



Pippa's Advice on How Executives should handle their Assistants

I've been a PA for years now. I love it and, as my experience and pay packet grow so does my sense of fulfilment. I realise how lucky I am to have a job I enjoy, so maybe the best piece of advice I can ever give is this. Find a job you're good at. The rest will follow.

Of course, making a career out of assisting someone isn't for everyone. Many people would far prefer to be the person who needs the assistance; though hand on heart, personally I wouldn't. I see first-hand the stresses an executive role brings with it. The saying 'there's no such thing as a free lunch' is true. These people don't get paid the big bucks for having an easy time of it I can assure you.

I know this because these days I'm an 'Executive Assistant' meaning the people I work for are inevitably powerful, highly paid individuals. Being an EA means increased responsibility, more decision making and more authority. Corporate executives have intense schedules that need careful management, they have huge responsibility (and therefore pressure) and no time to be sorting out personal admin (buying presents, booking travel, going to the loo, checking Facebook, picking their noses) let alone organising everything that goes into ensuring the smooth running of their working weeks. Their time is valuable (particularly when you work out their hourly rate) and allotted accordingly – meetings, lunches, early morning personal trainer sessions, work events, board meetings, breakfast meetings, dinners and more meetings; every minute of every working day is accounted for and expected to 'bring value' to whichever company they work for. This means they simply *have* to delegate to 'us' and be able to trust that everything will happen at the right place, at the right time with the right people with minimum headaches along the way.

So, today I thought I would write about how *they* can get the best out of *us*. Reverse psychology if you like. After all, if an executive doesn't know how to utilise their assistant effectively the relationship might never work. If they refuse to delegate, or have a tendency to micro manage it'll be up to them to book a first class train ticket to Sheffield which arrives in just enough time to be able to check into the hotel first and have a briefing before a 2.30 meeting. If they spend their time sorting out all that, plus the accommodation, plus making sure everyone is attending etc then very soon the wheels are going to fall off and you're going to feel redundant and unappreciated.

As I've always said, this job is only as good as the person you work for and it's vital that the relationship is as healthy, functional and close as possible.

So, here we go. For anyone who aspires to be a career PA/EA this is how it needs to be.....

1. A Partnership

The executive is your boss. That hierarchy is obvious and clear for all to understand. However, if your boss doesn't respect and trust you, like any important relationship it simply won't work. As an assistant you are a gatekeeper and in order to be able to do your job properly you need to be privy to the minutiae of their lives.

After all, it's you they'll need to tell if time off is required for a medical appointment for example. It's you they'll be relying on to make sure you only convey what's happening to the appropriate people. It's you they'll be relying on to book travel arrangements, at times that most suit them. They need to know that you'll put certain people through on the phone, even if they're in the middle of a meeting if they need to speak to them as a matter of urgency. On the flipside they also need to feel confident that you'll keep people at bay if they don't have time for them at that particular point. They need to rely on you for discretion. Therefore they have no choice but to treat you as a partner in so many respects. You need to know about their likes, dislikes, secrets, personal lives, foibles and office politics. You're not psychic (at least I'm assuming you're not) and a smart boss will understand that making sure their assistant is fully briefed will benefit them greatly and allow

you to perform well. This is why some execs insist on their EA being present during meetings. This negates needing to relay information back and allows the EA to make decisions without needing to consult all the time because they have the full picture. Executives who expect their EA's to get approval every time they need to make a decision are wasting everyone's time. This is what I mean by the relationship needing to be a true partnership.

All of the above requires a certain amount of luck and chemistry which is why when an Executive finds an assistant who totally 'gets them' and who makes their life run smoothly they can become very dependent and will pay accordingly.

By the same token I can remember one CEO shelling out top dollar to pay for a highly experienced EA only to end up micro managing them and essentially treating them like a secretary (different job altogether) until the EA felt so frustrated and miserable he left for pastures new as soon as he was able. If you're good you'll be in demand. We need 'them' but they need 'us' too.

2. Communication

Without good communication from your boss you literally will not be able to do your job to the best of your ability. If it doesn't happen you are within your rights to feel upset and I advise you to address the issue as soon as you are able. Schedule in face to face time once a day, even if it's just for ten minutes, or insist upon a daily update email – whatever it takes. (Walkie talkies...??)

3. Priority

As the relationship between assistant and boss progresses, the unwritten rule needs to be that they take your calls, and reply to your emails as a matter of urgency. In return you need to demonstrate good judgment. If you're bothering your boss with questions that could wait (would you like steak at Thursday's work dinner, chicken or the vegetarian option?) or relay information that at that point it's not necessary to know (your husband called. He said it was nothing important and that he'd call you later) and you are going to lose that privilege. If however your boss can work out that when you do call or email it's in their best interest to get back to you ASAP they will soon learn to make you the priority.

4. Likeability

There's nothing you can really do about this one. To an extent you'll either be compatible with your boss, or you won't. It's a bit like online dating – everything can sound great on paper but if that mystery chemistry isn't there you're never going to be the best of friends. Of course, in a working relationship it's not friendship you're after but there does need to be a certain amount of mutual respect and if you like each other there's no doubt the job will be more satisfying and enjoyable.

So there you have it fellow PA's. I hope that's helped and I'll be back soon enough with more tips. In the meantime feel free to follow me on Twitter @Pippablog

See you soon,

Love Pippa.