in decision-making, the transformation of organizational models. The crisis of the economic model makes it essential to identify and optimize how to access information and organizational methodologies.

In particular project management techniques are affected by the transition period and the great dynamism and variability of the factors that influence all project stages.

For this reason the classic and well experienced model, the “cascade”, due to its constraints and rigidity, makes a flexible management of the project impossible. The result is that it is impossible to respect the defined scheduling and very often more resources are requested than those originally involved.

The list of activities or “check list” is usually the following:

1 Identify the basic activities (tasks) associated with each element of the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS);
2 Represent the breakdown of tasks in a Gantt chart, highlighting the interrelations between the different elements of the project (macro-activities or work packages, task and output) in a time scale;
3 Assess the amount of work required (the so-called effort) to complete each task, determining the type of resources (human and otherwise) necessary for their implementation;
4 Calculate the time of completion of each task based on the number of resources assigned to them;
5 Determine personnel costs for the implementation of each task adding the cost of other materials and/or services required;
6 Determine the critical path based on the dependencies existing inside the WBS;
7 Calculate the total time by adding the times of all tasks that are within the critical path;
8 Determine the total cost: staff + materials + services.

This process seems to me very complicated for projects a Manager Assistant usually manages.

On the opposite end, the “simple project management” is definitely suitable for offices where the specifications are unclear, there is a high variability of priorities and evolving demands. For these reasons it is perfect for projects Manager Assistants have to manage, as usually the information is not clear, we don’t have enough resources and a very small budget.

Adopting a new management model may appear, at first, very difficult, because the temptation to fall back on the usual methods, such as the method “cascade”, is certainly more immediate and we are more used to.
The first two aspects that seem more interesting to evaluate and that can offer more benefits are:

- A different approach to error management
- The organization and management of time and priorities in their creative aspects

A cliché about Manager Assistants is that there is little demand of creativity in the profession and I do not agree. The creative process is based on the flexible management of the complexity and who better than us to face complex situations?

The question is “what is the purpose of creativity?”

Certainly the main purpose can be identified in the resolution of a situation that has suddenly complicated, sometimes even in a surprising manner for the same Assistant who has to solve it, through a process of instantaneous solution, often unique in the interaction with other colleagues and with external stakeholders.

It seems obvious that in this process there is a high risk of failure and error, but it is through the potential failure that it is often possible to learn new solutions and reuse old management best practices in a different way to solve critical issues.

The risk inherent in creative improvisation often tends to keep people on well-known territories, trying to repeat the success stories previously explored. This approach has several flaws, most notably the repetition of the creative act that ends up making it useless, because it is surpassed.

We are often tempted to repeat successful experiences in order to limit the risk, since learning in organizations tends to move towards routine and predetermined default. For this reason we prefer to stay in well-established pattern as those of the “cascade” project management techniques.

I want to underline that risk sources are more and more identified and located not only in infrastructural or technological assets and tangible variables, but in human factor variables, and decision making. The interaction between human factor and tangible aspects of risk highlights the need to focus closely into human factor as one of the main drivers for risk management.

For this reason we have to pay a lot of attention to situations in which we are involved and consider that people around us change constantly coming into conflict with this trend to repeat default and predetermined actions.

Staying on predefined trails limits the risk, but in this way we cannot take full advantage of our ability to act creatively, that could allow an innovative management process.

The Assistant, in order to handle the unforeseen, must have recourse to all her experience and her leadership to overcome the block and find the solution. Ironically, the error in a situation that gets complicated is what can really lead to innovate and revolutionize an established procedure. To achieve this result it is necessary to be extremely flexible, and that the structure we have behind us supports and ensures a high level of response to solicitations coming from an error breaking the daily routine.

It’s amazing the quantity of experience and the amount of information needed in one of these emergencies, and as a figure of strong leadership such as the Assistant, even though not deterministic, can be decisive.

This brings us to the second point, the management of the project team.

The organization and the dynamics of a group are always different, while communication techniques have sometime common elements and the basic structures of the project remain generally unchanged. Different people have different problems, for this reason we should try to avoid retracing familiar patterns sacrificing the implementation of new ideas and solutions.

Acting outside the schemes, thinking outside the box, could provide surprisingly positive results and innovation. We must, however, be careful in trying to understand what makes this type of approach winning rather than disastrous or even harmful.

First of all, we have to consider the awareness of the team and the level of improvisation they can face. The Project Leader, in this case the Assistant, must be very familiar with the characteristics of people who are part of her team, and the group should include individuals able to handle discontinuities and challenges.

The discontinuity should not be treated as an eerie factor, but must lead to the creation of new material that gradually brings the team members to overcome their limitations in an unconscious way.

The brainstorming technique, leaving the initiative to flow free, is an exciting opportunity during which the Assistant/Project Leader can provide the necessary documentation to other members of the group to find a solution or can help them to focus on new and interesting ideas coming up.

From this brief analysis we can see how the management of a project is essential to have a positive approach to risk management and error, using the moments of error as a potential source of new ideas for innovation, enriching the trust and awareness of the team members.

In the same way the Project Leader, through the proposition of new processes can lead the team to exceed their limits and to manage in an innovative way problems that definitely could be resolved by conventional techniques, but without being able to bring new contribution in terms of professional growth and innovative work team. A single brain can’t bounce different ideas off itself! In this situation each team member has a responsibility to contribute equally and offer their unique perspective on a problem to arrive at the best possible solution. Teamwork can lead to better decisions, products or services.

about the author

Mariachiara Novati lives in Milan, has a degree in Foreign Languages, a Masters in HR Management and a second one in Marketing & Communication Management. She worked as a Manager Assistant since 1992 covering different roles such as Scientific Secretary, Personal Assistant and Office Manager. In almost 20 years of experience she has changed many companies and improved her skills through different experiences and continuous learning. Mariachiara founded MACSE Italia, the first Italian Association dedicated to Manager Assistants (www.macseitalia.it). After working as Senior Executive Assistant of CFO in one of the most important editorial groups in Italy, she had a brief experience at Prada Group and now works as Senior Personal Assistant at Ralph Lauren.
Pushing Back, Appropriately and Diplomatically
Do you ever say “no” to your boss? Do you ever push back and tell your boss that you’re too busy? These questions might alarm you – but I am being serious. They are the questions I ask, deliberately, to the delegates on my PA training courses. The majority of the people in the room will shake their heads and say “never!”; they wouldn’t dream of saying “no” to the boss. When I question their thinking and ask why they don’t feel able to say “no”, most of them reply with something about the fact that it’s their belief that they are paid to do as they are told, and get on with it. It’s a sort of unwritten rule amongst PAs – that the boss asks you to jump and you say “how high?”

Now this strategy may have worked for the secretaries long-gone-by, but in today’s climate of overwhelming workloads, multiple bosses to work for and an expectation that everything can be done at lightning speed (due to technology!) and “like magic”, it actually does the PA no favours not to push back; when PAs don’t push back it can often result in them receiving less respect from the boss (and others), as well as an ever-increasing amount of work.

My view is that PAs should push back and say “no” to the boss – though it should always be done appropriately and diplomatically.

So, when would it be appropriate to push back say “no”? Well, naturally, it wouldn’t be appropriate to say “no” to the boss all the time; the role of a PA is to support, assist and enhance the boss’s productivity and personal effectiveness. The new PA works in partnership with their boss, and their boss, of course, is their prime concern, where providing a service and solutions is the foundation of the role.

However, as we will explore, the occasional “no” – without actually using the word “no”, followed by a brief explanation as to why the request isn’t possible immediately, or a brief rationale as to the complexity of the request, will give others the understanding of what your role is really about. It will also command respect in terms of your time and ability to juggle your demanding workload.

When we talk about pushing back diplomatically, we mean using the right phrases – assertiveness is key here – and the right types of conversations that foster and encourage that mutual respect from both parties. The words and phrases you use can often help (or hinder!) your success in achieving the outcome you want.

So, how do you push back or even say “no” without feeling guilty or even unhelpful? Well, let’s explore some strategies – with some real-life examples to demonstrate the sort of things that PAs should be saying to their bosses.

