

# StarQuest™

NOVEMBER 1997

*A communication vehicle for administrative office professionals on a quest for excellence*

## Don't Get Lost in the Clouds . . . The Visible Assistant



**Joan Burge**  
CEO & President  
Office Dynamics, Ltd.

My destination was Peoria, Illinois. Believe it or not, Peoria can be an exciting and interesting place to see. The only way for me to get from Lansing to Peoria in a timely fashion is to take a commuter from Lansing to Chicago and then another commuter from Chicago to Peoria.

On this particular day, as the 64 seat plane took off and started to rise in the sky, I could see land easily and all the little houses and buildings. As we climbed higher though, visibility became more difficult. We started to go through haze

and then a thick mass of clouds. I couldn't see a thing. If you have ever flown on a small plane, you know that when you go through a mass of clouds, the ride gets quite bumpy. We still hadn't reached our desired elevation and so the pilots continued our climb. When we did reach it, we came up on top of the clouds and I saw the beautiful sun and clear blue skies. I gained an entirely different perspective of the area I was traveling, of nature, and of things in general.

For years, secretaries and administrative assistants traveled at low levels. They were invisible. In fact, the theory was that if you were a really good assistant, you would be invisible to your boss and others. You would glide through your day, get tasks done, and do whatever it took without telling everyone what you did and how you did it. This was the way it was! Today's philosophy is *be visible*. Stop hiding your talents and contributions to the organization. Stand out — be different — use your strengths to shine. Stop being a glimmer of light.

It's time for administrative professionals to come up

from the clouds that have cast a gloom over their performance. It is time to rise above the coworkers, friends, or even family members who kept you invisible. It is time for you to become the Visible Assistant. There are four considerations to make this happen:

**1.** You have to expand your horizons. Quit traveling close to the ground.

**2.** Expect turbulence. As you climb and strive to reach your star performance, you may get some repercussions from your organization, department, boss, colleagues and even your best friend. Just remember that like my commuter plane going to Chicago, you will rise above the clouds to an even better place.

**3.** Rise above your environmental clouds. Like the aircraft blurred in the mass of clouds, you may be blurred in the mass of coworkers. Your performance may be clouded by a boss who holds you down, a coworker who diminishes your contributions, or a team who stamps out your creativity.

**4.** Increase your visibility through performance improvement. As you improve your work performance through professional development and feedback, people in your organization will notice you. They may notice you already, but are they noticing you for the right behaviors and reasons. ☆

**S** ~ ~ ~ ~

*Since November is the time of Thanksgiving, as you work on your visibility, be thankful for the gifts that have been given to you. Each person has been blessed with a special talent. Have you found yours yet? Is it visible to your boss, coworkers, and organization?*

~ ~ ~ ~

# Issues & Trends

A quickly emerging trend in the administrative field is companies establishing core competencies for their secretaries and administrative staff. A spin-off of this is the creation of a computer-based 360 feedback tool containing an Administrative Staff Skill Set. Are you totally confused? Have you ever heard of competencies? Do you know what 360 feedback is and how multi-raters work?

Let's start at the beginning with some definitions.

**Competency:** In the job world, competency has many meanings. Some definitions relate to the work tasks, results, and outputs. Others describe the characteristics of the people doing the work — knowledge, skills and attitudes (also values, orientations, and commitments). (Taken from *Training & Development* magazine, May 1997)

**Multi-rater assessment and 360 feedback:** A computer-based technology for gathering and reporting performance feedback from many sources. Also referred to as 360-degree feedback, it gives individuals an evaluation of their work skills combining the observations of many people such as managers, direct reports, coworkers or customers. (From *20/20 Insight*® Performance Feedback booklet)

Several major organizations like US Airways, AT & T, and the Kellogg Foundation have taken a serious look at the

skills and behaviors they expect their administrative staff to embrace to be stellar performers. Usually after months of interviews, surveys, and research, organizations come up with their own list of competencies. These lists can then be used for performance measurement. Often the feedback from these evaluations lead to training and development and goal definition.

