

Getting to Yes! Gaining Support for Training

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You know the scenario. You read about a great seminar, workshop or conference for administrative office professionals. The topics are of interest to you and will help you in your job. You walk into your manager's office to request his or her approval only to hear "no". You walk out. End of story.

Selling your executive on supporting your professional development is a skill. It's also known as the art of persuasion. While training, coaching, and consulting thousands of Assistants nationwide, I have found that they don't see they have to work at gaining support for training and development. They view it as a "yes" or "no" situation. "Yes, I'll get to go" or "My manager will say no." Instead, an Assistant needs to view this as, "This is a great program. This will help me become a better Assistant and a more valuable employee. How will I sell this to my executive?" You now have

your subconscious working to develop ideas and language on how to get a "yes" from your executive.

I also hear Assistants say, "My executive will never approve this" so they never present their case to their executive. It's all in positioning your thinking. You have to really believe that you are worth investing in and that you and your executive will both win big with this investment.

I'm providing this advice after being on both sides of the desk. For 20 years I was an Assistant and I often had to persuade my executives to let me attend seminars and conferences. Since 1990, I've been on the other side of the desk as the CEO of Office Dynamics International. I see the executives' perspective. There has to be return on the investment (ROI) in an employee. As an employer, whether one of my staff is

attending a one-day workshop or a four-day conference, I expect them to come back to the office with ideas and to become better at their job. I take training and education seriously.

I have been providing training to administrative professionals since 1990. Organizations hire me to train their Assistants and expect behavior change as a result. They not only invest financially in education for their Assistants, but they are giving their administrative staff time away from their desks for the training.

Before you can "sell" someone else to support you, you have to be 100% convinced that you need and deserve training and educational resources. If you are not convinced of your own value and need to grow, you will not be able to persuade anyone else. I say this from 42 years of experience. Use the guidelines below to help you gain support for your professional

development whether for a conference, onsite workshop, online course or books. Help your executive see why it is beneficial to invest in your education and how your executive will also win as a result.

Points to consider

1 You need to continually learn and grow. In today's competitive marketplace and at the pace this profession is changing, if you do not continually enhance your skills, build new ones, and have a strategy for your career, you will get left in the dust.

2 Don't feel guilty about being out of the office to attend a program or conference that will make you better equipped, faster, smarter and sharper.

3 Get your executive to see the long-term payoff. Often executives think about the number of days you will be out of the office. You need to help them see that while you may be gone three or four days, you will gain skills and knowledge that will take you, and them, into the future.

4 Executives travel all over the country. Why shouldn't you? Some Assistants tell me they can only attend seminars that take place in their city or state. That is not 21st-Century thinking. Assistants should be a business partner to their executive, so start acting like a business partner and convince your manager why you should be allowed to travel out of state.

5 I'm sure you receive lots of information on seminars, conferences and workshops for administrative and executive Assistants. You need to be selective. Some things to consider are:

- Who is the speaker? What qualifies them to speak on the subjects covered?
- If they are going to speak on how to thrive in your profession, do they understand the administrative profession? Did they ever work for any length of time as an administrative office professional? And did they work in various positions and organizations so they can share a broader perspective?
- What is the value of the program? In other words, what are you getting for your money? Any extra events such as a welcome dinner?

What meals are included? Of course, the content should always be the most important but when you are comparing one seminar to another and can only attend one, you need to consider these other aspects.

- Inquire about the quality of the workshop materials? Will you be able to use them as reference guide after the training? Do they provide robust information? What about post-class follow-up activities for ongoing learning?
- Is this a lecture or will you be actively involved in the learning process?

6 Don't give up. If you really believe this training will help you professionally or even just rejuvenate your enthusiasm for your career, realize it may take three or four attempts to convince your manager. You may have to try different ways or formats to persuade your executive and, remember, timing is important.

Principles of persuasion

1 Know exactly what you want to accomplish by attending the training or conference. You should list your objectives alongside each topic in the curriculum and how that will tie into your current job or prepare you for the future.

2 To be a good seller, consider the buyer's viewpoint. Try to put yourself in your executive's position. What key selling points would be important to your executive? How will your executive benefit from you attending training or a seminar?

3 Learn what motivates your executive. Is your executive motivated by ROI (return on investment), the skills you will develop or you learning from an acclaimed expert in the field? Does your executive believe in personal development and growth? If not, it will be a harder sell but don't give up; be persistent.

4 Keep in mind the format you will use to present your case. Try to gauge your receiver's communication style preference. Does your executive prefer information short and to the point or does your executive like details? Is your executive a visual learner? If so, provide graphs or charts to make your point.

5 Tie key learning points of the seminar or conference to your professional development

plan for the year and to the goals of your department.

6 Show your executive how what you will learn will help you in specific areas of your job. For example: let's say one of the topics covered will be learning and understanding communication styles. Tell your executive you will use that information to be a better communicator by tapping into the receiver's style, build rapport with internal and external customers, and complementing your executive's and his or her staff's communication styles.

7 If your executive still says no to the training or seminar, sincerely ask your executive why he or she believes this is not a good investment. You may be able to counter that perception.

8 Offer options. Say, "Would you rather I attend the conference in May in California or the seminar in September in Atlanta?"

9 It always helps to let your executive know that you will share what you have learned with other Assistants in your organization. But be absolutely cognizant of copyrights.

10 Emphasize the benefits of networking with peers and learning from others in the field.

11 Negotiate if necessary. Ask your executive to pay the registration fee and hotel and you'll pay your airfare. Or you pay for your hotel stay and ask your executive to pay for registration and airfare. Be creative!

12 If all else fails, maybe you need to make the financial investment in yourself. Yes, I said you make the investment. I know several high-performing Assistants who have spent thousands of dollars on their development and have reaped tremendous rewards over the years.

Most of the time Assistants tell me they can't attend our programs because of budget cuts. Sometimes it really is a budget issue. I understand that perfectly as a business owner and CEO. But often, it's just lack of knowing how to sell the program to the executive. Have the courage to go after what you want. That in itself is a learning experience.

about the author



Joan Burge is known as the red-lipstick-wearing "Rock Star" of administrative and executive Assistant training and a successful entrepreneur who created a unique niche in 1990 by founding a training company that would uniquely provide sophisticated, robust educational programs and information to administrative professionals. Joan is an accomplished author (8 books), professional speaker, consultant and corporate trainer. She is the creator of: *Annual Conference for Administrative Excellence*[™]; *World Class Assistant*[™] Certification course; *Star Achievement Series*[®] Certification and Designation course; 30+ customized workshops, 200+ educational videos, 150+ articles and 900+ blogs for executive and administrative Assistants. Her company, Office Dynamics International, is a global industry leader which offers a broad range of solutions and provides high-performance, sophisticated executive and administrative Assistant training and coaching. For more information visit www.officedynamics.com.