To give you the context, when I first worked for one boss, I can quite honestly say he didn’t have any understanding of what my role entailed. (Sound familiar?) But more to the point, he didn’t understand the complexity of my role, and how in actual fact what can often sound like a simple request (“Hey Adam, can you arrange me a meeting with all 20 Board Directors, and I want it next Thursday…”!) would actually contain underneath it 20-50 “sub requests” or “sub activities” to get that “one” job done. And as you will know, those “sub requests” could take hours!

In that vein, a common complaint of many a PA I have trained is: “But the boss doesn’t understand what I do!” and my response to that is always: “Well, have you taken the time to explain to the boss what your job is really about?” The PA will then look blankly at me as if to say that, in their view, the boss should understand their role and therefore support it. But, bosses are not PAs (nor would we want them – and phrases you use can often help (or hinder!) your success in achieving the outcome you want.

So, with the boss who didn’t understand what I did, my strategy was simple. I took the time (over several months, I hasten to add), every so often, when appropriate, to help my boss know what my role was about and how those small requests that sound easy-peasy can often take forever to do. That meant pushing back diplomatically, or giving the boss the reason as to why I couldn’t always get things done at that particular time.

To illustrate this, the conversation between my boss (Thomas) and me may have gone something along the lines of:

“Thomas, I know you said you wanted me to arrange an ad hoc Board Meeting by next Thursday, but in reality I am not sure that is achievable. It will probably take me over a day’s work just to ascertain the availability of the Board members, and I am mindful that three of them are on leave this week. So, could I suggest we look at doing the Board Meeting within the next two weeks instead… to allow me sufficient time to get through to everyone?”

Or, another dialogue may have been:

“Thomas, I was able to change those travel tickets for you last minute, last night – but it did actually take me about two hours of my own time… in future, if we need to make last-minute travel changes, could we agree a better way of working? Could we touch base say the day before you travel, and agree any changes then, rather than you emailing me late at night? When you make those changes last minute, it does put me under enormous pressure, as I have other priorities to work on…”

Or a simpler discussion:

“I’m sorry Thomas I can’t do that right now – as I am in the middle of reading through those five emails you have just sent me with Board papers to format on by noon today. If it’s not urgent, do you mind if we touch base later on – say at 3pm, when I have finished the Board papers?”

I am sure you get the thread. The point I am making is that pushing back or saying “no” is never an outright “no”, it’s more considered that that, but it enables you to show the boss, by the assertive explanations you give, why, sometimes, you cannot drop everything for them – and that your world doesn’t always revolve just around them.

I worked with this strategy with the boss I’m referring to over several months, and what was interesting for me was that the boss in question gradually gained more respect for my time and the job I was employed to do. So much so, that he would often ask me if I actually had time to do something, before doing it, or if it was tricky to do, he would ask if there was an easier or more efficient way of doing it. It also set, by default, boundaries and showed him I was fully aware of how long things take to do and, more importantly, demonstrated I was managing my own time and the expectations of him and others.

We should also remember that when we push back, or say “no” diplomatically we are actually using assertive behaviour and reinforcing boundaries with the boss and others.

The way we talk to the boss will absolutely determine the way we are perceived, and indeed the responses we get back. In that regard, I learnt a long time ago to make sure that my thoughts were in gear (in “assertive mode”) before I had the conversation with the boss, especially if it was something I needed to address with him or her that was tricky or difficult. What I am driving at here is that you must be in “assertive mode” before you have the conversation; otherwise you may not get the result you were hoping for. Assertive conversations foster assertive responses, and show the other person you are being adult-like.
This in turn will drive boundaries in terms of people’s expectations of you and they are likely to be more considerate in future when placing demands on you. This can only be a good thing when workloads are sky-high.

Here then are my top tips for pushing back or saying “no” with confidence:

1. Stick to facts, never feelings or emotions. The facts could be that it will, for instance, take nearly all day.” etc, etc. you know precisely you to “phone every person individually will “don’t have three hours today”; or that for “Take three hours to collate that report”, and The facts could be that it will, for instance, 2 Stick to facts, never feelings or emotions. 

2. Stick to facts, never feelings or emotions. The facts could be that it will, for instance, “Take three hours to collate that report”, and you “don’t have three hours today”; or that for you to “phone every person individually will take nearly all day” etc, etc. You know precisely how long things take to do, so help the boss to understand that too.

3. After you have pushed back diplomatically, then come up with a solution or strategy to enable you (a) to get the job done; and (b) to meet the expectations of the boss. For instance, “I can’t do that right now, but could I suggest we speak after lunch? If we meet at say 1.30pm, it will then take me about an hour to prepare the report, and I can ensure that they are in today’s post.”

4. Avoid generic phrases such as: “I’m too busy!” or “No one understands how busy I am,” or even the sighs and huffs. These don’t look good on your part, and aren’t helpful. Assertive responses are always precise statements based on seeking a win-win solution.

5. Use “we” rather than “you” when speaking to the boss about them. Notice, in one example above I said ‘…Can we agree a better way of working?’ and “If we need to make last-minute changes”. The use of “we” when you actually mean “you” (speaking to the boss) is less threatening and more supportive, though the message about needing to change something still as effective.

6. Always ask for a deadline – and then agree to the deadline, but make sure the deadline is realistic. For example: “That copying typing will take me about 50 minutes, then I will need to check it. So, can we agree I’ll have it ready at 2.30pm today instead?”

7. For difficult conversations, write down what you want to say and rehearse saying it before you go in and see the boss. Write down the facts of what you want to get across, then write out what you are going to say based on evidence and using assertive statements.

8. Use your own diary and schedule your key activities or work in it (eg transcribing minutes of a meeting). PAs who use their own diary tend to get through their day in a more structured way, and using your own diary is the best way to stop and think about whether you can accept that task or not before you jump in and say “No problem, leave it with me!” So, by default, when you say to someone “I’m not sure I can do that today, I will just check my diary…” you are giving yourself time to think and respond appropriately. The diary acts as your “buffer” and allows you to stop, think and slow down before you reply. For instance, after checking your diary, you might say to a manager, “I can’t do that right now as I have something scheduled in 10 minutes… Can I see you at 4pm instead?”

A brave PA isn’t afraid to push back – but it’s not about being brave, it’s actually respecting yourself and your time… and encouraging others to do the same. Good luck!

**About the Author**

Adam Fidler is a PA Trainer Practitioner who offers training and consultancy for Executive Assistants and PAs. After graduating with a degree in business studies in 1999, Adam has worked as a Board-level PA in a variety of blue-chip organisations, including Boots PLC and Bank of America. His most recent position was Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive of Salford City College. Adam is passionate about the role of the PA, and a big advocate of self-development and life-long learning. In 2008, he qualified as a college lecturer and has, for many years, taught shorthand on a part-time basis. In addition, Adam regularly runs PA courses for Pitman Training in London, including his two-day PA course “From good to outstanding.”
The Powerful Duo of Listening and Empathising

Listening: is the key to creating and maintaining rapport. Combine it with empathy and you have a powerful duo to ensure a great working relationship with your manager and team. Let’s consider each in turn starting with Listening.

Listening is a skill and for many of us, it is a skill we can improve on.

The crème de la crème of listening involves listening with your whole body and then mirroring or matching the person in order to create and maintain rapport. Once we have great rapport we are more easily able to influence or persuade – with integrity – so that we can achieve our goals and outcomes. The “integrity” element here is of utmost importance when influencing – we need to ensure the person we are influencing is being taken to a good place as well as ourselves.

Let’s use the research of former Harvard Professor Albert Mehrabian as a basis for whole body listening. Mehrabian stated that when engaged in face-to-face communication and sharing our thoughts and feelings, communication can be broken down into three areas – 1) the words that we speak 2) the tone that we use and 3) the body language that we use. The words that we speak account for 7% importance in getting our message across, the tone for 38% and the body language for 55%.

Listen with your ears to the words: We all have a preference for phrases, terminology and favourite sayings. Our own personal interpretation of vocabulary may be different to someone else’s.

Notice what specific words and phrases the person you are listening to has used. Repeat back these words and phrases. Based on the popular saying “people like people who are like themselves”, by using the same “language” and words as the person you are listening to this demonstrates your respect for what they are saying. You are keeping the conversation “clean” by using their language without “dirtying” the conversation with your own preferences.

Listen with your ears to the tone: Listen to how someone is using their voice. What tone of voice are they using? What emphasis are they placing on words? How fast or slow are they speaking? What volume are they using? What does this tell you?

