

Leading edge strategies for today's office professionals.

Office Life

Premiere Issue

Welcome to Office Life

Welcome to the Premiere issue of *Office Life*. We hope this will be your main source for leading-edge strategies to help you keep pace and stay on the cutting edge of today's fast-paced office environment.

As the work world brings compressed work weeks, more employee involvement, expansions and mergers, intensified high tech environments, virtual workplaces, accelerated pace of change, quality focus, career shifts and labor shortages, you will be challenged to think outside the box. As job boundaries are blurring and responsibilities are expanding, you need a source that will help you rise to these challenges and more. *Office Life* will give you practical tips for today's ever-changing office and prepare you for tomorrow's radically-altered office environment.

We will address topics like managing conflicting priorities, leading a team, techno etiquette, crash and burn career moves, decision making and problem solving, balancing work and family life, achieving job satisfaction, and how to impress your boss. You will get proven strategies from experts in the administrative profession and topic gurus. We want to help you streamline your processes, reduce stress, gain greater job satisfaction, and get the respect you deserve.

A unique feature of *Office Life* is that as the editor, I worked as an administrative professional for 20 years before starting my own business in 1990. Since 1990, Office Dynamics, Ltd. of which Sundance Publishing is a division, has become a national leader in the professional development of administrative office professionals nationwide. We train, coach, and encourage office professionals in every type of industry. We know what it is like to be in your shoes. We know

the challenges you face. And we are here to help you get the most out of your profession!

Office Life is also a great training tool. You can plan brown-bag lunches with your peers and discuss topics of interest from each issue. You may want to plan some mini-training sessions and use topics from *Office Life* to springboard your creativity. Delegate different topics from an issue to your team mates and have each person come prepared with an activity geared around that topic. If you are serious about making *Office Life* part of your training program, you will want multiple copies so that your staff can read it when they want, highlight key points and share ideas with their managers. We will have a special column called Dear Manager. You will want to make sure your manager reads this section so he or she can learn how to effectively work with you.

Additionally, we have a Chat Room and Message Board for admins only! Our Chat Room will provide opportunities for you to converse with office professionals across the country in all types of industries and different size businesses. We will have guest speakers in our Chat Room who will answer your questions about such things as professional image and dress, health, attitude, communications, career choices, managing change and goal setting. I will have special sessions where you can meet me in the Chat Room and ask me any question regarding work and get immediate answers!

Our Message Board is an area where you can post your questions that can be answered by other office professionals who have been in similar positions and

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can offer advice. You can ask questions like, "How do you handle stress in the office?" "How do you deal with a boss who always criticizes your work?" "Have you ever experienced working with a non-team player and how did you handle it?" You can also share your expertise with others who post questions on the Message Board and provide best practices and resources. Occasionally, we will post a relevant question and you will be able to submit your answers and opinions.

It is as simple as going to **www.office-dynamicsltd.com** and click on either **Message Board** or **Chat Room**.

I hope you will give *Office Life* a try! If you ever feel it isn't all I say it is, you may cancel your subscription and we'll refund every cent for remaining issues.

Dates to Remember

September 4, Monday: Labor Day in the United States and Canada. A national holiday to honor all working people.

September 11, Monday: National Boss/Employee Exchange Day. A day for employees and bosses to appreciate one another by sharing viewpoints.

September 22, Friday: American Business Women's Day. A day to recognize the contributions of American working women.

October 9, Monday: Columbus Day. A day to recognize Christopher Columbus and his travels.

October 16, Monday: National Bosses Day. A day to recognize your boss.

October 28, Sunday: Daylight Savings Time Ends. Turn your clock back one hour.

October 31, Tuesday: Halloween.

Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace

Mobbing is a malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through

- unjustified accusations
- humiliation
- general harassment
- abuse
- and/or terror

Mobbing behaviors include: assaults on the dignity, integrity, and credibility of employees; negative, humiliating, intimidating, and controlling communication; portraying the victimized person as being at fault; committed with the intent to force the person out; engineered to discredit, confuse, intimidate, or force the person into submission.

