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EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT SEARCH & CONSULTING

21 Traits of Successful Executive and Personal Support Professionals



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Introduction

Executive and Personal Support Professionals work in many different industries, have a wide variety of responsibilities, and may have titles that range from “Chief of Staff” to “Administrative Manager.” An Assistant to a Managing Partner of a law firm will likely be using specialized knowledge about the law and an Assistant to the CEO of a biotech firm may have his focus on schedule management and gatekeeping. The sole support of a busy veterinarian office will need an affinity for animals while the sole support of a technology company needs an affinity for engineers.

There are as many definitions of the role of Executive Support Professionals as there are varying services, industries, cultural influences and company sizes. There are virtual assistants, temporary assistants, part-time assistants and “24 and 7” full-time assistants. There are assistants that are promised work life balance. There are assistants that sleep with their iPhones under their pillows. The roles all have diverse responsibilities depending on many different factors, but there are certain “Traits” we have identified as being universally prevalent in the top professionals.

21 Traits of Successful Executive and Personal Support Professionals

1. **Proactive focus on support.** Constant focus on working ahead of the breaking wave. Proactive support is an anticipation of issues and needs before they are needed. It is seeing a train coming through a tunnel before anyone else does and making sure that everyone is out of the way. It is the habit of creating a Plan A, B, and C for contingencies. It is saving time or money or “face” of the people being supported. It is staying way ahead of the breaking issues and providing a level of support that is world class.
2. **Exceptional task and time management.** Requires disciplined focus with an awareness of vision and strategy so that tasks and time are managed at the most efficient level possible for the assistant as well as the executive. Appropriate questions are asked so as to be able to manage time and tasks relative to the knowledge of what is urgent but not important and important but not urgent.
3. **Commitment to lifelong learning.** Self directed accountability for ongoing training and learning. This includes technology, information about people, places, companies, current events, travel issues, and anything else that is needed to increase value in day to day management of great support.
4. **Keen intuition.** The ability to ‘read minds’ is a part of the top Executive and Personal Assistant job description. The precursor of mind reading is well developed

intuition. Intuition is like a muscle and gets stronger the more it is used. Top Assistants always have strong intuition.

5. **Strong listening skills.** Listening with an open mind, without judgment or preconceived ideas as to what will be said, is critical for the depth of understanding needed in strong support. "Beginners Mind" is a Buddhist phrase and Shunryu Suzuki, a Zen Priest who was a teacher of Buddhism in the US, said: "In the Beginner's mind, there are many possibilities; in the Expert's mind, there are few."
6. **Exceptional organizational skills.** Keeping track of the highest volume of information, people, events, tasks and preferences without dropping balls. This is a skill that is non-negotiable in great assistants. They tend to be naturally 'super' well organized and probably have been that way since childhood.
7. **Natural "reader" and "assessor" of people.** Reading people accurately is based on both intuition and experience. Many executives ask their assistant's opinion of people and her point of view will determine critical next steps for that individual's advancement or inclusion in a project.
8. **Strong interpersonal skills and relationship management.** Creating and managing effective relationships is always present in top Personal and Executive Assistants. There is a talent for being able to say "no" and have people hear "yes." Excellent assistants are "people who like people" -- they inspire confidence and trust.
9. **Maximum utilization of current technology.** The ability and commitment to stay ahead of the technology curve is a critical component for success. Full utilization of technology assures the ability to effectively support in fast moving and rapidly growing business cultures of today. The ongoing training needed and the networking for best practices is a quest that top Assistants proactively pursue.

10. **Well-developed sense of humor.** It is lonely at the top and managers so appreciate an assistant who has the ability to inspire a laugh at times during stressful days. Not taking things personally -- being able to keep a distance from emotional reactions to people and events -- is a critical trait for top assistants.
11. **High energy.** Impressive energy resources are a hallmark of the best Personal and Executive Assistants. Their positions demand the ability to run marathons for the long term. Top assistants take care of their bodies and minds by scheduling time to exercise and making an effort to get adequate sleep and time for renewal.
12. **Global awareness and knowledge of cultural differences.** Staying current on cultural differences and business practices around the globe is often an important added value of top assistants who work for companies doing business outside of the US. Even small companies are now traveling the globe both virtually and in person, so this trait has become a critical advantage to organizations of all sizes.
13. **Self-assurance and confidence.** A good assistant has the confidence needed to be able to “push back” when it is required. As a partner in thought and vision, a top assistant will question as needed and offer perspectives that are sometimes different than those of his/her executive. Strong partnerships are nurtured as a result of this developing closeness and trust.
14. **Skilled management of priorities, information and projects.** Schedules, tasks, projects, and information are all managed proactively from the assistant’s thorough understanding of the executive’s priorities and strategy. There is constant inquiry to be certain that the knowledge of priorities and strategy is current.
15. **Emotional intelligence.** A high “emotional IQ” is critical for success in the role of executive and personal support. There is no time for drama at this level. The critical

need is for mature and professional behavior regardless of pressures, demands, changes and misunderstandings.