Listen with your eyes to the body language: Based on Mehrabian’s research we know that 55% of communication comes down to body language. As a listener then we can assess a lot from noticing what is happening in a person’s body language including their physiology (facial expressions), gestures and movement. What can you see happening? We can listen with our eyes and use this information to be curious about what is going on for that person. Combine this with empathy and you have a powerful duo.

So what is empathy?

Empathy (according to www.diffen.com) is “the ability to mutually experience the thoughts, emotions and direct experience of others”. By empathising with someone, you are taking the time and effort to try to understand things from their point of view. You are working with the fact that most of us like to be (and indeed want to be) valued and respected in the workplace. We want people to take the time to understand things from our point of view. By empathising with someone you are gaining more of an awareness of a situation – and that can open up choice, opportunities and flexibility around your own behaviours. By empathising with someone and respecting and valuing them – they, in turn will respect and value you. And that sets a pretty solid foundation for a great working relationship, I’m sure you’d agree.

Think of what you already know about the person you want to empathise with. What’s important to them? Remember, we are “sensory” creatures, so see, hear and feel the world from their perspective. Put the person you are empathising with at the forefront of the conversation. Be precise in the language that you use. Say things like:

“I appreciate your point of view and...”
“I can see/hear where you’re coming from and...”
“I get your perspective and...”
“It’s obvious to me that you’re really passionate/upset/frustrated/excited with this...”
“I understand how you are feeling...”

Sound back and repeat particular words or phrases that they have used. A person’s vocabulary, the terms and words they use are “precious” to them – they mean something to them (which could be different to your own interpretation).

Keep gentle eye contact. Let the person finish saying what they want to say. Regular nods of your head will indicate you are listening (with your whole body remember) and you value what they are sharing with you.

And then, ask one Great Question – “What do you need from me?”

about the author

Lindsay Taylor is the Director of Your Excellency Limited, an executive training and coaching organisation in the UK. Lindsay specialises in delivering training and coaching to PAs, EAs, Secretaries and Administrators across the world and believes that fun, experiential training delivered in a jargon-free, down-to-earth manner will ensure a memorable experience and optimise learning. Lindsay is a member of the Association for Coaching and supports continuing professional development.
Managing Your Boss

Time and time again I hear from PAs how they struggle to find a way to work with their executives. With the constant demands and complexities of your role, the last thing you need is a resistant executive, who slows you down, and obstructs your ability to assist and work with them to the best of your abilities. Make an executive decision for the both of you and ensure 2015 is the year you address any outstanding discrepancies or “niggles” with your boss, and start a working relationship, that actually does “work” for the both of you. Your executive and your career will have a lot to thank you for in the long run.

It’s not a case of being abrupt, demanding or confrontational, but more so using the skills that you have acquired throughout your career to coax them in to assisting you in fulfilling the demands of your role, and in turn fully supporting and assisting them. A few pointers are outlined below, with the aim of helping you to manage your boss, and develop a successful two-way relationship which works for both parties.

Schedule time
It’s no secret that your executive is incredibly busy, and finding time to break away from their daily routine/schedule for even five minutes to have a catch up could be incomprehensible to them, or they may think it’s not necessary.

Think about what time you need with them and how frequently. It may be that you’d like to catch up with them each morning for five or 10 minutes to discuss the day’s agenda, and then have a 30-minute meeting every other week to discuss any other business or forthcoming appointments. Look at their calendar and see where you can schedule in the time to meet with them – it may be five minutes before the working days starts, or five minutes at the end to iron out the “ins” and “outs” of tomorrow.

Schedule in your slot and send your executive an invitation – with a message which states why you have selected this slot and what you would like to discuss – eg “I would like to catch up with you first thing tomorrow morning to go through the following points…” or “You have a meeting with Mr Jones tomorrow at 10am, the notes for the meeting are attached – need to run through a few points beforehand at 9.50am, before you meet Mrs Smith for lunch.” You’ll find they will be hard pushed to decline the invitation, if you clearly confirm the reason for the meeting and outline your agenda, making it clear as to why the meeting...
needs to happen. To ensure the meeting is not overlooked once it is agreed, make sure you “flag it” – this will highlight that the meeting/catch up is important, and ensure it doesn’t “slip” their mind.

Regular meetings with your executive are crucial for the development of your working relationship, as well as getting to know and respect each other on a more personal level – a PA and Executive who have a great relationship will tell you this.

Further training in how to expertly use email packages could be a great way to enhance your efficiency and capabilities throughout your working day. Being able to use advanced mail features to manage and customise your mail environment and calendar options will make the tasks you carry out on a daily basis a lot easier. It will also enable you to effectively and confidently communicate with your executive (and other colleagues), and organise them more resourcefully. Also, if your executive is failing to give you full access to their emails, being deemed an expert in Microsoft Outlook could be your way in, and a surefire way to gain their confidence in your capabilities. It will confirm to them that you are able to further assist and support them by helping manage and organise their mail environment and calendar.

Put yourself in their shoes

In order to be able to work with your executive and support them to the best of your abilities, you need to understand how they operate, what their role actually entails and get in to their frame of mind – put yourself in their shoes. What areas of the business do they operate within? Are you well versed in these areas? What areas of the business do they operate in which they operate. This will undoubtedly help your career no end; having knowledge and skills in a different sector of industry, but also being able to support your executive whilst being more attuned to their role.

A management or leadership course could also be a great way to get into the frame of mind of your boss, and allow you to understand and grasp their role more intimately. This will not only give you more confidence and the opportunity to expand your expertise and, in turn, your career progression, but it will also enable you to gain a deeper insight into the demands, pressures and requirement of your Executive’s role, and enable you to support and manage them more efficiently, on a genuine level.

Look and “Be” the part

We’ve all heard the phrase “Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.” But this isn’t the be-all-and-end-all of looking the part at work. The way you look and present yourself in your role is not solely about the way you dress – although it does play its part. Looking and being the best PA you can be in order to support and manage your executive is about always remaining professional, presenting yourself in the best possible light and seeking out ways in which you can continuing progressing in your career and assisting your executive in progressing in theirs.

Seek out ways in which you can stand and really take command of your role. This could be anything from making a conscious decision and taking action over your CPD by requesting training in new areas of the business. Or requesting funding/investment to attend an industry event or seminar which will enable you to network with your peers, and learn tops tips on how to progress in your role, to putting yourself forward for a new project. If your executive sees you are serious and passionate about your career, they will understand how important it is for you to succeed in assisting them, and should not really want to hinder this.

Your executive needs to have the confidence that you are fully capable in your quest to support them, and know that you are serious about having a successful career. Once the penny drops, they will subconsciously be more open to you managing them, and in turn ‘let you in’, as they know your sole aim is to be successful in your quest to assist and support them with their success.

As with professionals in any area of industry, there may be people within the company who the executive does not necessarily get along or “gel” with. As a PA, this is simply not an option. It’s over to you to cultivate a favourable working relationship, in which you both are working together in harmony, and in effect making each other’s lives easier – this may not necessarily be on the top of the list of important things to do for your executive, but it has to be on yours, in order for you to be as successful as you possibly can be.

A good relationship between the two of you is the foundation from which your career can succeed and progress. If you refrain from tackling any issues you have which prohibit you from carrying out your role effectively, be assured your personal and professional growth will be stunted, as will the progression and perception of the profession overall.

about the author

Claire Lister is MD of Pitman Training. www.pitman-training.co.uk. Renowned for its heritage in PA and Secretarial courses, Pitman Training has remained synonymous as the leading independent training provider, revolutionising office communications since 1837. Specialists in Office, IT, Administration, Finance and Business Skills, Pitman Training offers a flexible approach to training for employment and has been trusted for generations which has enabled the provision of exceptional centre-based and online training for thousands of people every year throughout the UK. Recommended training programmes which support this article: Microsoft Outlook Advanced Seminar, Different Leadership, Attributes and Skills Course, Management Diploma, Assertiveness and Confidence Skills Seminar. Many of the courses, diplomas, awards and seminars available at Pitman Training are CPD accredited.
Ultimate Secrets for Career Success

I have been privileged to meet many executive administrative professionals over the years. Every time I speak with someone who is exceptionally competent in their job and has an unwavering positive attitude toward their career, several themes invariably arise.

