

Six Must-Have Skills for 2024

We need to invest more in ourselves to further advance the success of our careers as Executive Assistants, says Joan Burge

A new year is underway. I like to think about where I was a year prior and compare the differences I felt looking ahead to the year before me. The most drastic difference was from 2020 to 2021, but how I feel today is also substantially different than the year before, largely due to AI.

As part of my career, I diligently study trends I see from publications, research articles, and from my work training Executive Assistants. I use those insights to guide my training. My last article for *Executive Support Magazine*, [How to Be an Irreplaceable Assistant in the World of AI](#), talked specifically about the necessary skills I believe every Assistant should have to thrive in the world of AI. I want to spin off from that and dive deeper.

Looking down the road as we march into the bulk of 2024, I want to consider six skills that I believe every Executive Assistant needs to invest in this year to become a stand-out professional. Let's dig into what I've gathered from my research.

1. Attitude Management

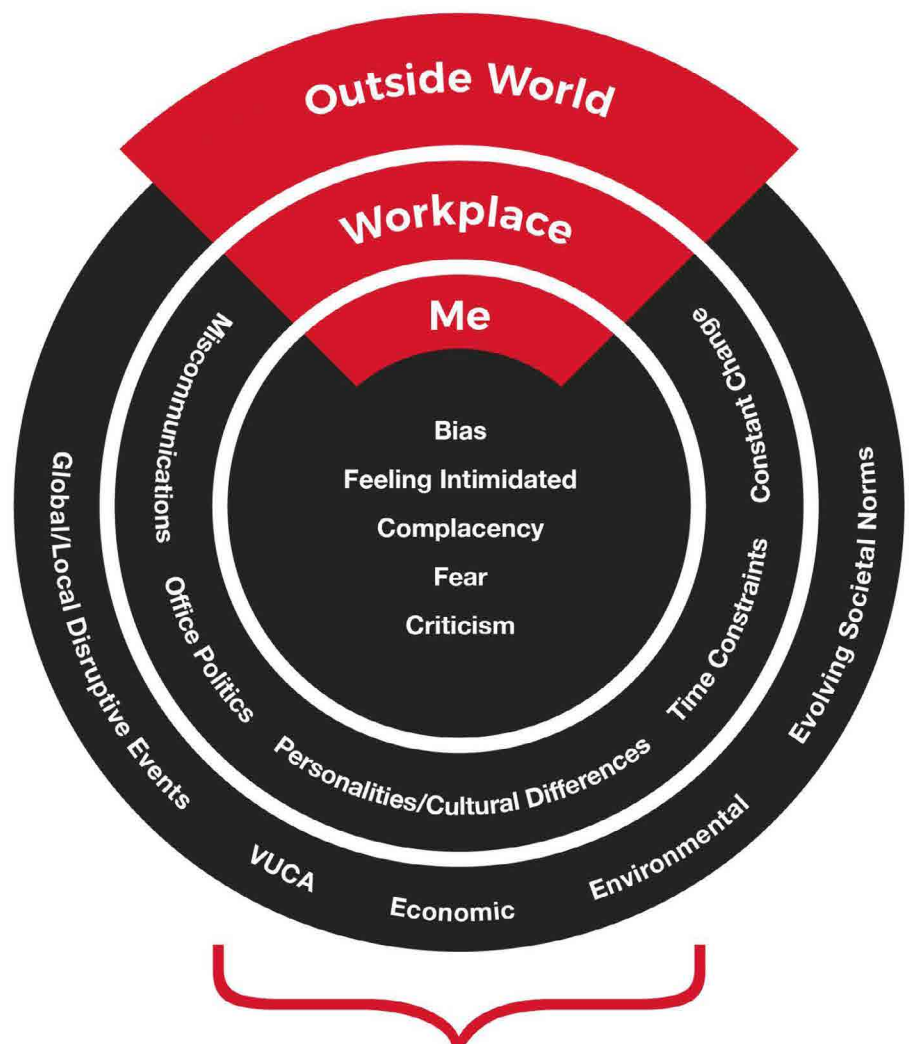
Keeping a positive and professional attitude is imperative in our line of work. We function as information gatekeepers, and the way we behave influences the flow of information. Further, our jobs rely on human interaction, and that interaction suffers when we don't have the correct attitude. This concept is nothing new, but what may be often overlooked is the understanding of what's impacting our attitude and how we can use that knowledge to shape our responses.

