

# How to Be an Irreplaceable Assistant in the World of AI

You don't have to have it all figured out, but through careful preparation now, you will thrive in the world of AI, explains Joan Burge

In October 2023, my training company for administrative professionals, [Office Dynamics International](#), hosted our 30th annual conference in Las Vegas. In front of a room packed with Assistants from across the world, I took to the stage to open the conference and discuss our theme: The Multidimensional Assistant. In a nutshell, a multidimensional Assistant plays many different roles. Like an actor who can adapt to various characters depending on what is needed, the [Modern-Day Assistant](#) must also be able to adjust to diverse responsibilities. One way this has become particularly important is by using AI to your advantage.

The AI boom is not only here to stay but will be and has already become extremely relevant to your job. Many of the speakers we had at the conference, including [Lucy Brazier](#) herself, instructed Assistants on the trends they see on the horizon for our industry and how Assistants can adapt to and prepare for them. These professionals know that AI isn't going away and will become an even bigger part of our daily lives.

In that same spirit, I hope that I can help you prepare for the coming trends I see regarding AI and job security for administrative professionals. It is not to scare you, but to give you the tools you need so that you can strengthen your skills for future success. Below are five ways to prepare that I believe will significantly impact your career and help you become an irreplaceable, competitive Assistant.

## 1. Enhance Your Social Skills

I recently published an article on my LinkedIn page encouraging people to grow their social connections to enhance their personal well-being and professional lives. I received a comment on that LinkedIn article from an Assistant struggling with this in her workplace. With the boom in remote work, many of her colleagues have not returned



to the office. Furthermore, those who have returned hardly engage with each other, locking themselves in their offices. She said that she feels there has been a drastic decline in social skills, and I have to agree with her.

Some people call it human skills, and others call it soft skills. Whatever you call it, what we are defining are the skills needed for enhanced emotional intelligence. Your emotional intelligence is based on your ability to understand and manage your emotions and those of others. This is something that AI simply cannot do. Furthermore, a high EQ (a measure of your emotional intelligence) is imperative to work well with other humans.

Numerous studies and articles across the web speak to the benefits of emotional intelligence, including better rapport among your colleagues, improved leadership ability, and even a median increase in wealth. In the age of AI, where this will become increasingly rare, developing these skills is more lucrative than ever.

## 2. Understand How to Use AI and Other Tech

I have heard it phrased for many professions, and it is also true when phrased for our own: "AI won't replace you, but an Assistant

who knows how to use AI will." This should make you pay attention to the importance of developing your technical skills. Let's review why this is the case in a hypothetical scenario that encapsulates what I often encounter.

An Assistant sits down to a flooded email inbox. Between taking calls and scheduling meetings, they spend most of the morning sorting through emails to find a new set of tasks. In between that are errands, events to plan, and calls to make on behalf of their executive. That Assistant is also often wearing multiple hats and managing the office or another side project their company sent their way. There is little time, if any, to invest in learning tech tools.

I want you to see what a vicious cycle this scenario is. Like digital transformation thought leader Mike Song says, it becomes like a hamster wheel, where you are continuously moving but not really going anywhere. Instead, an Assistant who can leverage AI to automate and simplify their daily tasks will be able to focus their energy on more creative and strategic efforts. Furthermore, they will become much more capable in companies adopting more AI and tech tools, increasing their competitive advantage.

Don't let AI scare you, and trust me, you don't need to be the most tech-savvy person to increase your skills. Aim to learn a little every day, and it will build up over time. Do your research and focus on the skills that will be most pertinent to your career.

## 3. Develop a Strategic Approach

In my 30+ years of training administrative professionals, I have encouraged my students to take a strategic rather than just a tactical approach. Tactical thinking is focused on the immediate objectives and executing tasks. There is a time and place for tactical thinking in our daily work. I can't think of a job where it's not required.