Three exceptional individuals shared with me the following truths that guide their actions, help them add value to their organizations and advance their careers:

1. Earn your job every day.
Rhonda Strong, a Senior Executive Assistant for Eastman Chemical Company, has quickly progressed to positions of high responsibility in several companies. One key factor in Rhonda’s progress is her dedication to seeking ways to go the extra mile and do more than what’s expected. She always asks herself, “How can I help make this better, or do this job better?” By asking this question first, rather than, “Is this in my job description?” or “Do I really feel like doing that?” Rhonda focuses on what’s important, which enhances her success and her reputation.

Rhonda believes that every day she comes to work, she needs to earn her job. She says, “We all have days when we don’t want to be there. We wouldn’t be human otherwise. But what we do on those days to ensure that the quality of our work remains highly consistent is crucial in determining how quickly and how far we will advance.”

By embracing an entrepreneurial mindset that helps her focus on how she earns her job every day, Rhonda feels the peace of mind that comes from a job well done, and the self-pride and confidence that make her career financially and emotionally rewarding.

2. “How would I…?”
Linda Peevey, former Office Manager for MarCares, LLC, a credit correction company, related her father’s advice: “Whatever you do, do it 200%. Whether you like it or not, always do your best.” This advice always leads her to ask herself an important question: “How would I…? How would I want things done if this were my company? How would I want to be treated if I were the customer… or as an employee?”

This focus has fostered many admirable traits in Linda, including loyalty. While many of us are tempted to buy into the belief that, “Many companies don’t demonstrate loyalty, so why should I,” we must remember that the reverse is also true. If good companies don’t see loyalty in employees, they may simply give up and say, “Why should we be loyal when no one is loyal to their company?”

My personal advice for anyone who wants to create a WOWplace is to go first! We must demonstrate loyalty (and other admirable qualities) by going first and proving that good people are still out there. So, what happens if you go first and discover the other party isn’t worthy of your trust? It’s simple: demonstrate your values anyway; don’t allow the attitudes and behaviors of others to lower your own. Although others occasionally take advantage of Linda’s giving nature due to this, she says, “I’d rather be this way than the other way around.”
Besides, those instances are few, and they teach you how to deal with those situations differently in the future.

3 Connect with your core.

Karin Bartz CPS/CAP, a Sr Executive Assistant at Medtronic, shared her insights from 24+ years of experience, having begun her administrative career working in an office after school at age 16.

Karin credits her philosophy of “always coming from your core” as the overriding factor in her success. “You have core values that drive you to succeed and do your best every day,” says Karin. “When you use your strengths to connect with those values, take charge of your career and become more confident, you won’t be intimidated when higher opportunities arise.”

One example of this occurred when Karen was promoted to the position of Executive Assistant to the President & COO at Medtronic. She has consistently focused on increasing her skills, knowledge and confidence. Approaching burn-out after being in one position for five years, she told her manager that she wanted to do something different. Her supportive manager encouraged her to explore other opportunities within the company.

As Karin prepared for her first interview, an opportunity arose to assist a VP providing human resources support to the COO. Shortly, she was asked to perform a short-term assignment for the COO. Three months later, Karin accepted the position on a full-time basis. This opportunity came “out of the blue” and Karin believes that had she not been preparing for it throughout her career, she never would have had the confidence to accept the unexpected offer of a “move to Corporate” when it arose.

The following crucial habits and mindsets have also helped the best of the best move from success to significance in their careers:

1 Maintain your professionalism and work ethic at all times.

It’s not about what other assistants are not doing… it’s about what you are doing. It takes an incredible amount of time and effort to worry about what everyone else is (or isn’t) doing, what they get paid, and whether their workload is equal to yours. It’s easy to get wrapped up in this, but if we just focus on what we do, our work ethic will shine through… in sharp contrast to those who don’t do this.

2 Never judge the task.

No matter how menial a task may seem on the surface, how that task is performed is of utmost importance. Whether it’s as inconsequential as getting a cup of coffee or as weighty as advising a leader who is traveling internationally, never think about the “value” of the task itself, but how well you want it done. This is true in every profession. (I’m reminded of a Sr Vice President at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, US, who began his career as a tram operator. Did he rise to SVP by viewing “tram operator” as a menial task? Doubtful. I’m also reminded of a woman who started as American TV talk show host Montel Williams’ EA and became President of one of his divisions.) Always remember that people rarely notice what you do as much as how you do it.

3 Add value to your position.

At the start of every position, you must learn what is expected. But once that learning period is over, seek ways to improve the position and add more value than management has yet to envision. Be proactive; don’t wait for anyone to ask you to do more, or be more efficient. Analyze what is done, how it’s done, and how to deliver more, before they know it’s necessary, or even possible. If a position is overburdened or inefficient, try to improve existing processes and efficiency, cut costs or add income. Even small improvements have the potential to add up to big value. In fact, by taking unnecessary work out of several processes, Rhonda helped her company save over $1 million between 2004 and 2005!

4 Focus on where you want to be, rather than where you are now.

Whether related to performance of a task, attitude or participation in a dress code policy, always be one step above. For example, the dress code in Rhonda’s office is “business relaxed”.

However, the executive administrative professionals wear suits… a big hint for all admins who desire a position at that level.

Here’s one final valuable mindset that has guided many successful people:

5 Give before.

My philosophy is to seek opportunities to give first, rather than waiting to give back. While we should never give only in anticipation of receiving something in return, there’s something exceptional about giving in the true spirit of helping others. Call it the Law of Attraction, or “what goes around comes around,” but I have usually found it to be true that when I give first, I get more back than I could ever hope to receive. So, in addition to seeking support and guidance, look for opportunities to help others. Be a mentor, serve in professional organizations and attend educational events. Not only will this increase your knowledge, reduce your learning curve and add immense value to your organization, but it will also help advance the dignity and value of the administrative profession.

The best of the best continually provide added value to their employers, demonstrating that they are not only worth what they are being paid, but a whole lot more. When we go above and beyond in our jobs, often surprising our superiors with unexpected actions and attitudes, we make others feel valued.

And when others feel valued by us, they see more value in us. Standing out in this manner puts us in a great position to be noticed, remembered and selected for new opportunities that abound all around us… if we have well prepared ourselves to take advantage of them when they come our way.

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**About the Author**

Professional speaker, trainer and author Sandy Geroux has more than 18 years of administrative experience. She now helps others create the WOW factor, become more effective and efficient, and achieve their personal and professional dreams. Since 2000, she has conducted over 100 keynotes, training programs and workshops for more than 13,000 administrative professionals in 41 countries. Her columns and articles appear in many administrative publications. Visit her website ([www.thewowplace.com](http://www.thewowplace.com)), blog ([www.wowplace.com](http://www.wowplace.com)), email her (Sandy@thewowplace.com) or call her in the US at +1 (407) 856 1188 to discuss an educational and entertaining presentation for your administrative staff.
Have a Goal? Get a System!

Most admins have personal and professional goals. However, many are missing a crucial component to accomplishing them: a system.

James Clear, an author and habits expert, says, “Forget goals. Focus on systems instead.” And he is right. Systems are procedures with a built in repetitive plan of action for how you get stuff done. Part of what helps you accomplish your goals is having a system or systems in place to keep you on track. Systems provide a means for follow-up. They keep you accountable. And they simplify even the largest, most complex, goals.

One of the big problems people have with accomplishing their goals is that the goals feel too big or unachievable once they try to tackle them. A much more realistic and practical approach is to break a large goal down into several smaller chunks that are easier to accomplish. Then you can set tasks and due dates so you have specific action items on your to-do list that feel more achievable, instead of one big project. With a good system in place, you can move through all of the smaller pieces quicker and easier and make actual progress on what you’re trying to achieve – whether it’s a personal goal or a project at work.

But how do you actually create systems? What components go into a good one? There are three simple tools you can use to put effective and efficient systems in place for your professional and personal goals: forms, templates and checklists. And the good news is that you’re probably already using them in some capacity – it’s just a matter of tailoring them to fit your specific objectives!

Forms
Forms create a logical and orderly flow to information that needs to be collected or shared with others. They’re really useful if your goal involves collecting or tracking repetitive information, such as updating your resume with accomplishments throughout the year as you complete projects or assignments. They are also useful for tracking your weekly or monthly progress on each specific goal you have set. A form is typically a document with blank spaces for information to be inserted, either electronically or in print. Think about the information you need to collect to accomplish your goal or a part of it. Then capture and organize it in a logical and orderly way so, as you move forward, you’re more likely to get the right information as efficiently as possible.

Templates
A template is a preset format for a document you create once with the intention of using it over and over again. With a template, you can quickly and easily create new documents that contain all of the formatting, fonts, headers, footers, layout and style elements you need. If your goal is to find a new job, then a template can be useful when it comes to creating cover letters. If your goal is to create an administrative procedures binder, templates are effective here also.

Checklists
Admins have been using checklists for years. But you might not be using them to their fullest potential, especially when it comes to tackling your goals.

To put it simply, a checklist is a list of things, such as tasks required to attain a goal, materials needed for a job, or to-dos to complete to plan a meeting. They help you remember all of the details you might otherwise forget. Most checklists are formatted with the list of items on a page and boxes to check on the left. However, you can format yours any way you want – provided that it keeps you on task.

These tools are all very similar but each has its own unique purpose in helping you create systems that will enable you to attain your goals. Just remember: systems help you tackle your goals – they’re not a replacement for them. They need to coexist in order for you to successfully achieve your objectives at home or in the office. So if you’re serious about accomplishing your goals, start working on the systems you need to realize them now. And then follow through with them, use them, and see how much progress you make on even your biggest goals!

about the author

Julie Perrine is an administrative expert, trainer and all-round procedures pro. She is the founder and CEO of All Things Admin, a company dedicated to developing innovative products, training and resources for administrative professionals worldwide. Learn more about Julie’s book, The Innovative Admin: Unleash the Power of Innovation in Your Administrative Career, and download free templates at www.AllThingsAdmin.com. Follow Julie on Twitter: @julieperrine. “Like” All Things Admin on Facebook: www.facebook.com/AllThingsAdmin.

Download free career planning forms and templates to help you get started at www.allthingsadmin.com/free-templates.
Create a “Mindset Spiral”
to Become Powerful

One of the key determinants of the life we lead and what we get out of life is our beliefs. Self belief, belief about what’s possible, belief in what we can achieve and contribute to others and the world. A term that’s often used to describe these kinds of beliefs is “mindset”. People with a powerful mindset generally achieve more and get more out of life compared to those who are less mentally endowed.

As with other aspects of character, mindset develops as a result of experience, when we’re young and throughout our lives. Most people go through life without ever consciously intervening in this process. Can we take control of how our mindset develops? Absolutely we can. This article aims to suggest how.

One way of influencing our mindset is to listen to others, read biographies and gain ideas from other inspirational books. This is hugely helpful. But in recent years psychologists have come to realise that one of the most powerful influences on our minds is behaviour. Our own behaviour has a major influence on how our mindset develops.

If you have 15 minutes to spare, watch a TED talk on this subject by Amy Cuddy outlining some research and providing a personal example. Just type “Amy TED” into Google. The last five minutes of her talk are particularly inspiring.

I recently wrote an article in this magazine explaining why it is that whenever we allow our feelings to drive our behaviour, we reinforce the unconscious beliefs driving those feelings. Allow anxiety to prevent us from speaking to groups and we’ll remain anxious speaking to groups. Withdraw because of low feelings and we’ll sustain those feelings. Eat when we’re not hungry or “comfort eat” to control them, and we’ll sustain our feelings. Eat when we’re not hungry and our perceived need to control uncomfortable feelings.

By contrast whenever we act powerfully, despite any uncomfortable feelings, we undermine limiting beliefs and create a more powerful mindset. The key to acting powerfully is to accept any uncomfortable feelings that we believe are preventing us from acting powerfully. We can accept uncomfortable feelings simply by reminding ourselves that feelings never harm us and almost all feelings are “bearable”. Then act powerfully anyway.

“Accept the feeling, choose the action” is a highly effective psychological tool to break through and unwind limiting feelings. Accepting anxiety speaking to groups (stop resisting it and let it be there) while creating opportunities to speak to groups, like joining Toastmasters, will unwind the limiting beliefs driving our anxiety and replace them with more powerful beliefs. Accepting low feelings (stop resisting them and let them be there) while fully engaging with life, will unwind the limiting beliefs driving the low feelings and replace them with more powerful beliefs.

Accepting any uncomfortable feelings (stop resisting them and let them be there) while choosing not to “comfort eat” to control them, will unwind the limiting belief that we mustn’t feel uncomfortable as well as the unconscious beliefs driving the feelings.

If we continue to accept any uncomfortable feelings, and act powerfully despite those feelings, we’ll create a positive spiral that results from repeatedly undermining limiting beliefs and reinforcing positive beliefs. Powerful behaviour in one area of our lives further promotes positive beliefs and behaviour in other areas. Our self-esteem also rises, further contributing to the positive spiral.

The key to becoming powerful? Yes, read inspirational books. But far more importantly identify limitations in the way you behave in your life. Accept any feelings or unproductive desires that may be driving those behaviours. Then act powerfully and so unwind the limiting beliefs that are driving the uncomfortable feelings and limiting behaviours.

If you have any limiting behaviours in areas such as health, weight, fitness, eating habits, confidence, abilities, aspirations or relationships, make up your mind to “accept the feeling, choose the action” and so change those behaviours. Understand this isn’t just to gain benefits in the particular area you’re choosing to change. It also generates a positive spiral that will build a powerful mindset in all areas of your life.

I personally made this choice over 25 years ago. Within a few months my mindset was unrecognisable. It had changed from the mediocre side of “ordinary” to “powerful”. My life changed from uninspiring to amazing and has remained there ever since. I strongly recommend you do the same.

about the author

Graham W Price is a chartered member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and an accredited member of the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP). He is the developer of Acceptance-Action Therapy and its personal development equivalent, Positive Mind Training. He offers free webinars called “Acceptance Training” teaching life skills that attendees use every day for the rest of their lives. His company Abicord has recently teamed up with a well-known wealthy philanthropist who’s so impressed with the training he’s sponsoring a goal to train one billion people in the next five years. See www.abicord.com.
Building Your Portfolio of Evidence

Just as an artist or a model requires a portfolio of their work, so too should office professionals have one demonstrating not only their skills and abilities, but also their contributions and work ethic within their profession. It can also serve as an additional tool when being considered for promotion, seeking a new job, or even asking for a raise!

It should begin with you deciding what your Ethos is towards your profession, coupled with evidence requirements which essentially are those tasks that you have done demonstrating your Ethos. The concept is not rocket science at all, but does require some strategic and creative thinking from your side.

To get you going on the idea, and hopefully inspired, I have outlined some Ethos elements, and provided a summary of the evidence requirements. So here goes!

**Ethos elements:**
- Professionalism
- Communication ability

**Evidence Requirements:**
- Accomplishments
- Awards
- Certifications
- Publications
- Volunteer Work
- Professional Affiliations
- Community Involvement

By gathering these elements and evidence, you can build a compelling portfolio that will showcase your strengths and contributions to your profession.
- Master of time management
- Strategic partnerships
- Resourcefulness
- Champion of change
- Commitment to self development and training
- Lifestyle balance and community activities

Professionalism
Evidence requirements include but are not limited to:
1. Membership of a professional secretarial and administrative association: this shows your commitment and involvement with your profession
2. Work evidence of articles, presentations and email communication examples, such as presentations you may have compiled for a proposal, an article you may have written for a newspaper, in-house magazine or contribution made to a professional body
3. Record of a personal image consultation, indicating that you are aware of your physical image and the message you portray everyday as illustrated by the way you take care of yourself, and dress appropriately for the environment in which you work. It also a great idea to include updated full body-length photographs
4. Commendations, nominations and awards for professional and work ethos conduct

Communication ability
Evidence that you are competent in:
1. The use of MS office; this can include a certification of competency in the use of MS Office coupled with examples
2. Business English and writing skills; certification, courses attended and examples of communications used in the workplace
3. Minute taking and dissemination of information; you can outline the process you follow and provide templates of your meeting correspondences, which should also include minute and agenda layouts etc
4. Document management; a summary of how you manage both eDocuments and hard copy documents and filing and a short summary on why you use the methods you do, is also useful
5. Negotiation skills; provide brief summaries of incidents where you have been required to negotiate – these could include your approach and communication skills to acquire corporate

rates for your organisation, requesting a salary increase, diary management and the reshuffling of events to ensure a win-win situation etc

A master of time management
Evidenced by:
1. The completion of a time management training opportunity
2. A short essay or PowerPoint diagram on how you manage your own personal time
3. Evidence on how you manage your manager’s diary and examples of how you manage your manager’s time keeping

Strategic partnership
Evidenced by:
1. An analysis of the strategic contribution you make within the business unit in which you work
2. Your department’s strategic goals
3. A description of the strategic contribution you make within your department
4. A list of the seemingly menial tasks you perform to make a difference, and how these small seemingly unimportant tasks impact on your environment if not done.