If this is happening to you or a coworker, here are some options by Noa Davenport, Ph.D.:

1. Analyze what is going on.
2. Attempt to work it out.
3. Bear with it.
4. Plan an escape.
5. Fight with legal means.
6. Whistle-blowing.
7. Engage in positive action.

For more information, visit www.mobbing-usa.com.

Facts on 'memo overload'

It takes 54 minutes to plan, write and edit the average memo, according to recent studies. Then it's rewritten 4.2 times before it's distributed. Estimated cost of the average memo: about \$82. One memo a week adds up to over \$4,000 a year.

Bottom line: If you don't have a good business reason for writing the memo, use the telephone or a face-to-face conversation.

Source: *Personnel Journal*, P.O. Box 55695, Boulder, CO 80322

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Career Corner

Question: *How do I handle a job assignment support role change that takes me out of my comfort zone? A change in who I support that I really do not want?*

We all enjoy staying in our comfort zones, which keep us free from worry and stress. The benefit of stepping outside of our comfort zones is that we grow ourselves personally and professionally. Embracing change allows us to take on more responsibility and advance at work.

Life is full of change, especially during our careers. Instead of resisting change, we need to refocus our outlook. Envision change as a positive opportunity to stretch yourself and learn. Following are a number of ways to make a smooth transition when stepping outside of your comfort zone.

Wipe the Slate Clean

Start your new job with a clean slate. Your success will be determined by your ability to make a fresh start. Letting your past experiences and other's comments influence your views will get you off to an unhealthy start. Although it may be difficult, erase the negative comments and viewpoints about your new supervisor.

As a recruiter, it is fascinating to see how well employees and supervisors work together. I recently spoke with an employee, "Jo", who has worked for our association seven months. When Jo first started, coworkers warned her about how difficult it was to work with her new supervisor. Jo was happy to tell me that she enjoys her job and supervisor. She contributes this to: (1) forming her own opinion versus listening to others; (2) finding out her supervisor's pre-

ferred working style; and (3) maintaining a positive attitude.

Identify Positive Traits

Are you looking for a perfect boss? The reality is that you will never have a perfect boss during your career. Many supervisors possess the traits we desire in a perfect boss, but there is usually something missing or a trait that we want to change.

Instead of focusing on what is missing, focus on the positive and what you can learn. Look for the positive traits of your new supervisor. Is he/she flexible, have confidence in your skills, or recognize your hard work? Even if it is something small, focus on that positive trait.

Adjust To Your Supervisor's Working Style

It is interesting to see the success rate of employees who have worked in the same position. Why do employees with similar skills thrive and others struggle when working with the same supervisor? Many times it is attributed to the employee's attitude toward their supervisor and their willingness to change. The struggling employee places the blame on the supervisor and does not want to change. The successful employee determines their supervisor's working style and adjusts theirs accordingly.

Take time to find out your supervisor's likes and dislikes. What worked well with your previous supervisor, may have a different outcome with your new supervisor. For example: If your previous supervisor was hands-off, the only communication he/she may have requested was when a project was completed. If your new boss is more hands-on, you may

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Dear Manager,

This section is dedicated to your manager(s). Please pass along my success tips for working better with you.

Make Your Administrative Assistant Your Greatest Asset

In today's fast-paced corporate world, many managers rely on the newest technology to help their company grow. Between e-mail, virtual assistants, palm pilots, high speed Internet connections and a host of other technological marvels, they mistakenly believe they are more independent than ever—making their own travel plans, faxing their own letters and scheduling their own meetings. In reality, however, these so-called independent managers have lost sight of the one asset that can truly impact the company's bottom line: an empowered administrative office professional!

Unfortunately, many administrative professionals are not taken seriously. In order to make the most of your administrative professional and advance your company's mission, you need to treat your assistant like a partner and develop their skills on a daily basis. Only then will they have the know-how and confidence to make decisions and take charge of challenges that arise during the day. Following are the top four ways to foster growth and make your administrative professional one of your company's greatest asset.

1. Have regular meetings.

Conducting daily or weekly meetings allows your assistant to gain a broader perspective of your company's goals and what is currently going on in the organization. Attending these meetings also keeps your assistant abreast of upcoming projects and the status of existing ones. Armed with this knowledge, he or she can intelligently answer questions for clients, follow-up on action items, monitor the progress of upcoming projects and also remind you of important tasks.

2. Establish goals and state expectations.

Your administrative assistant truly wants to please you and help you look good. However, it's difficult for this person to meet your expectations when you don't clearly state them. To make your administrative assistant a greater asset to your business, clearly state what needs to be accomplished. Let your assistant know not only how things need to be done, but also why. Write out the company's goals and let this person plan out how to help the company achieve those objectives.

3. Provide continual and constructive feedback.

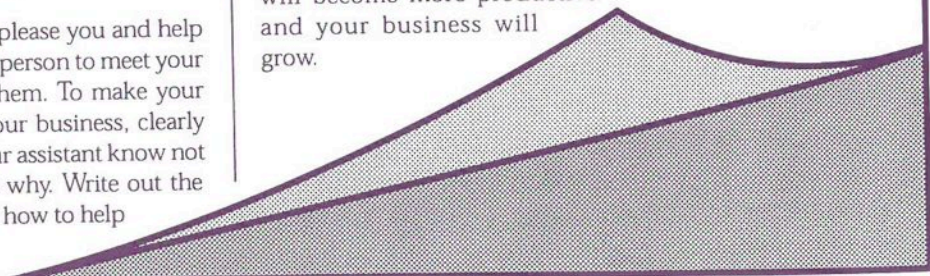
Many managers neglect to give their assistant any kind of feedback—positive or negative. While they may be able to critique a specific project the person worked on, they're hesitant to give an individual the praise or correction needed. However, if you want your assistant to grow professionally, you need to let her or him know how their performance rates.

If you want your assistant to improve on a certain behavior, focus on the behavior itself rather than the individual. When you meet with the person, let them know why the behavior needs to change and why it bothers you. Then, help this individual understand what they can do to improve and work out a solution together to change the behavior.

4. Be a mentor.

While you may have an abundance of company information, such as brochures, web site content and catalogs, your assistant ultimately looks to you to teach her or him about the organization and business in general. You can help by mentoring on a regular basis. For example, whenever you make a decision, explain to your assistant why and how you came to your decision.

No matter how advanced your office becomes, your administrative assistant will always prove to be your greatest asset. Not only will this person pick up the slack in your absence, but she or he will also stand by you during the toughest business challenge. When you encourage your administrative assistant to become a true work partner by unleashing their creativity and broadening their scope of responsibility, you will become more productive and your business will grow.



Welcoming a New Member to a Team

The workplace increasingly functions on teamwork, and employees must do their part in keeping it running smoothly. It's especially important to orient new members to a team to make them feel welcome and wanted. Here are some ways to do this:

- Get a list of your new team mate's qualifications and experience, so you know her strengths.
- Have at least one member of the team serve as a "buddy" who'll show her the ropes.
- Organize social events that bring your team together and include the new member.
- Demonstrate that the team appreciates the new member and the work she can and will provide to the group.

Eti-Tech

Using the appropriate form of technology in order to communicate your message is largely a matter of good common sense. In *Miss Manners' Basic Training: Communication*, Judith Martin identifies some questions to be considered when making a decision about technology use. Ask yourself the following:

- How legitimate is this disruption of a person's life? Consider the true urgency of the message, not just the fact that you want to leave a message before you forget.
- Which method of communication will cause the least annoyance?
- Is it respectful to use the new communication tool to circumnavigate a person's efforts to screen information?
- Can it be assumed that the message will reach only the person for whom it was intended?
- How long will the chosen technology tie up a machine or medium?
- What technology will provide the most effective means of communication?