Finally, after six years of research, we now have available the *20/20 Insight*® Administrative Staff Skill Set. This is a versatile, affordable, customizable computer-based multi-rater. This skill set contains 12 main categories with 116 specific items on which to rate administrative staff's performance. Below is a listing of the 12 main categories.

- ◆ Appointment Coordination
- ◆ Manager Support
- ◆ Managing Office Technology
- ◆ Meeting Preparation & Coordination
- ◆ Office Communication
- ◆ Office Organization
- ◆ Problem Solving
- ◆ Professional Behavior
- ◆ Professional Development
- ◆ Supporting Multiple Managers
- ◆ Task and Project Management
- ◆ Time Management

## Motorola CIG Wins New Administrative Team Award



MOTOROLA

Assistants on the Run, Motorola CIG's administrative team are the winners of the first annual *Rising Stars* Award sponsored by Office Dynamics, Ltd. The *Rising Stars* is awarded to the administrative team within an organization who best represents the qualities and behaviors of a stellar team. The award was presented at Office Dynamics' 4th Annual Forum for Administrative Teams.

## New! Multi-rater for Administrative Staff - The first on the market!

Call today 800-STAR-139 for information  
on *20/20 Insight*® Administrative Staff Skill Set.  
Lists 116 competencies. Can be customized!

What does this have to do with you? When I talk about visibility, your skills, attitudes, and behaviors are definitely visible. They are seen by your boss(es), department coworkers, administrative peers, business colleagues, vendors, clients, and customers. You are in an extremely visible position. Therefore, you need to take a close look at your performance — everything from your organizational skills to effectively prioritizing to managing conflict.

What if you work in a small office? You are even more visible because everyone in that office probably has regular contact with you. Plus if you are the only assistant, your skills are critical to the success of that small business. So make sure you read and practice the strategies in the Star Achievement™ section. ☆

“Office professionals have developed better communication skills and understand where their jobs add value.”

# Star Gazers



Jeanette Geiman, CPS  
Shell Chemical Co.

Star Gazers are people who have a vision for the future. Jeanette Geiman, CPS, Personal Computer Administrator for the Engineering & Construction Department at Shell Chemical appeared in our Premier Issue. This is the final excerpt from my interview with Jeanette where she discusses being visible.

**Jeannette:** In the past secretaries worked more “behind the scenes” and their efficiency seemed to be assessed relative to how invisible the administrative process was. While it is always the ultimate goal to have a well run office, I feel office professionals take more responsibility now and are much more visible and involved in the management of the administrative functions. Our opinions are valued and we are seen as team members not just assistants. In many cases, we take full responsibility for the administrative functions so that our busy managers can utilize their energy for other activities.

**Joan:** I think in the past we were taught to get the job done, but don’t talk about what it took to get the job done. Just do it quietly.

**Jeannette:** I think this was due in part to social and business culture and also a factor of our secretarial training. Over time, the culture has changed and everyone is expected to be assertive. Office professionals have developed better communication skills and understand where their jobs add value.

**Joan:** So in terms of being more visible, do you mean making your *talents* more visible?

**Jeannette:** Yes. Display a take charge attitude. Ensure that your actions display your talents, skills and attitude.

An excellent way to do that is to get together with your manager and review a project you have completed. Focus on the value of the work. Document how much money you saved (if you can) and what innovations you put into play. Then talk about the next project you want to undertake. Once your manager understands the value of your work and your commitment to adding value it will be a simple process for the manager to recognize you for your efforts.

**Joan:** What are some strategies that you’ve used that are successful in developing rapport with your manager?

**Jeannette:** You have to talk to people to get to know them. This can be a challenge in the very busy workplace and with globalization, we may not even be on the same continent as our manager. It is important that you be in contact (face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, fax). This might mean daily meetings or it may mean a few moments a week. But use whatever time you can get to your utmost advantage in obtaining information and getting to know the people you support. Gain their trust by demonstrating your commitment to providing a standard of excellence.

**Joan:** Jeanette, with more administrative people supporting more managers, how could a person be visible when they are supporting 10-20 people?