Resourcefulness
Evidenced by:
1. Examples of your financial prudence; budget control, use of company funds etc.
2. A list of new ideas you have initiated and implemented within your team / department that has made a significant impact on the effective and efficient running of business
3. Results achieved as a result of implementing your ideas / initiatives.
4. Proactive action you have taken, or take to be a strategic partner in your manager’s work day.
5. Initiatives you have created within your organisation that add value.

A champion of change
Evidenced by:
1. A description of how you experience change and have helped others embrace it.
2. A short essay on how change has come about in your profession and the challenges you overcome to adapt.

Commitment to training and self development
Evidenced by:
1. A two-page resume
2. Your personal development plan

3. A record of training courses and qualifications obtained
4. An updated self assessment tools and skills matrix
5. An updated job description for your current role, highlighting new initiatives and responsibilities
6. A list of books read, accompanied by a brief summary of key learning elements gained.
7. Your most recent and updated resume and sample cover letter
8. Copies of certificates / diplomas / degrees

Lifestyle balance and community activities
Evidence any outside interests you may have as a one-pager! Here you can evidence community activities you’re involved in, hobbies you enjoy and sports you participate in.

Branding your portfolio of evidence
Although some people may deny it, looks do count, and a book is judged by its cover. It is important therefore that you choose an A4 binder or good quality PVC file to document your evidence in. Unless you’re in the floral profession, stay away from pretty flowers and funky files and binders.

you have a great full length colour photograph of yourself near the front, after your index page, and please make sure that your photograph displays a professional image of you – so no sunglasses poised in your hair, or beach backgrounds. Keep it slick and professional.

Separate each category by section, and preferably in the order as set out above. Portfolio categories should be neatly indexed and marked, to make it easy to access and view. Stick to one font style. Use colour if you want to, but don’t turn your portfolio into a rainbow meaze!

Your portfolio of evidence should be a “living document”, updated and added to as you progress through your profession, experiencing new challenges, overcoming obstacles and continuing in your pursuance of excellence.

about the author
Cathy Harris is an Executive PA at Discovery Life. Nominated SA National Office Professional of the Year in 2006, she drives various initiatives which include the Discovery Centre of Excellence, the OPSA Institute of Learning, assessment of professional designation applications and heads up the OPSA National Award committee. Cathy was instrumental in initiating the National Secretary of the Year Award for Mauritius and assisted in the formation of their Professional Association. Other initiatives include Discovery PA workshops, external seminars and symposium facilitations, PA Forum facilitation and also compiling secretarial workbooks aligned to workshops and mentoring programs. Cathy travels internationally, inspiring excellence and sharing her passion for her profession of 34 years. Tel +44 (845) 707626 or visit www.discovery.co.za.
Why Use a Coaching Approach as a Line Manager?

Coaching cultures
The use of coaching within organisations, whether formally (through structured internal or external coaching arrangements) or informally, as an element of a style of conversation, is becoming recognised as a powerful tool for individual and organisational development. Organisations are increasingly seeking to develop “coaching cultures”.

What is coaching?
Coaching is used as an approach to enable individuals and teams to move forward in a certain direction through generating greater awareness, responsibility and choice. For example, in a line manager’s informal coaching conversation with a team member, coaching might consist of the manager and team member talking about things the team member wants to change and the line manager helping the team member develop motivation and momentum towards achieving the change. Good coaching is a facilitative process unlocking capability through guiding and questioning rather than teaching and instructing. Thus, the “coachee” takes greater responsibility for the outcome and action resulting from the conversation.

Who can benefit from a coaching approach?
People enlist the services of a coach because they want to improve their situations and achieve goals. They want to learn new ways of thinking and approaching situations, in order to get better results. Common goals might be being more effective and organised at work, gaining confidence in certain situations, or simply relating to other people more effectively. Often, coaching is associated specifically with the talent pipeline or senior managers and directors although from the description above, it can be understood that any team member will benefit.

What is the difference between coaching and managing?
It is not uncommon to hear the term “managing” and “coaching” used interchangeably. Those who understand the difference (that will include you after you read this article) cringe a little inside when this occurs because it is likely they have worked for, or with, a manager who certainly was not a coach, and therefore ineffective. In a nutshell, coaching is a function of managing that every good leader of others must be able to do well.

The term “managing” refers to the job of overseeing the work of others. The responsibilities of a manager typically include, but are not limited to, the following:
- On-boarding and orienting new employees
- Conducting meetings
- Delegating tasks and assignments
- Giving feedback
- Monitoring progress and performance
- Making decisions
- Dealing with conflicts

The term “coaching” refers to a two-way communication process between members of the organisation (leaders to team members, peers to peers, team members to leaders) aimed at influencing and developing the employees’ skills, motivation, attitude, judgement or ability to perform, and the willingness to contribute to an organisation’s goals.

Unfortunately, too many managers fall short of success because they focus on the task and bottom line results, overlooking the fact that results are best achieved through developing and inspiring others to achieve those results. While achieving results through others is a challenging task, organisations cannot grow and compete if their managers don’t talk to people about their performance and contribution to the organisation. With regular and skillful coaching, managers can fulfil their responsibility to deliver:
- Enhanced performance and improved productivity
- A work environment where people are highly engaged
- A culture of trust within the organisation

Once a manager learns how to think, talk, and act like a coach, the “coaching process” not only becomes second nature to the coach but changes attitudes and behaviours of his or her team members.

What are the core skills of coaching?
A coaching approach uses a combination of observation, questioning, listening and feedback to create a conversation rich in insight and learning. For the coachee, they will experience a focus and attention that will enable them to develop a greater awareness and appreciation of their own circumstances. In addition, they will also create new ways to resolve issues, produce better results and generally achieve goals more easily.

Kate Hesk has coached and trained many and varied clients including directors, Managing Directors and leaders at all levels in small and large organisations by utilising a combination of hard, sophisticated business skills and a personable and approachable style. Her most recent corporate role was as General Manager where she introduced numerous self and leadership programmes to inspire and develop individuals within her teams to achieve their personal and business goals. Kate combines her academic background with the skills gained through twenty years of sales, marketing and general management in blue chip organisations, including Johnson and Johnson and Merck and Co, and the softer skills of coaching. In addition to her first degree, Kate holds an MBA from Henley Management College, a Masters in Coaching and is a member of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. Kate is also accredited to facilitate MBTI feedback. kate@thesperformancecoach.com Email: kate@thesperformancecoach.com
Subject Line, Not Surprise Line
How to create better email subject lines that get your emails opened...

I have a good friend in Canada who sends me emails about things he finds interesting, and he always types “memo” in the subject line. That’s all – just “memo”. I have no idea whether there was a flash mob of sharks off the coast of Australia or aliens landed in New Zealand or a penguin swam to Singapore. It’s frustrating, but also a tiny bit exciting because it’s a surprise that I won’t see until I open the email.

While surprises might be fun at home in personal emails, they aren’t much fun at work. You prioritise your work and schedule your day in order to be efficient and productive. If you have to open every single email you receive so you can determine its contents, it can really make a mess of your schedule.

How do I decide what to write?
To keep confusion and misunderstanding to a minimum, you should always think seriously about what you put in your subject lines. Ask yourself, “How can I create a subject line so my audience understands the importance of the contents right away?”

Most business emails will require clarity and polish, with a little emphasis on “capturing” your reader’s interest. For example, the subject line of a cover email for a job application probably shouldn’t be too cute or funny. However, a marketing email to clients might actually get more attention with a cute or funny subject line. It still needs to convey information, but it can be done in a captivating way.

Let’s look at some examples
The basic information you need to include in a subject line depends on your topic and what your audience needs to know. You might also think about how you want your audience to react as well. Let’s look at some examples and determine how to get the subject across clearly:

1. Cover email for a job application. The audience will probably be a human resource employee, so you know they are getting stacks of applications for many different jobs. You want them to know which job and why you are writing. A possible subject line might be, Application for Job 030730 (Marketing Manager). The recipient will be relieved to have all the needed information right there.

2. Email asking for time off. The audience is your boss so you want to get to the point quickly. Perhaps you would write, Request for time off on 4 Jan 2012. It gives her all the information she needs to know how important the email is.

3. Request for document review from the editor. Since your audience is a co-worker, you still want to keep the subject line professional, but it can be a bit less formal. Perhaps Draft procedure for review is appropriate. It’s friendly yet informative.

4. Meeting notes. Since this email will likely go to both co-workers and the boss, you want to maintain that very professional attitude. You need to convey the contents clearly and quickly: Minutes from staff meeting 3 Sept 2011. Not only does it let the recipient know that these are minutes, but it lets them know what meeting and when it was held.

5. Marketing email to a group of clients. This type of subject line can be fun because you want your audience – the group of clients – to get excited about what’s in the email. You want them curious and ready to be pleasantly surprised. Let’s say your new software will help reduce paperwork, You might write, Is your office a zoo? Or if you are promoting sales of a new method of accounting, your subject line could be, Let the numbers crunch themselves!

The key to creating better email subject lines is to decide what needs to be conveyed and know how you want your audience to react. With these two pieces of information, you can create subject lines that save people time, reduce misunderstandings and confusion, and of course pique their interest. After all, some surprises are nice, but not if they spend all day long in your email inbox!

about the author
Originally from Sheffield, Shirley Taylor lives in Singapore. She is a popular speaker, trainer and author of 12 successful books on email, communication and business writing skills. Her bestselling book Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents seventh edition has sold over half a million copies all over the world. She’s just launched her wonderfully interactive virtual training program “Business Writing that Works”. Find out more at www.ShirleyTaylorVT.com.
Social Media and the Job-hunter

According to research carried out by the company I work for, Randstad Business Support, just two in 10 job candidates tailor their LinkedIn profile when going for new jobs. But more than three-fifths remember to make their CV relevant for specific posts. Three-quarters of applicants are comfortable with future employers viewing their online profiles.

Despite the increased involvement of social media websites such as LinkedIn in the job-hunting process, candidates are forgetting to tailor their online profiles when applying for jobs.

Its research found that while more than three-fifths of workers are mindful of the need to adapt their CV before applying for specific roles, less than two in 10 remember to update their LinkedIn profile, meaning there may be discrepancies between the two.

A third of job hopefuls don’t refresh their CV or their LinkedIn profile, hoping the generic information included within will be enough to land them a new role.

Social media – and LinkedIn in particular – has made looking for new opportunities easier for those seeking a fresh challenge, but it needs to be harnessed in the right way to be of maximum use to the individual. You wouldn’t send a group email attaching your CV to multiple different job applications, so similarly you need to be careful that your LinkedIn profile isn’t accidentally doing the same thing.

With jobs in retail, office support, marketing and sales there are likely to be transferable skills between roles, but it is still vitally important to show you are interested in a particular role by demonstrating the specific traits that make you suitable for it. To this end, it is actually more advisable to adopt a “less is more” approach to your LinkedIn page and populate it with pretty basic information rather than risk over-sharing and counterintuitively ruling yourself out of a desired role.

Social media skeletons

While three-quarters of employees say they are comfortable with future employers viewing their social media profiles, 15% admit it is a “little worry” and a further 5% concede it is a “big concern”. Almost half (45%) are confident future employers would still hire them if their online interactions were disclosed, while just 9% thought this would preclude them from a new role. Interestingly, 46% weren’t sure if their social media presence would preclude them from future opportunities, meaning employees may not be entirely confident on what content is appropriate or what prospective employers might be judging them on.

Putting the shoe on the other foot, 26% admitted conducting cursory Google searches of potential staff members and 14% would look them up on LinkedIn. A comprehensive 88% of those polled said they wouldn’t be deterred by a candidate having no social media presence, while just 4% cited it as a deal-breaker. Of those that would be dissuaded, three-fifths admitted they were worried the individual would have something to hide and more than a quarter said it showed signs of being out of touch.

People seem generally comfortable about current and potential employers being able to see their online activity and, at present, businesses don’t seem unduly concerned whether workers use social media or not, but for some professions it can be an important tool. For individuals in marketing for example, shrewd use of social platforms shows employees are up to speed with not only how to “market” themselves but with the latest technology that could prove beneficial in their day jobs.

It is an individual choice whether or not to be on social media, but given its use is so prevalent nowadays, it may raise suspicions in some quarters if you have no presence at all. However, if it is not directly relevant to your profession, then employers are ultimately unlikely to hold it against you if you’re not a keen Facebooker or a diligent Tweeter. At the other extreme, oversharing some information such as incriminating pictures or inappropriate content may count against you.

Keeping it fresh

Whatever profession you work in, whether it be retail, sales or a general office role, it can be important to ensure your LinkedIn profile is up to date, is relevant for the role you’re applying for and doesn’t contradict your CV. It also pays to ensure that you try and steer clear of the hackneyed clichés that plague so many job applications. A more detailed profile leaves you potentially exposed to software that some employers use to “sweep” applications for overused words or phrases. LinkedIn itself recently published a list of the most commonly-used terms on the site which included “motivated”, “creative”, “enthusiastic”, and “passionate”.

Whether you use a traditional CV or apply for roles online using your LinkedIn profile, some of the same rules still apply. Not only do you want to make sure you’ve conducted sufficient research on the organisation and role by demonstrating your specific experience and suitability, but you want to distance yourself from the pack by steering clear of using the same tired buzzwords and phrases. It can be tempting to opt for the same traditional expressions, but a bit of extra thought can help your application stand out from the competition.

About the author

Ruth Jacobs is Managing Director of Randstad Business Support, an arm of the global recruitment provider that focuses on sales, customer service and office support roles. Ruth is a highly experienced senior manager with almost 20 years of leadership and operational management expertise and joined Randstad in 2004.
Preparing for Retirement

The period leading up to retirement can be one of the most stressful times of our lives and is now widely recognised as a time of greater risk of stress-related illnesses such as stroke, heart disease and depression.

Consumers’ Association Which? state the number of people in the UK who work beyond state pension age (currently 65 for men and 62 for women) is 1.4 million, up from 753,000 in 1993 and set to continue to rise steadily. Retirement is no longer stereotypically about hanging up your working gloves for good and living a sedentary lifestyle, particularly when your financial status is a cause for concern. I believe proper preparation before we retire is needed to reduce our risk of stress-related illnesses.

Not having enough savings in the pot is possibly one of the biggest fears people have about retirement. The government recently warned that astonishingly nearly 12 million people are failing to save enough for their retirement so it is unsurprising that so many are feeling the pressures of not having enough income to live off and are naturally concerned about what happens when the money dries up completely. Financial influences such as the rising cost of living, unpaid debts and false expectations all create unhealthy levels of anxiety and stress.

A certain amount of stress hormones such as cortisol is good for us because it keeps us on our toes, but when levels are high for a long period of time it can negatively affect our short-term memory and more. Research shows that stress is one of the factors to consider in healthy ageing and it is one that we have some control over. It is, therefore, logical that if we try to decrease our anxiety and stress levels we will see an improvement in our cognitive processing including short-term memory.

Except for the lucky few, retirement doesn’t have the same connotation of being a time when we can at last relax and focus on ourselves as in days gone by, because of the added pressures we face today. We worry more about our finances. We are constantly battling against a poor image of ageing these days. Because we don’t have a close-knit community anymore we also are deeply concerned about losing our work friendships and status.

More pre-retirement preparation is needed to ease us into what should be some of the best years of our life rather than a possible vortex of stress, anxiety and consequent health problems.

5 tips on how to prepare for retirement

1 Start saving
If you haven’t already started saving, it’s never too late to start! However much you decide to save per month it’s worth having a goal to work towards and to increase your instalments when you can pre-retirement.

