



## Pippa's guide on... How to Make your Executive Happy

Hello fellow PA's.

Are you all well and enjoying this rather 'dramatic in terms of news' summer? I hope you have some holiday to look forward to and that the sunshine has warmed your bones during at least one or two of your lunch breaks.

I'm a huge fan of a proper lunch break by the way. Plenty of studies show that if you have a proper break during the day (and by that I don't mean a snatched sandwich, stuffed in your mouth at your desk over a quick glance at Facebook), your performance will be far more effective overall. In fact, if you never stop and don't schedule in the odd 'proper' rest/break, you will end up becoming totally wired. Of course, the culture of working endlessly has become common practice but that doesn't mean it's healthy. Still, this is all for another time perhaps, for what I want to focus on today is something I was musing on over a salad and a cappuccino in a nice, sunny square one lunchtime last week during one of my most pleasant breaks.

You see, over the years, I've been lucky enough to have assisted various different individuals, all of whom have made the job of assisting them a totally unique experience. I've said this many times before in this column but the job of assisting someone is only as good or bad as the person you work for. Like any partnership, if you find someone you gel with, who appreciates you and makes you feel happy, then that relationship is worth working at and nurturing. It takes effort on both sides of course but you will get back what you put in.

So today I thought I would give you a few tips on how to make your executive happy, because if they're happy, you're happy. And if you're happy you'll be effective and then pretty soon you'll become invaluable. The moment you become indispensable to your employer is the point when things can get really good. So here we go, a few tips on how to keep your boss thinking you are the best thing since sliced bread and then some.

### 1. Stay Calm

When it comes to temperament, no two bosses are ever the same. I've worked for very dynamic individuals who remain utterly unruffled in every situation and are able to appear in control the majority of the time. I have also encountered bosses who at times were so affected by 'executive' stress you could practically see the steam pouring from their ears. But no matter whom you work for they will always appreciate having an assistant who is a calming influence. It is always going to be preferable for them to be around someone who is able to mollify and pacify as opposed to heighten already stressful moments by panicking and becoming totally neurotic at the drop of a hat. Of course everyone including me feels a bit stressed or overwhelmed sometimes but I have learned to mask these feelings in front of my boss. No one wants a drama queen assisting them. It is about 'them' not 'you' so appearing calm and in control helps contain a situation. If your boss looks across the office and spies you having an utter meltdown at your desk it simply won't help inspire confidence. If a meltdown or a rant is absolutely required though I'm not suggesting you keep it all in and risk exploding, I'm merely saying it might be better to have your outburst away from your boss.

### 2. Don't Make Them Have To Check

A great assistant will soon have their boss feeling confident that they only need to say something once and it will get taken care of. This is one of the most wonderful traits a PA can have as your boss has enough to think about without having to dedicate loads of their time and headspace to having to check up on and remind you to do things all the time. Admittedly this trust might take a while to earn but the sooner you can reassure them that you are on top of things the better. Even if this means doing an 'update' email occasionally to say that you haven't forgotten X, Y or Z, it's just that A,B and C have taken priority.

Of course, the only way to ensure that things don't ever get forgotten about is to write everything down somewhere. Otherwise mistakes inevitably will happen and your boss will end up chasing things which in turn doesn't instil faith that you are on top of everything. That said it is vital that all emails get replied to on your boss' behalf. Stay on top of the smaller details and the larger matters will be easier to cope with. You represent your boss to a large degree, being often the first point of contact for them, so being efficient reflects well on them. Therefore the opposite is true too.

### 3. Never Promise The Earth

It will stand you in great stead if now and again you can over deliver on something. From time to time your boss will set you a task which they will appreciate is challenging yet if from the outset you have already said *'don't worry about this one, won't be a problem for me at all. In fact, consider it done'* and then you run into difficulties and can't deliver, you will only disappoint. If however, you accept the task and then go back to them having surpassed expectations you will have earned yourself major brownie points.

A great example of this is something like the Christmas Party. This is a task I have been given a few times to sort out, and it's a big one. Finding the right venue then ensuring everyone has a great time, on budget and without any catastrophes is no mean feat. So, if your boss approaches you a few months in advance and asks if you'll take on the task, it's in your best interests not to say *'Leave it with me, it'll be the best party you've ever been to. Think Ibiza closing parties crossed with a black tie dinner at Buck Pal with a smattering of Vegas.'* Because if then, come one night in December, your boss is in fact standing by the stationary cupboard, plastic cup of warm Lambrusco in hand, having over indulged on twiglets whilst watching Colin from accounts, Debbie from HR and Dave from the post room humiliate themselves during a slightly unsavoury round of Twister, your words could come back to haunt you.

So, under promise, over deliver.....

### 4. Know When To Challenge And When To Stay Schtum

If your working relationship is a successful one, once you have acquired your boss' respect and trust you will no doubt become someone whose counsel they seek more and more. Having said that, there might also be many days when they simply want to impart instructions, secure in the knowledge that they can leave you to get on with it. Sometimes they might also just bark orders at you with no consultation on anything because they're stressed and simply need things sorted ASAP. On a different kind of day though you may notice them asking what you think about something or wondering how you think something should be handled. If/when this type of thing starts to happen it's a major breakthrough and you should be pleased and give yourself credit for it means they value your opinion. But, as I've said before, being a great PA is also about having the ability to know when to pipe up and when to keep quiet. Be intuitive.

### 5. Solutions Not Problems

You will definitely have heard this one before I'm sure but the old ones are the best and certainly when it comes to being a great assistant being pro- active, practical and adept at finding solutions are some of the most important strengths and skills to possess. For a boss it will be so much more appreciated if when a problem is identified you are able to take it to them having already thought about how to tackle it.

### 6. Know When To Put the Kettle On

Do I even need to say anything more? Sometimes the job is simply about being there for someone. A good assistant will become the person whom that executive can eventually confide in, talk to, gossip with and use as a sounding board, knowing that you are on their side. Be that executive's rock and start to learn the moments when all they need is a cup of tea and to know you're there to support them.

Good luck everyone! Pippa x