**Jeannette:** Again, communication is the key. When you’re supporting a large group, it is important that you feel comfortable talking with each person you support. Without this rapport, prioritizing projects can be difficult when more than one person has a project with the same deadline. If you have developed a good working relationship with the people you support and they value your input on their work, you can discuss the full scope of the project and negotiate the priorities. ☆

*A*re you a Star Gazer?  
Do you have a vision for the future?  
If you think you do, fax your idea to Joan Burge  
at (517) 347-6695 for consideration.



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

**Skills** – learning new and enhancing current business skills

**Attitude** – achieving and maintaining a positive attitude about your employer, your co-workers, your customers, and yourself.

**Team** – being a part of and contributing to various team relationships inside and outside the organization

**Strategy** – setting goals and cultivating networks to actualize your professional self

Star-performing assistants consistently combine skills, attitude, teamwork, and strategies to stay on the cutting edge and shine above the average performer. I will provide strategies focusing on these four areas of development in each issue of *StarQuest*.

► **Skills:** Your skills or lack of excellent skills are visible to your boss, coworkers and clients. Skills are the foundation on which excellent administrative staff are built. One place that is visible to others is your work area. Whether you realize it or not, it says a lot to your boss about you. The perception your boss has of you based on your work area may or may not be a true perception, but it is your boss's reality. Here are some strategies to apply today!

1. Make your desk a place of action. Clear all files and other materials that are only used occasionally. Find another area to store them.

2. Remember that a messy desk signals lack of control and focus. Appearing to be busy by having lots of papers spread across your desk does not equate to being productive. It actually sends a message of not being organized and focused.

Basic administrative skills are a necessity today. They will serve you well when and if you leave the profession.

3. Set up in/out trays and make sure others use them appropriately. Don't let people place things all over your desk or on your chair. Request all incoming work and correspondence be placed in your "in" tray.

4. Leave cutesy things at home. Although work environments are becoming more casual, remember you are at work. And you are trying to portray a professional image and be taken seriously by your boss and coworkers.

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### When You Are

#### Not Organized

Waste time

Create rework

Make errors

Add stress

Appear unprofessional

#### Organized

Use time more efficiently

Do things right the first time

Reduce errors

Reduce stress

Look professional

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► **Attitude:** *Is yours showing?* In a recent national survey by the United States Census Bureau on hiring, training and business management practices, employers ranked attitude at the top of their priority list. Nearly 60 percent of companies responding ranked attitude as the number one concern. This survey reflects a growing trend that placed attitude ahead of aptitude. (Taken from *MetroLink 8/97*)

In thinking about being visible and attitude, your non-verbal communication says a lot about you or how you might be feeling about a situation. Because you are in a visible position and interact with numerous people, it is important to reflect a professional attitude through facial expression. How often do you . . .

- ☆ communicate impatience by drumming your fingers or using some other annoying movement?
- ☆ use a distracting gesture when speaking under pressure?
- ☆ project boredom by the way you sit at your desk?
- ☆ show frustration through sighing?
- ☆ project aggravation?
- ☆ roll eyes when asked to do more than you think you should?

► **Team:** Your skills, attitudes, behaviors, and frustrations are definitely visible to your boss.

For 20 years I sat on your side of the desk. Since 1990 I've been sitting on the boss's side of the desk. Here are five strategies that will make you look good to your boss.

1. Accept criticism graciously (without having an attitude). Providing constant employee feedback is an important management tool today. So if your manager does give you a lot of feedback, you should feel good.

2. Watch your body language at all costs! Professionals don't wear their attitudes on their sleeves. So even if you've had an upsetting situation or disagree with your boss, handle it with poise and confidence.

3. Be on time! Just because the boss shows up late or takes longer lunches doesn't mean you should. Star-performing employees display exemplary behavior. You should also consider that most managers work evenings at home, stay late, come in early, or work weekends.

4. Manage your wardrobe. That is the most visible part of you. Are your clothes neat, clean, and appropriate for your body shape? In upcoming issues of *StarQuest*, I'll focus on dress.