Snuffing Out Meddlers

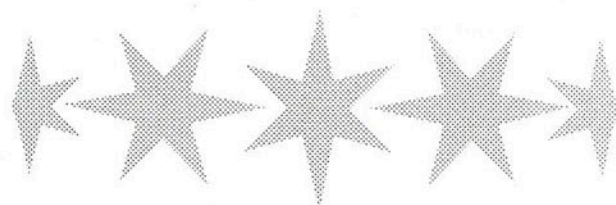
It is possible to have too much of a good thing in that overzealous, over-eager, over-helpful employee. When an employee constantly interferes with other people's jobs, it frustrates everyone around him or her.

Meddlers mean well, but they can cause harm if left unchecked. But beware, there's a fine line between that ideal worker who is willing to help or take on tasks that aren't part of her or his job. Here are some signs of classic meddlers:

- ★ They're always at someone else's desk.
- ★ They frequently offer unsolicited advice.
- ★ They offer help even after being told it's not needed.
- ★ They often interrupt when others are talking.
- ★ They bypass the boss and go directly to other workers to try to solve a problem.

So, once you've spotted the meddlers, what to do? Some suggestions:

1. Talk with them about the behavior and its negative impact.
2. Tell them how you want them to change the harmful behavior. Be specific and candid.
3. Let everyone know (not just the meddler) that while it's good to speak up and help out occasionally, it shouldn't be a habit.
4. Realize that the meddler won't change overnight. Be persistent about pointing out the behavior. Most meddlers don't mean any harm and will change their ways once they realize the negative impact.
5. For the persistent, be prepared to threaten consequences. Problematic meddling is a job performance issue.



Star Achievement

Skill • Attitude • Teamwork • Strategy®

The Star Achievement™ philosophy says: You have the potential to be a star performer at work. It just takes the right combination of:

★ Skill:

How to Succeed in the Workplace

Your future at work depends on one thing: taking charge of your own career. As we move into the new millennium, jobs as we once knew them have been transformed. In some companies, there are no titles, no corner offices, and no clear hierarchy. You are required to be not only an individual contributor, but also a team member and innovator. Here are some tips to help you become truly indispensable.

- ★ **Think like an entrepreneur.** See yourself as President of You, Inc. Don't just think of yourself as working for someone else. Learn to take responsibility and be accountable for your actions and decisions. Be a creator of your work environment. Quit waiting for management to create the culture. Be a catalyst in making good things happen where you work.
- ★ **Think teams.** See beyond you and your manager as a team. Think of your department colleagues as your team mates. See people in other departments as part of the bigger team. A company should be a constellation of talent. As each person becomes better at what they do and share their successes with each other, each department becomes stronger. As each department becomes more effective, the entire organization excels.
- ★ **Be a problem solver.** Long gone are the days of running to management with problems and letting them solve them. In the new work en-

vironment, you will have to tackle problems inside and outside your immediate area. When you see a problem, take ownership. Think of several solutions, evaluate possible outcomes, select one and move forward.

- ★ **Take risks.** Taking risks can be scary. When you take a risk, you usually are not guaranteed of the outcome. But if you never take a risk—push your limits—you will never know your true potential.
- ★ **Seek feedback.** All of us have “blind spots.” While we may think we know all our strengths and weaknesses, others see us in a different light. Encourage feedback from your manager, colleagues, customers, and others who interact with you regularly. Once you receive their feedback, work on a plan for improvement.

★ Attitude:

Keep Your Positive Focus

Remember: The most important attribute of a successful person is attitude with a positive slant. Here is a list of ways to keep your mind focused on the positive side of every event. Post this list next to your desk, in your car, at home by the mirror and, if necessary, inside your laptop case.

