



## Pippa's advice on... Questions to ask a New Boss

Hello my fellow PA's. I hope this finds you well and enjoying life. I think it's fair to say we've definitely had the last dregs of what has been a fairly prolonged Indian summer. In fact, as the leaves fall from the trees, the temperature drops and we head towards winter, this time of year often feels more like New Year than New Year itself!

Certainly my thoughts have turned to clearing out my cupboards, choosing soup over salad, buying a new winter coat and perhaps acquiring some smart boots or shoes to go with it. Though maybe I'm feeling particularly inspired to get shipshape because I'm about to start a new job (hence justifiable clothes buying....).

Of course, a new job means a new boss and along with a streamlined wardrobe comes a strong sense of determination to do really well in my latest role.

So, today I thought I'd try and write something helpful for anybody else who has a new boss to ingratiate themselves with. Contracts are often temporary these days meaning new starts are increasingly frequent for people in our line of work. So, even if this isn't relevant to you right now, it may come in handy at a later date.

Of course we are used to the notion of *answering* questions during interviews, but once hired what should we be finding out from our new employers and asking them?

Here follow some suggestions. Though perhaps don't ask them all at once! I'm not suggesting you arrive on day one, march round to your boss' side of the desk, thrust an angle poise lamp in their face, shining it directly into their startled eyes before proceeding to interrogate them with a quick-fire round of non-negotiable questions. What I am saying is to at least consider asking them at some point because finding out the answers will help you in various different ways. If possible you can drip feed them in, as and when it feels appropriate, the hope being that you will come to understand the person you're working for better and therefore be able to be exactly the kind of PA they're after. Ready? Here comes question number 1.....

### What is your life like outside work?

Ok, with this first one, please don't take it at face value. It would be a bit of a strange question to ask outright on day one, particularly seeing as at this stage any boss would be within their rights to reply 'None of your business.' What I'm trying to convey however, is that by understanding what your boss' home life entails you will immediately get a sense of how that person is likely to operate.

For instance, is your boss a devoted wife or husband? If the answer is yes then make sure you get to know their spouse and try to make a great impression on them too. Their opinion will count!

Is your boss a parent? If so it might be important to them to try to get home at a reasonable hour wherever possible. Single? Maybe their social diary will reflect this. In one way or another every boss's personal situation affects their working life so, the sooner you have some understanding of it, the better.

### How do you prefer to receive information?

This is a really important thing to suss out as soon as you are able. And it's a question they will appreciate you asking if they haven't explained the answer already. Some bosses want to be CC'ed in on absolutely everything as and when it's dealt with. Others prefer to receive less in their inboxes and to receive some

form of update at the end of each working day instead. A precis, if you like of what you've been up to. Others I've worked for place far more value on regular face to face catch ups than constantly communicating by email. There's no right or wrong of course, just different ways people like to operate.

### What are your short term and long term objectives?

You are going to be a far more useful and effective PA if you have some sense of your bosses goals and visions. If you know what they are aiming for you will be a support and someone they can talk to, confident in the knowledge that you care whether they succeed or not.

### Have you worked with a personal assistant before and if so what did you value in your assistant?

You are your own person of course but it doesn't do any harm to know what kind of things are going to ingratiate you the most. If you ask this question and they say 'my last assistant was always on time and kept a very tidy desk' you know straight away that this is something to live up to. If however, they cite loyalty or a keen sense of initiative, again you know these are traits which are really valued. Of course if you are the first assistant your boss has ever had it will be up to you to help work out what their expectations are, drawing upon your own previous experience to help.

### Apart from the specific tasks outlined on my job description are there any 'informal' tasks you would like me to take on such as organising team socials etc?

This might be a question to save until you have got to grips with the basics and are confident you can cope with your workload. Some bosses expect their PA's to perform more personal tasks such as collecting their dry cleaning for example. Some are very respectful and show appreciation for everything their PA does, others don't. However, if you have a good relationship with your boss you might find you want to take on extra work in order to make yourself utterly invaluable so that you're fully supporting your boss in every area.

### What decisions can I make independently and which must I absolutely seek approval for?

This is a fairly crucial question to know the answer to in order to avoid any awkward situations. Most bosses want you to be pro- active but sometimes the trust needs to be built up slowly before you go headlong into making decisions without checking first. Having said that, other bosses want to be consulted as little as possible and prefer you to shelter them from as much as you are able. But, if you are working for a more controlling type this will be the worst thing you can do, so this really is a good question to discover the answer to.

### Do you see my role as gatekeeper and if so how vigorously do you want me to protect your time?

Similarly to the last point the answer to this one will vary enormously. It also goes without saying that as time goes by you will become more in tune with who's who, who your boss will always want to speak to and who they might prefer to avoid!

### Why did you hire me?

You don't really need to know this; it's just nice to know. You will have got the job for a reason and finding out what that reason was is going to be A/interesting and B/helpful so you can make sure you live up to expectation.

## How do you take your tea and coffee?

Well, let's face it everyone needs a cuppa made for them occasionally so if you can learn just how they like it, it will certainly be appreciated. And, all being well, it won't be long before they'll be making you a thank you brew too.

Good luck!

Love, Pippa x