

## Pippa's Guide to being Productive

I'm sure you've all heard the saying 'Behind every great man there stands a great woman' but what about 'Behind every great Executive there stands a great PA.' It's a lesser known saying admittedly but that's largely due to the fact I've only just coined it. Plus, it would probably be slightly more accurate if it went 'Behind every great Executive there sits at a nearby desk a fabulously well organised PA without whom their life would implode.'

A slight exaggeration? Possibly. But it is only slight. Successful people in business tend to have got to the top due to a mixture of hard work, being focussed and ambitious..... or having a parent who owns the company (joke...) and the same can be said for the very best PA's or EA's who become their assistants. An incredibly successful, busy person isn't going to hire someone who can't make their lives run as efficiently as possible.

So, what I wanted to talk about today was how to become one of the best at what we do. We will look at how we can keep productivity up and how to take our own initiatives. Let's live to work, not work to live. And here's how –

### **1. Be Pro- Active not just Reactive**

You have a choice. Go into work every day and do the bare minimum. Complete the tasks you've been given by your boss, reply to emails, answer the phone, have lunch, play candy crush in the toilet, get through, go home. And that's fine. Ish. You will have just about done your job but will that kind of routine get you promoted? Will it get you noticed as a rising star? Or have you ear marked as 'one to watch'? I doubt it. All the truly successful PA's I know who have gone on to become well paid and highly respected EA's have always done more than they were asked. They use their initiative. They find ways to make their boss' life easier and if necessary, implement change to how things are normally done if they think it will improve things.

### **2. Do Sweat the Small Stuff.**

As a PA there is always going to be basic admin to do and no one will appreciate if it gets left undone while you try to tackle bigger, possibly more interesting tasks. So, get the basics done quickly, thoroughly and efficiently and that way you create time in your schedule for more ambitious projects and for being pro- active. See above.

### **3. Know your boss**

The best assistants have usually formed a great working relationship with their boss. To the point where they can sense when he or she is in a great mood and therefore open to being approached (or asked for a raise). By the same token a good assistant will be sensitive to those days when the executive is suffering from the inevitable executive stress, or facing personal challenges. At these times a great PA will know who to put through and who maybe your boss would rather avoid. Your boss shouldn't have to say these things. It's up to you to hone your people skills, to be empathetic and to gauge when things can be heaped on and when things are simply best left. In a way it's like a marriage, only with no in- laws, ring,

arguments, anniversaries or cuddles. So not like a marriage at all really.....but you know what I mean.

#### **4. Respect the Diary**

The majority of top PA's/EA's are in charge of their boss' diaries. My tip with this is to look at it as if it's your own and imagine having to live the schedule you are creating.

No matter how in demand or important your boss is, if you overload them they will burn out. They will be exhausted, they will resent you and won't perform at their best. Then they will get ill, have a breakdown, leave the company, you'll be jobless.....you see what I'm trying to say here.

So, if you can see that he or she has an incredibly early start, don't go scheduling in an extra meeting at nine pm that night. Be aware that everyone occasionally needs a night slumped in front of the telly, to pick their nose and have their brain numbed by the Kardashians, or Newsnight, or Coronation Street. ....whatever it is that floats your brain numbing boat basically.

Of course there will be times when their schedule simply has to be packed and arduous but don't make it any harder than it needs to be is the basic message. Be respectful of their time, appreciate they need to have the odd break and that if they've been travelling and are incredibly jet lagged it might be best to avoid booking in late dinner reservations with people they can't stand.

#### **5. Techy Speccy**

Hmm. This one is a tricky one for me to be even vaguely righteous about because being honest tech is not my strong point. However, at least I recognise this and I AM going to book myself onto a course soon to rectify this problem so that I can spend less time on the phone to the company's IT department all of whom I know on a first name basis.

The trouble is, technology is changing at such a rate and has far outgrown the basic stuff I learned at school. But it's also part and parcel of the corporate world. So know your systems and be able to at least solve basic issues when your computer starts acting like an absolute idiot.

Otherwise valuable time is wasted and who knows what emails or messages might be missed!

#### **6. Work for someone you like and respect**

This is a tricky one because of course you have precisely zero control over how your boss acts or their personality. However, I have noticed, and I don't believe it to be coincidence that the most successful and enduring boss/PA partnerships have occurred when the working relationship between them is really healthy. Put simply, if you like someone and respect their work ethos you are going to want to make their life work as efficiently, pleasantly and well as possible. It's a bit like when you were at school. There were teachers you wanted to impress. Praise from them felt worth having whereas the teachers you didn't like or who had no control over the class were the ones you ended up behaving badly for.

Like I said, you can't control what your boss is like but you can control your own destiny and if you want a long lasting, happy and fruitful career as a PA then make sure you partner up with someone you actually want to be around.  
So maybe it is like marriage after all....?