- Keep your mind fixed on your goals.
- Laugh in the face of adversity.
- Get excited by every achievement—no matter how small.
- Never dwell on misfortunes—they are mental depressants.
- Associate with people who have a positive outlook.
- Treat each experience as another step toward your dreams.
- Commitment, action and self-esteem determine your outcomes.
- Consistency is not a luxury. It's a necessity!



★ Team:

Upward Feedback

Have you ever wanted to give your manager feedback? Maybe your manager always brings things to you at the last minute. Or maybe your manager changed a process that you didn't agree with or he or she was too harsh on an employee. You can positively give your manager feedback by following these steps.

- Confront the problem head on. Don't dance around the issue.
- Schedule time to meet with your manager for discussion. Try to select the best time of day based on your manager's preference.
- Prepare notes before your meeting and try to site specific examples. Think about what you are going to say, how you will say it, and even practice.
- Think of the negative domino effect of your manager's behavior on you or coworkers.
- Explain your perspective calmly in the meeting.
- Watch your body language and facial expression. Be professional.
- Listen to your manager's version. Try to be understanding.
- Focus on the issue.
- Accept the outcome. Even though you may not get your manager to change this behavior, thank him or her for taking time to meet with you. You may be surprised and see some changes later.

★ Strategy:

Taking Critical Feedback

As you request and receive feedback from coworkers and managers, you want to develop the skill of accepting feedback. While some people aren't the best at offering constructive criticism, you can still benefit from it. Here are some techniques to help you.

- ★ Try to schedule face-to-face meetings with your manager. Some managers dislike providing critical feedback one-on-one. So, they end up writing criticisms on paper or e-mail. This just raises tensions. If your manager operates this way, let him or her know that you prefer to discuss these things face-to-face.
- ★ If you're the victim of public humiliation, calmly take the person aside who is criticizing you. Tell them that you would like to know how you can improve, but would rather keep these discussion between the two of you.
- ★ Don't become defensive, argumentative, or angry. Instead, ask how you can specifically do things differently. And take notes.
- ★ If you disagree with the feedback, simply change the perceptions. Criticism allows you to know how you are being perceived. So if the perception is wrong, don't get angry, change it.
- ★ Act on the information. Let your supervisor know about your attempts to improve. This way you can demonstrate that you're sincere about improving your work.

Fax a Thank-You Note?

When people give you their techno vitals—phone and cellular phone numbers, address and e-mail address, fax and beeper numbers—they should advise you as to their preferred order of communication. If they do not, ask them.

(A personal hand-written note is always the most professional and does give that personal touch!)

need to provide status reports on a frequent basis.

Tips For A Successful Partnership

Building a successful partnership takes time and hard work. Follow these steps to make sure you and your supervisor are working together and not against each other.

- Find out your supervisor's expectations. Ask about what has/hasn't worked with previous direct reports.
- Set up a weekly meeting to update each other on projects, ask questions, and gather feedback.
- Determine the best method to communicate with your supervisor. Some options include e-mail, voicemail, or setting a daily time for questions.
- Observe how your supervisor, employees, and customers interact. Watch and learn what tactics work best and incorporate these into your future interactions. Avoid any areas that may be "hot buttons" for your supervisor.
- Strive for quality in everything you do. Avoid letting your feelings impact your job performance.
- Set a goal on at least one thing you would like to learn from your new supervisor.
- Set work performance and career goals. Share your goals with your supervisor and discuss how he/she can help you achieve your goals.
- Schedule a three or six month non-financial review to talk about progress and areas of improvement.
- Talk with your supervisor about their goals, job challenges, and successes. If they are experiencing job pressures, be supportive and always maintain confidentiality.
- Form a working relationship built on good communication, trust, confidentiality, respect, and flexibility. Be patient with your supervisor and yourself.

Network With Other Professionals

Network with other administrative professionals to alleviate some of your job pressures.

Talk with others that you respect and who have a positive outlook. Everyone faces similar challenges in their careers. Find out what tactics they have used when dealing with difficult supervisors.