16. **Self-management capability.** The ability to manage oneself without supervision and move forward with self-directed planning is critical. There is rarely time or inclination for executives to direct top assistants. Expert assistants have an ongoing habit of asking the right questions to assess needed support.
17. **Resourceful and well-connected.** Functioning constantly at a “solutions-oriented” level requires creativity and resources. Top assistants appear to have limitless wells of resources through networking with other top assistants, the internet, the business community and their own ingenuity.
18. **Efficient multi-tasking skills.** Managing a wide variety of tasks all at once, and smoothly, often appears to be much like conducting a symphony, knowing just the right moment for each section of the orchestra to play. Providing support to a demanding manager, who herself is under super-human pressures, appears effortless with the efficiency of expert multi-tasking.
19. **Thriving on change.** A strong comfort level with constant change is critical for success. High level support professionals possess discipline and strength within a deep and abiding flexibility. Constant rescheduling, reorganizing, changing and redoing are inherent demands on great support and require the ability to bend without breaking on a minute by minute basis.
20. **Managing up and managing down.** Top assistants train their managers in accepting great support. They set limits and expectations, carefully monitor relevant activity and manage a high volume of information and requests. Assistants serve as the face of the leader and often have to skillfully manage down as well. With a passion for service, they interact with warmth and effectiveness at all levels.

21. **Adept communicator.** Top Assistants are strong writers and articulate speakers.

They are thoughtful and skillful about what they say and how it is being said. They have exacting standards, don't say too much or too little, and are conscious of the impact of their written and verbal communication.

If you are interested in executive/personal support, or already are a member of the profession, we hope this paper is helpful to you.

If you are beginning to think about hiring executive or personal support to best serve you and your organization, this paper should add clarity to your search.

For 30 years, EASearch has specialized in assessing executive and personal support needs then finding just the right fit and talent for our clients. In many cases, we have found that clients do not really know what is important to look for in the best personal and executive support candidates. We know! We have an extensive proprietary database of top candidates, and if we don't currently know the best candidate for you, we network and recruit to find the perfect, deep match.

This report has been compiled to help you identify the qualities that represent the best of the best in executive/personal support. Feel free to contact me with any questions or if you need our help.

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Tips and Resources

- Top Executive and Personal Assistants contribute significantly to the productivity, peace of mind, and success of the people they support.
- Full utilization of technology has raised the level of responsibility of the executive and personal support role to one of highly effective partnership with an executive or manager.
- A strong educational background including independent commitment to lifelong learning is a critical foundation for success in the profession.
- There are now people leaving other professions, such as law and teaching, to join the executive support profession.
- There are people leaving the military, who have supported senior level officers, now joining the executive support profession.
- Executive Assistant training is available online and through University of California, Santa Cruz which has a curriculum developed by some of the top EAs to CEOs in Silicon Valley.
www.ucsc-extension.edu/programs/administrative-executive-assistants/course
- Personal Assistant training is available through classes taught by my friend Bonnie Low Kramen at the Bespoke Institute in New York City. Bonnie is the best-selling author of "The Ultimate Assistant," and is the former PA to Olympia Dukakis and the co-founder of the Celebrity Assistants of New York.
www.bonnielowkramen.com
- Executive Assistant training is also available through Linda McFarland and Joanne Linden, who are coauthors of "Sitting on a File Cabinet, Naked, With a Gun," an engaging, entertaining insider's look into top Executive Assistants and their bosses in Silicon Valley, CA. They have also cofounded a training company called "Planet Admin" for ongoing training for top Executive Assistants. www.planetadmin.net
- There is a developing shortage of top level Executive and Personal Assistants in the market place. This will ultimately increase salaries as supply and demand has a significant impact on salary levels!
- Please feel free to email me at leni@easearch.com if you have any questions pertaining to information in this paper or other questions pertaining to the profession.

Leni Miller, President, EASearch, LLC
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Leni Miller, is the Founder and President of E.A. Search, a premier search firm specializing in executive support recruiting and consulting. With over 30 year's experience and a passionate mission for finding the "right" Executive Assistant to leaders in all industries, Leni's high rate of success reflects her years of expertise in creating strong partnerships.

Before starting EASearch, Leni was the Co-Founder and President of McCall Staffing in San Francisco, Founder and President of Leni Miller Personnel, and Co-Founder/Producer of "Home Sweet Office;" a TV series focused on the emerging workplace sponsored by Intel Corporation. Leni is currently completing a book, "Five Steps to Your Right Work," to be published in 2012.

Leni's commitment to "giving back" is apparent through her many professional and volunteer affiliations, including her roles as the former Director for Junior Achievement, National Association of Women Business Owners, World Business Academy, and the "Center for Attitudinal Healing". In addition she is a member of the Association for Corporate Growth, Women President's Organization; San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, Sausalito Chamber of Commerce and was one of the first women in the world to be admitted to the Rotary Club as a member of the second oldest club in the Rotary World; San Francisco.

Leni graduated with honors from Columbia University and holds a B.A. in German Language Studies.

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