

Volume

1

CERTIFIED PERSONAL EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT



Delegate Manual

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Module 1

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The Modern Personal Assistant

How the role has changed



READING

The role of the modern office professional has changed immensely over the last decade. Technology has been the one of the major factors influencing this rapid evolution. Secretaries used to be focused on manual, repetitive and menial tasks but these days they are considered to be middle managers in their own right often with focused areas of expertise. The days of typing, tea and telephone are over!

The modern office professional often deals with finance, human resources and other functions that were previously handled by other members of staff. The main reason for this is that during the recession companies started to downscale their employee numbers which meant that some tasks were assimilated into the personal assistant role and many admin professionals were retrenched which means that suddenly PAs were supporting multiple bosses and required to do more with less at a higher speed and with greater efficiency.

In the past secretaries and personal assistants were sometimes hired for the wrong reasons, they were appointed for their looks, demure demeanor or as a status symbol but these days you need to be intelligent, articulate, innovative and well versed in various aspects of the business world to make the grade. Many successful top tier PAs are considered to be the boss' trusted advisor and right hand.

The profile of the profession is also changing in the business world today, many top tier PAs are being featured in the global media and there is a great deal of focus on how important a good

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support person can be. People like Richard Branson have written about how vital their personal assistants are to their success and this has raised awareness of how business critical the role is and how radically it has changed. **(See article from LinkedIn in Resources Section of Module 1)**

To understand where we are today it is essential that we look back into the past. Since the Renaissance up until the 19th Century the powerful and wealthy employed men to handle their daily correspondence and other activities, they assumed the title of secretary. The origin of the word secretary comes from the Latin word **'secernere'** which means **'to set apart'**; this eventually came to indicate something private or confidential. These men were respected and worked for influential individuals such as popes and kings. To this day the United States of America has a Secretary of State...*interesting that there are so many negative perceptions and so much bias against the term secretary.*

Women started to enter the profession when the typewriter was invented and took the leading role in the profession during World War I when the men were at war. The role eventually became a predominantly female role but today the picture is changing once again. More and more men are entering the profession and are becoming very successful in the role.



The world has changed significantly for office professionals in the last few years, the typewriter is out, the desktop pc is on its way out and so too the fax machine. Technology is advancing in leaps and bounds. The modern PA is not chained to a desk anymore and technology has even spawned a spin off group of administration personnel called virtual assistants who do not work for one specific individual but can work for many people, remotely and often across multiple time zones.

Smartphones and tablets have greatly enhanced the mobility of the modern working PA but this has come at a price. Office professionals are working longer hours than ever before and are more connected to their offices. This is causing more stress and fatigue than the industry has ever had to face. It is estimated that the contemporary employee now works 12 hours as standard.

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Technology has also changed the face of communication, internationally the trend is that more and more data is being used and voice is in decline. Simply put we are inundated with information and email. In fact more data has been generated in the last four years than in the history of the world and people are seeing more than 34 billion bits of information daily which is the equivalent of 2 books. No wonder the modern PA feels like they are drowning in a sea of email and information.

The modern PA also needs to have at least a basic understanding of the technology and software that is prevalent in the present day office. Those office professionals who have not kept up with technology have fallen by the way side.

Globalization and social media are also factors which have changed the way we work and play. You may work for a company based in South Africa with a branch in the United States which means that you may need to adjust your working hours to accommodate business across time zones. You may also be arranging more travel than ever before.

Social media has also become ubiquitous in our business and personal lives. Most companies have a social media presence of some kind and many office professionals are involved in the management of these profiles (called Social Media Assistants). Social media also assists office professionals from around the world to network and connect with one another. This has enabled benchmarking and sharing on a scale never seen before in the profession.

So all and all, the present working landscape for the executive personal assistant has become faster, more dynamic and challenging than ever before in history. It is no longer just a job but has become (*or is rapidly becoming*) a respected career.



TIP SHEET

TOP TEN TIPS

1. **Keep up with technology**
2. **Find a mentor/coach**
3. **Be organized and manage your time**
4. **Develop desirable skills to ensure your employability – continuous development**
5. **Build up your business acumen by reading industry publications, strategy documents, financial results, news stories and other materials that you have access to. Understand the business, your team and your boss' role in it.**
6. **Focus on your strengths and build a CV on it - specializations**
7. **Have career goals**
8. **Develop your communication, leadership and soft skills**
9. **Pay attention to the leaders around you, (you are getting management training for free)**
10. **If you don't know – ASK!**