5. Your communication skills are visible to your boss's eyes and ears. Do you have excellent verbal skills? Can you present information clearly and concisely? Are you up on the latest writing trends? There are some new twists to old rules.

► **Strategy:** When someone approaches you, what do you notice? Do you see what they are thinking? Do you see what they are coming to tell you before they open their mouth? No, you notice their body, hair, and clothes.

Visible-obvious-noticeable. That's your wardrobe. Clothing is a difficult subject today because of business casual and casual dress. However, there are situations where you will be visible to others that your wardrobe will be important.

*Introducing . . . Power Dressing!* What is it? Well, there is no formal definition. It basically is using certain styles and colors that reflect or give the appearance of power or confidence. The types of situations you should use this strategy are ones like when you are asked to fill in for the CEO's secretary while she's on vacation; when attending your first staff meeting (and possibly all staff meetings after that); when giving a presentation on behalf of your boss; when attending a community or association meeting for yourself or on behalf of your boss.

Power dressing is a real confidence builder. Another great benefit is that when power dressed, you act more professional. Others tend to trust you and have more confidence in your opinions. It is especially helpful when you are put in an intimidating situation.

## *S*ome Symbols of Power Dressing

*Darker colors*

Suits (particularly skirts)

*Traditional style*

Non-frilly

*Tailored blouses or shirts*

Basic black or brown pumps

*Quality briefcase*

Classic jewelry

*A good watch*

## Administrative Assistants Become Trainers

Congratulations to six new Star Achievement Certified Trainers! Twice a year, I offer Train-the-Trainer sessions for the Star Achievement Series™. Companies are creating wonderful opportunities for their administrative staff by allowing them to learn and teach modules of the Series to their peers. Some companies have even created new positions for this purpose.



(From L to R:) Ann Rosone (AT&T), Virginia Skellenger (Rocketdyne), Karen Schley (Aid Association for Lutherans), Darlene Wallace (Rocketdyne), Joan Burge (Office Dynamics, Ltd.) Petronella Feeheley (Michigan Capital Healthcare, and Kathy Tosoian (Office Dynamics, Ltd. - new trainer).



Would you like to become a  
Star Certified Trainer?

Call 800-STAR-139 for details!

# Executive Perspective



**Ron Richardson,**  
Director of Training  
Drummond Co., Inc.  
(Main industry -  
coal mining)

*The second and final part of my interview with Ron takes a unique look at visibility. Ron focuses on professional development and keeping your eyes open and looking up. Remember the commuter plane ride and my rising above the clouds to have a better view? Keep that in mind while you read this.*

**Ron:** In times when change is so rapid in organizations and the outside world, you have to keep your periscope up frequently. Don't be so focused as to what is going on inside your department or immediate area that you lose sight of what's happening in the rest of the world.

**Joan:** That's an interesting concept. Tell me more.

**Ron:** It's important that you continue to increase your own value inside the organization and outside the organization. If you keep the periscope up, you stand a much better chance. Growing up in the baby boomer generation, we were raised to believe that you just had to work hard and you'll always have a job. Some of us interpreted that as work hard and I'll have the same job with same company.

Today, many of us are finding out the hard way that's not so. Hard work will keep you employed but you have to take care of yourself. That's where I encourage people to ask themselves two questions at the end of each work day?

1. What did I do today to contribute to my organization?
2. What other skills did I acquire today to put in my tool kit that will increase my personal and professional value?

That allows you to say, "In the event this job goes away, I have a plan B. And even a plan C."


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**"Behold the turtle.  
He makes progress by  
sticking his neck out."**

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**Joan:** Ron, can you give me three strategies on how administrative professionals can keep their periscope up?

**Ron:** When thinking about the positives of keeping your periscope up, I use the acronym LEG for the three strategies I've found most helpful.

 **Strategy #1, Learn.** One of the best ways to increase your personal and professional value is to become an insatiable learner. Devote time to considering what skills are necessary to become more valuable in your present field and the area you are looking to move into. Polish your strengths and focus on the areas that need developing. For me, the truly exciting benefits of living in the 90's are the number and variety of ways to increase your knowledge in any given area. From the traditional classroom to CD Roms and workshops available over satellites, there are styles of learning that can fit the needs, schedule, and learning style of almost anyone.


 **Strategy #2, Expand.** By expand, I mean get outside your normal frame of reference. Read, go to lectures, attend workshops, and gather as much information as you can about the market where your company operates. Be on the lookout for breakthroughs and significant



## Executive Perspective

(Continued)

happenings in related markets that may impact your business. Learn all you can about your customers and build relationships with your counterparts there, if possible. Don't be content to read about important news in the company publication or on the computer bulletin board. Become a resource for meaningful information. Professional organizations are a great way to expand your network. Even here, go beyond the norm of joining organizations associated with your field. Strike up a friendship with someone in another department and go to one of their professional meetings. When your boss is unable to attend meetings, ask to sit in his/her place when it's appropriate. Look for other ways to help your organization while you are increasing your value.

 **Strategy #3, Grow.** For most of us, continued growth is a choice. We choose when to stop for a

variety of reasons. Most of the reasons are bogus. Here are some favorites along with my responses:

◆ *The subject or instructor is boring.* There are no boring subjects or instructors, only disinterested students. If you can find a need for the information, interest shows up when you do.

◆ *I don't have time or the money.* Career and personal development take time and they can be costly. You have to decide what is most important for you. Make participation or non-participation your choice. As far as cost goes, weigh the price of growth against the cost of no growth. Which one can you afford?

◆ *School was always difficult for me. I'm afraid I won't do well.* You're in good company! A lot of successful people struggled with school. The

question to ask yourself is: Do I have the capacity, ability, and desire to learn? If your answer is yes, find the type of instructional setting that suits your learning style. Being afraid is O.K. Just don't let your fear keep you from moving forward.

◆ *Why bother? I'm over 50 and no employer will be interested in me.* "Age-ism" does exist and I've found its actual presence much smaller than the concern about it. When career counseling, I remind my clients that employers most frequently want hard-working, dependable, experienced people who can work well with others, have consistently taken on more responsibilities, and have demonstrated the ability to learn new skills. In my experience, these are the things that get people hired regardless of age. Commit to lifelong growth and development. ☆

**Visit Our New Web Site**  
the end of this month!

[www.officedynamicsltd.com](http://www.officedynamicsltd.com)

## New Rules for a New Breed

Since there is a new breed of administrative staff emerging, new rules have to be set. Here are a few rules to help you be a part of the new breed.

1. Be personally accountable for your own success.
2. Develop stronger communication skills.
3. You don't have to make or get the coffee.
4. Think out of the box.
5. Be visible!
6. Be a generalist or multi-specialist.
7. Improve your basic administrative skills.
8. Know your strengths and weaknesses.
9. Understand various cultures.
10. Get feedback from several people.

  
**A** NEWSLETTER OF DIFFERENT COLORS

Are you wondering why the November issue of *StarQuest* isn't the same color as the Premier Issue? Did you think our printer made a mistake? No. We've decided to keep each issue interesting by using a different color each month. Hope you like it.

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## In This Issue:

- ☆ The Visible Assistant
- ☆ New Rules for a New Breed
- ☆ New multi-rater for Administrative staff
- ☆ Strategies for organizing your work area
- ☆ Introducing. . . Power Dressing!

## In Upcoming Issues:

- ☆ Crash and burn career moves
- ☆ Core Competencies for Administrative Professionals
- ☆ Brush up on career skills
- ☆ Upskilling
- ☆ Can you really make a boss happy?



Joan Burge is CEO & President of Office Dynamics, Ltd., *the leader in providing professional development services and products for administrative office professionals*. Joan is the developer of the nationally-acclaimed Star Achievement™ Series, eight-part curriculum for administrative staff. She has helped thousands of administrative professionals nationwide break self-limiting barriers, improve the quality of their life, and reach new levels of professional excellence. For more information on our products and services, call 800-STAR-139 or fax (517) 347-6695.



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