Who do you know that has been successful in their chosen career? Success was not handed to them on a silver platter. They took charge of their future by stepping outside of their comfort zones again and again.

Working with a new supervisor can be a big challenge. Since we cannot change others, we need to take an active role in forming a successful partnership. Keep a positive attitude, set goals, and stay focused on what you will learn.

You are accountable and responsible for your own happiness and success. Take charge of your destiny by stepping outside of your comfort zone. As you look back, you will be glad you took that first step.

Written by Amy Maxson, author of Create Your Career workshop and self-study workbook. Amy is a recruiter and trainer for a large professional and trade association. You can contact Amy with questions for future issues of Career Corner at 312-329-8420 or amaxson@realtors.org.

Web Connect

Here are some sites to check out for everything from workplace health to ergonomics.

- www.mmm.com/office/
(3M Office Products features news plus ergonomics and presentation advice)
- www.4pm.com/default.html
(The Project Managers Palette)
- www.mindspring.com/guide/
(personal development)
- www.stress-less.com
(reduce your stress)
- www.usernomics.com
(ergonomic computer usage and workplace safety tips)
- www.mapquest.com
(chart your driving course)
- www.travelweb.com
(features the Business Traveler Resource Center)



Pushing the Envelope

The reporter who was doing an article on the local college discovered they offered a program to certify morticians. Curious about what kind of a person would enter that line of work, he spoke to the dean of the college and gained permission to interview some of the students in the program.

After sitting through one of the introductory classes, he introduced himself, announced what he was writing about and asked one of the young ladies, "Why do you want to be a mortician?" She replied, "I like to work with people."

Nearly every management book written in the last two decades has addressed the important role people have in organizational performance. Still, management spends the majority of its time plotting new strategies, initiating new marketing campaigns, purchasing new equipment, and focusing on the effective utilization of that equipment as opposed to acquiring a thorough understanding of human behavior. If our employees are truly the most important assets in the organization, why do those in charge spend so much of their time working on things? If bosses spent as much time supporting you and the other employees in your department as they do interacting with the latest spreadsheet, what kind of progress could be made?

Managers prefer working with "things" because they are relatively easy to deal with when compared to people. Machines don't have opinions. Spreadsheets may tell you a lot, but they don't talk back. The copy machine may jam occasionally, but in the end you get what you want. When things break down, supervisors and managers get to exercise their well-developed set of problem-solving skills. If things are really going their way, they will get to roll up their sleeves, get up to their elbows in the problem, and be present when the thing gets fixed. Life is good.

These managers who would gladly spend hours getting a machine back on line are often the same ones who don't want to spend 10 minutes coaching an employee on a performance problem. Why? People are messy. They make demands. Universal solutions rarely work. People don't come with schematics, wiring diagrams, or operator's manuals. They don't like being fixed.

Though most managers agree that the human factor is an important factor in the performance of any enterprise, most feel it is only one of a number of equally important issues. They have a great deal of difficulty understanding that whether you are making a decision about a merger, increasing plant production, or designing a new product, human behavior is the key to success.

Aubrey Daniels, author of *Bringing Out The Best In People* says, "The behavior of people in business is not another issue to be considered—it is at the center of every business decision."

My opinion is that it has always been this way and will continue to be this way for the foreseeable future. Yet, the prevailing management behavior seems to be focused on trying to minimize the impact that people have on the day-to-day operation of the business. Machines are predictable. Numbers don't lie. People cause problems.

Our poor understanding of human behavior, particularly the behaviors that result in consistently higher performance, falsely encourage us to look for solutions in areas that we know well—better machines, faster computers, and improved processes. We quickly scan the horizon for the next best answer for improving our ROI and making more profit. In a short time,

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Administrative Mom

Family and work: You can find a balance

To put family and career demands in perspective, realize that some trade-offs are necessary and the balance will be tipped unevenly at times.

Here are four tips to help you stay sane:



1. **Don't aim for perfect balance.** Set your priorities, but realize they're likely to change. Adjust accordingly, making decisions on the basis of whatever issues demand your attention most immediately.