However, what will take you from being a solid Assistant to a stellar business partner is the ability to think strategically, and it's even more crucial in the age of AI. As an Assistant facing a myriad of tech and AI tools to use, you will need to be able to strategize on how to use these tools to your advantage. If you can guide your executive and your company with strategies from your unique insights while leveraging AI tools to help you do that, you will become an indispensable partner for your organization.

Start [shifting your mindset](#) from that of a task-doer to that of a strategic partner. Not only will you stand out in a sea of Assistants and AI tools, but you will also be able to look at tech with new eyes and creatively think of ways to use it to your advantage.

## 4. Strengthen Your Communication Skills

Communication skills are among the most common skills that I find Assistants desire to improve. I see this in my training company and hear it from others in the field. With social skills on the decline, communication skills are unfortunately falling as well. In order to set yourself up for future success, here are a few areas of communication I recommend focusing on:

Your presentation (how you dress) is a form of communication. Think of that infamous scene from *The Devil Wears Prada* where Miranda Priestly roasts Andy for her apparent lack of interest in fashion. The way we dress always communicates something. We don't have to wear designer clothes to polish up our appearance and tell others more about who we are and what we want. We just have to put in some educated effort.

Communication via texts, phone calls, and emails is essential in our digital age. While there are similarities here to in-person conversation, there are nuances

to consider. The tone is often lost, as well as visual cues. We need to pay extra attention so that we are concise, clear, and communicate in a way that is both friendly and assertive.

Of course, in-person communication is vital and powerful. Communicating with our speech in person holds a power unlike other methods. I want to encourage all Assistants to make this a priority with their executives. Schedule regular meetings so you can plan ahead. It will save you and your executive time and energy, and help you stand out in our digital world. It will also help you capitalize on proximity bias, which is critical if you desire a competitive advantage.

With AI growing, commit to investing in your communication skills. Being a skilled communicator will be more important than ever if you want to hone your people skills and stand out in a world ruled by technology.

## 5. Network and Grow Your Relationships

I can't emphasize enough the importance of networking, which is why it's such a crucial component of our annual conference. Here's the thing I want you to consider, though. Networking is not merely about connecting with other people so you can get a job opportunity. If that's all you're using it for, you're missing the point. Networking is about building deep, meaningful relationships with your peers, and it's crucial in the age of AI.

There is a connection between people when we meet in person that technology cannot replace; this can be used to your advantage. If you develop your social skills to the point where you can make any person feel valued and conduct a positive in-person conversation, you will be invaluable to your organization. It is, unfortunately, a dying skill, as mentioned earlier in this

article. However, if you master this craft, you can perform well in a crucial setting in a way that AI simply cannot.

Further, the relationships you build will be vital for your learning and development. Even if you prefer to work individually, there are few people who do not benefit from others' input. There is always someone who is better than us at something. That shouldn't intimidate us. Rather, it should motivate us! If we seek out the people with the skills and experience we esteem, we can learn directly from them and challenge ourselves to grow more.

Remember, relationships matter, and they need to be cultivated for our personal and professional success.

## Conclusion

These are just a few, although all very important, ways to ensure you are investing in yourself and preparing for tomorrow. Take action today, and your future self will thank you for it. If you're feeling overwhelmed, stop, take a deep breath, and realize that small, intentional steps accumulate over time. You don't have to have it all figured out, but through careful preparation now, you will thrive in the world of AI for years to come.



**Joan Burge** is known as the pioneer of the administrative training industry. She is an accomplished author, professional speaker, corporate trainer, and coach. After working in the administrative profession for 20 years, Joan founded Office Dynamics International in 1990, inspiring excellence in the administrative profession. Since then, ODI has grown into a global industry leader, offering a broad range of training and coaching solutions for administrative

Assistants. Joan has been passionate about the administrative profession for 50 years. She eats, breathes, and lives to improve the quality of life and education for Assistants at every level worldwide.

Joan is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Joan training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit [executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau](https://executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau).