



office

# SUPERHEROES

by Theona Layne

**T**he executive may be the face of the organization, but it's the administrative professional who works diligently to make sure the office runs smoothly. "Administrative professionals face a multitude of challenges every day," says Mikaela Kiner, founder and CEO of Uniquely HR, a human resource consulting firm.

This is so true. The executive assistant adopts many roles within the office. They're experts at time management and are adept at problem solving. They're also proficient at juggling many responsibilities simultaneously with speed, skill, and efficiency. Yet, the admin goes above and beyond the call of duty and gets the job done with a big smile and a pinch of finesse. No wonder 60 percent of senior level managers say support staff is more

valuable today compared to 10 years ago. Administrative professionals drive business success by supporting executives.

### You gotta have trust

Why is trust so important? For the administrative-executive relationship to thrive "trust is crucial," says Brandi Britton, district president for OfficeTeam. Administrative professionals have access to extremely sensitive company information such

as employee records and contracts. Admins handle personal information for the executives they support, including travel itineraries and financial records. A person who possessed anything less than high levels of integrity, empathy, discretion, and sound judgment would simply not work.

"Leaders have very few people they can really trust and confide in. A great assistant is a confidant and a sounding board that the leader can

speak to safely,” says Britton. The truth is executives want more than just someone with expertise in the latest office technology. They want partners to help them work through problems and provide advice when making certain business decisions. Admins command the aptitude and possess the willingness to complete tasks that would throw their boss off track from completing certain goals.

As a result, executives have the freedom and peace of mind to do what they do best. It makes sense when, according to an OfficeTeam survey, 94 percent of execs say their administrative assistant is very important to their success at the office.

It’s also important that executives not micromanage, have open communication, and clear goals that’ll empower their support staff to do their jobs well.

### **Masters of time and space management**

“The best assistants are very protective of the time of the people they support,” says Kiner, “they know what to say no to, what can wait and they help to ensure that the most important things are getting done each day.” In addition to trust and reliability, time management is an absolute must have. In fact, 39 percent of managers believe time management is the most important skill an executive assistant can have. Effective time management keeps managers organized, prepared, and focused on doing the right things to make their companies successful. That means managing the executive’s flow of information, including but not limited to mail, email, and voicemail. The best assistants understand company priorities and possess a strong business acumen that allows them to make good decisions quickly and on a daily basis.

“Space management is unique because it’s something many people don’t consider to be important,” says J. Lance Reese, chief operating

officer of The LIMU Company. Everyone is vying for the executive’s time. The admin who’s able to maintain control over the executive’s physical workspace safeguards the exec from unwelcome distractions. As Reese puts it, “Space management is really important to ensure [executives] aren’t distracted by things that aren’t important.”

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### **Diplomatic problem solvers**

The office admin’s role of master diplomat is, without fail, a daily occurrence. “They’re the voice of an organization and the director of first impressions within a company,” says Britton. An admin who’s well versed in the art of diplomacy is no doubt a contributing factor to business success. Since they’re on the front line of customer service, admins provide excellent rapport and a memorable customer experience for clients and company staff alike.

“Admins provide the clarity and calming effect to help manage unruly clients, provide the best interpersonal relationship skills possible, and say the right things at the right times,” Reese adds.

### **Acts as proxy for the executive**

“Having a solid executive assistant who can supply needed information

and stands in as a proxy for the executive is critical,” says Britton. Executives are often so busy that they must sometimes delegate some authority to their administrative assistants. In short, the assistant has to share the executive’s workload.

This may be why 87 percent of admins usually perform duties that are outside of their job descriptions, according to an Office Team survey. Some of these extra duties include attending meetings, approving expense reports, and paid-time-off requests. Problems sometimes materialize in the blink of an eye and the executive depends on support staff to put out fires and smooth out any wrinkles.

### **A little thanks goes a long way**

Despite the demanding nature of the job, over 3.9 million people choose this noble profession according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Without the value that administrative assistants provide, executives are left swimming in an ocean of disorganization, stress, and frustration. Such dedication deserves recognition. Administrative Professionals Day is a great time to recognize the hard work admins do all year long, but is it enough? Reese thinks recognition should be frequent and specific to the actions of the individual. For instance, when an assistant has helped solve a specific problem or has taken care of a difficult issue the admin should be recognized for that particular occurrence. Reese adds that showing genuine care for employees while providing regular recognition and trust inspires them to do their best work. “That specificity and recognition go a long way in expressing appreciation for their efforts.”

#### **About the author:**

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