Ask yourself: "What will happen if I don't take care of this issue at work? Is this home activity a must-do, a should-do or just a nice thing to do?"

2. **Avoid guilt.** Don't beat yourself up over that extra bit of time you spend at work. Feeling guilty won't get you anywhere.

Likewise, don't feel remorse if you must leave work on time for an important family event. Take stock of your expectations for yourself and your family.

3. **Establish family rituals.** They don't have to be elaborate.

Comfortable routines organized around meal time, bath time and bed time can add security to your family.

4. **Be at home even when you're on the road.** For example:

- Make a video or audio tape of your child's favorite story.
- Leave notes around the house.
- Cook and freeze special meals.
- Call home every day at a set time.
- Send letters and postcards.

Source: *Care Packages for the Home*, by Barbara Glanz.

Get Ahead the Smart and Sincere Way

Promotions aren't what they used to be. Titles are virtually meaningless in today's team-oriented, decentralized organization. And the way to get ahead is no longer by climbing a ladder.

What matters today is what you know and how you use it. Here are seven ways to get to the upper echelons of your company.

- ★ Love what you do. Otherwise, you won't be able to compete with those who do. You have to love what you're doing to be great at it. If where you are isn't what you truly get charged up about, ask yourself what you can get passionate about.
- ★ Build your skills. To move ahead, you have to know what you lack. Identify what skills and knowledge you need to get where you want to go. Then, get the information or training.
- ★ Get varied experience. Companies are constantly putting together temporary teams for a single project. Joining these teams is a good way to raise your visibility and acquire lots of varied experiences.
- ★ Be an entrepreneur. Identify a need and take your own initiative to fill that need. Spearhead a cost-saving project, provide a new service, start an administrative team.
- ★ Expect raises, not titles. Companies reward people for the value they bring to an organization, not the size of their sphere of influence.
- ★ Be good at what you're doing now. There's no magic bullet. The best way to get ahead is to be excellent at what you're doing. Attend extra training conferences, but don't neglect the duties you hold now.

Pushing the Envelope (continued from page 9)

we discover that doesn't work either and we're off to another round of fad surfing.

Rather than watch them give in to another bout of organizational attention deficit disorder, I urge you to work with your managers and help them understand this fundamental premise: *Whatever organizational changes are initiated will cause people to either increase or decrease their efforts, their creativity, their co-operation, and the quality of their work.*

Wouldn't it be nice if they knew why and how that happens? How great would it be if the next corporate initiative turned people on instead of confusing them? What could be achieved if managers knew how to modify consequences to promote the behavior that is needed? What would happen in your company if your management team understood that positive reinforcement is the only consequence that accelerates behavior and then behaved accordingly?

Putting the same amount of time into understanding human behavior as is devoted to the technical side of the business will get you started on the journey.

Ron Richardson is a lecturer, writer, and trainer who lives in Alabama with his wife and three sons. You can contact him at (205) 384-2431 or rrichardson@drummondco.com.

Sundance Publishing & Advertising Staff

Editorial Office:

Editor:

Joan Burge

Art & Production:

Pat Howard

Director of Marketing & President of
Sundance Publishing & Advertising:

David Burge

Contributing Editors:

Career Corner: Amy Maxson

Pushing The Envelope: Ron Richardson

Editorial Inquiries or Submissions:

Direct to Joan Burge, Editor,

Sundance Publishing & Advertising,

3980 Breckinridge Dr.

Okemos, MI 48864

Fax: 517-347-6695

E-mail: JMBSTAR@aol.com

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Office Life

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In keeping up with current technology demands, we have plans to offer an on-line version of Office Life in 2001.

Look for details in future issues.

Office Life is designed for those administrative professional who are truly driven to continually improve their skills and knowledge, to shoulder increasing responsibility and to achieve uncompromising standards of excellence.

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517-347-8926

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