2 Be a coach or mentor
By becoming a coach or mentor pre-retirement, you can put your experience and skills to good use and meet a variety of people from all walks of life along the way. It is a great way to wind up your working career with huge satisfaction.

3 Work out your budget
Once you have a rough idea as to what your retirement income is going to be, you can start working out how your spending is going to change according to your budget. If you choose to work beyond State Pension age, it is possible to defer your claim and not receive your State Pension alongside your earnings. This is a good way of safekeeping your funds for a time when you really need it.

4 Retire happy
Rather than worrying about loss of status and how you are going to fill the hours when you retire, write a long list of all the things you want to do when you retire – whether that is travel, read all of Thomas Hardy’s books because you always vowed you would, or take up fly-fishing! Whatever is on there, the list should be all about you.

5 Get healthy
It is really important to stay fit and healthy when you retire. Plan to exercise regularly. Join a pilates class or start a walking club or, yes, get those ancient golf clubs out that you never really used. This is your time so use it wisely to have a healthy body and mind.

about the author

Dr Lynda Shaw is a registered chartered psychologist with the British Psychological Society and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine as well as an entrepreneur and author. Lynda has lectured in Psychology and Neuroscience at Brunel University and conducted research on brain function and impairment, specialising in consciousness, emotion and the effects of ageing. A hugely popular speaker with an innovative, practical and immediately applicable approach, Lynda offers insights into a variety of relevant and often controversial issues. www.drlyndashaw.com. For information about the Which? report, visit www.which.co.uk/money/retirement/guides/i-want-to-carry-on-working-in-retirement/
AUSTRALIA
Australian Institute of Office Professionals (AIOP)
www.aiop.com.au
Executive Assistant Network (EAN)
www.execassist.com.au

BAHAMAS
IAAP Chapter
www.iaapbahamas.com

BARBADOS
Barbados Association of Office Professionals (BAOP)
www.baop.org

BELGIUM
Association Légéoise des Secrétaires et Assistante(s) de Direction (ALISAD)
www.alisad.be

BRAZIL
Brazil’s National Federation of Secretaries (FENASSEC)
www.fenassec.com.br

Sindicato das Secretarias do Estado de Sao Paulo (SINSESP)
www.sinseop.com.br

CANADA
adminassist.ca
www.adminassist.ca

Association of Administrative Assistants (AAA)

Federation Des Secrétaires Professionnelles du Quebec (FSPQ)
The Social Network for Virtual Assistants
www.ranetworking.com

CAPE VERDE
Association Professional Secretariat in Cape Verde (APSCV)
www.apscv.cv

CARIBBEAN
Caribbean Association of Secretaries & Administrative Professionals (CASAP)
www.casap-online.org

EUROPE (ALL COUNTRIES)
European Management Assistants (EUMA)
www.euma.org

CARIBBEAN

FRANCE
Cercle des Assistantes et Secrétaires (CLAS)
www.cielso94-32.free.fr

GERMANY
Bundesverband Sekretariat und Büromanagement e.V. (BbB)
www.bsb-office.de

HONG KONG
Hong Kong Association of Secretaries & Administrative Professionals (HKASAP)

INDIA
Indian Association of Secretaries & Administrative Professionals (IASAP)
www.iasap.org

INDONESIA
Ikatan Sekretaris Indonesia (ISI)
www.isi-handung.com

ITALY
AssistenteDirezione.it
www.assistenteDirezione.it

MACSE Italia - Manager Assistant
Carriera Sviluppo Evoluzione
www.macsetal.it

ManagementAssistant.it
www.managementassistant.it

Secretary.IT Manager
www.secretary.it

JAMAICA
Jamaica Association of Secretaries & Administrative Professionals (JASAP)
www.jasap-online.org

JAPAN
Japan Office Professional Alliance (JOPA)
www.jopa-hq.org

Japan Secretaries Association (JSA)
www.bisho-kyokai.or.jp/index-e.html

MALAYSIA
Malaysian Association of Professional Secretaries & Administrators (MAPSA)
www.mapsa-malaysia.com

MOZAMBIQUE
Association of Secretaries of Mozambique
www.asosmo.co.mz

NETHERLANDS
Nederlandse Vereniging van Directiesecretaires (NVd)
www.wisdirectie.nl

NEW ZEALAND
Association of Administrative Professionals New Zealand Inc (AAPNZ)
www.aapnz.org.nz

PAKISTAN
Distinguished Secretaries’ Society of Pakistan (DSSP)
www.dosp.org

PHILIPPINES
Philippine Association of Secretaries & Administrative Professionals Inc
www.philsecretaries.org

PORTUGAL
Associação de Secretárias Profissionais Portuguesas (ASP)
www.asp-secretarias.pt

SINGAPORE
Singapore Association of Administrative Professionals (SAAP)
www.saap.org.sg

SLOVENIA
Zveza klubov tajnic in poslovnih sekretarjev
www.zveza-tajnic.si

SOUTH AFRICA
Association for Office Professionals of South Africa (OFPSA)
www.ofpsa.org.za

IAAP Johannesburg Chapter
www.iaap-johannesburg.org/johannesburg

Professional Association for Secretaries & Administrative Assistants (PAFSA)
www.pafsa.ath.cx

SPAIN
Asociacion del Secretariado Profesional de Aragon (ASPA)
www.asparagon.com

Asociacion del Secretariado Profesional de Cantabria (ASECAN)
www.asecan.net

Secretariat i Empresa (SEiEM)
www.secretariatempresa.blogspot.com

Asociación del Secretariado Profesional de Madrid (ASPM)
www.aspm.es

SRI LANKA
Sri Lanka Association of Administrative & Professional Secretaries (SLAAPS)
www.slaapsonline.com

SWEDEN
Chefssekretariarna Stockholm
www.cssn.se

TAIWAN
The Professional Secretaries Association of the Republic of China
www.chinesesecretary.org.tw

THAILAND
Women Secretaries Association of Thailand (WSAT)
www.secretarythailand.org

TURKS AND CAICOS
Turks & Caicos Association of Office Professionals (TCAOP)
www.tcoffopprofessional.org

UGANDA
National Association of Secretaries & Administrators (NASAP)
www.nasap-uganda.org

UNITED KINGDOM
Association of Personal Assistants (APA)
www.apaprofessional.com

Association of Celebrity Assistants
www.aca-uk.com

Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators & Receptionists (AMSPAR)
www.amspar.com

Association of Secretaries
www.association.co.uk

British Society of Medical Secretaries & Administrators (BSMSA)
www.bsmsa.org.uk

Global PA Network
www.globalpanetwork.com

Institute of Agricultural Secretaries & Administrators (Ia&GA)
www.iagga.co.uk

Institute of Administrative Management (IAM)
www.institute.org

International Association of Virtual Assistants
www.inava.org

Institute of Professional Administrators (IPA)
www.inprad.org

London PA Network
www.london-pa-network.org

National Association of Administrative Staff in Schools & Colleges (NAASSC)
www.voiceheurton.org.uk

PA-Assist.com
www.pa-assist.com

Society of Virtual Assistants (SVA)
www.societyoffirstclassassistants.co.uk

UNITED STATES
American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
www.aasa.org

American Society of Administrative Professionals (ASAP)
www.asaprg.org

Association of Celebrity Personal Assistants (ACP)
Los Angeles
www.acpa-la.com

Association for Healthcare Administrative Professionals (AHCAP)
www.ahcap.org

Association of Executive & Administrative Professionals (AEEP)
www.thbnap.com

Association of Professional Office Managers (APOM)
www.apomonline.org

Coaches, Authors, Speakers Professional Assistants Association
www.caapaa.com

IAAP-International Association of Administrative Professionals
www.iaap-hq.org

Legal Secretaries International Inc
www.legalsecretaries.org

National Association for Legal Assistants
www.nala.org

National Association for Legal Secretaries
www.nals.org

New York Celebrity Assistants (NYCA)
www.nycelebrityassistants.com

The International Virtual Assistants Association (IVAA)
www.ivaa.org

The Office Professional
www.theofficeprofessional.com

The Virtual Assistant Chamber of Commerce
www.virtualassistantnetworking.com

Virtual Association for Administrative Professionals
www.thevnap.com

URUGUAY
Asociacion de Secretarias del Uruguay (ADESU)
www.aedeus.org.uy

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