What I show here is a model that I use in my training. At the top is the influence of the outside world. This is where our attitude is initially impacted. The economy, VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), and societal events all impact us and our attitudes in different ways, as well as our workplace (the next layer). Office culture, time constraints, and

different personalities will shape our daily attitude. Lastly, our attitude is a response to what is happening internally. Our own biases, intimidation, and self-criticism will impact the way we behave.

I use this graphic and explain this to help you understand that there are multiple layers to what impacts our own attitude, and they all impact one another. It's

important to have this understanding so we can correctly build strategies to manage our attitudes and respond to the emotions we feel with success. Learn to assess what's happening in your environment and get into the practice of self-reflecting. Uncover what you are feeling so you can embrace the strategies you need to ensure your attitude sets you up for success.



We Need Courage, Adaptability, Resiliency, Warrior Mindset, Exploration Mindset



2. Self-Leadership

If you desire to take your career to the next level as an Executive Assistant, you must be a proactive self-leader. Don't misunderstand me; we all need good leadership. The office environment created by our leaders can make or break a company. However, keep in mind what I previously mentioned: our external circumstances are only one piece of the puzzle. Our ability to self-lead is another, and when we self-lead well, we end up leading others. Let's explore how.

There are five pillars that I teach which I call "The Five Pillars of Life," and I believe we need to lead boldly in each of them. The five pillars are career, family, financial, spiritual, and wellness. Like the attitude influences above, they all impact each other as well. Your health in each of these areas will influence the others.

However, there is an important point I want to make. It's unrealistic to expect to give your full attention to each of these areas and be perfectly balanced. For instance, there will be times when you need to put more emphasis on your wellness or your family. When you get to the end of each quarter, reflect and try to refocus on certain pillars that you have been neglecting. At the end of the year, it's the sum of the whole that will matter more than maintaining perfect balance at all times.

When you see your neighbor prioritizing daily walks, it influences you to do the same. When you see individuals change their lives through healthy financial choices, it inspires you to make similar choices. By choosing to live as a leader in each of these areas and taking the initiative, you will indirectly and powerfully influence others to do the same.

3. Energy Management

Time management has been at the forefront of people's minds for years. There are countless articles dedicated to helping others be more successful at it. However, even with the endless resources promising to help us master it, we are still seeking better ways to manage our time. I think new technology has something to do with this; when we use tech to free up our time, we then put even more on our plates, and the cycle continues.

What I advocate for instead, and what I think will distinguish the superb Executive Assistant from the rest, is a mindset shift to energy management. We are each unique and only have a limited amount of energy to expend per day. We all have our peak energy times, too; some of us are early birds, and others are night owls. Some get their best work done during the morning and others in the afternoon. Understanding this is a big part of what it takes to harness your energy to produce your best work.

There are two points that I want you to focus on, in particular, for optimal energy management: decision fatigue and information fatigue. You have the power to manage both for you and your executive. Your time is limited, and it's easy to get lost in the multitude of decisions and overlook the bigger picture. Think strategically so you can focus on what's most important, prioritizing, letting go of, or delegating the rest.

Your executive's time is even more limited. With the influx of choices and information they encounter every day, make it easier for them and make sure they can understand things quickly. Not everything needs to come across their desk, so pay attention to their needs and the crucial items they should see so you can help focus their energy. This is vital for a high-level Executive Assistant.

Our energy reserves are limited. To be a top Executive Assistant in 2024, we need to understand this and work to harness our energy in a way that allows us to be the most efficient. Don't be afraid to make mistakes here. Pay attention to what you believe is the most important and learn from your decisions for the future.

4. Selective and Impactful Communications

Communication is a fascinating subject because there are so many pieces at play. We need to consider the medium (in-person, text, social media message, email, etc.), the person we are talking to, how we are framing our communication, our external cues, and our word choices. It's complex. Even though communicating is something we all do, many of us don't do it well.

Therefore, sharpening your communication skills is well worth the investment for Executive Assistants. Learn how to improve

your communication methods in various settings. Research better ways to relay your message and seek to understand how it is interpreted. Find ways to say less, reserve energy, and say it better. This also requires you to understand your leader's preferred communication style. For instance, if they are a "red" like me, they want quick and decisive communication and will not want to be bothered with the details. Knowing this will save you a lot of trouble and improve your strategic efforts, as well as your rapport.

5. Teamwork and Collaboration

I know both of these sound like they are saying the same thing, but teamwork and collaboration are distinct. However, both are needed. If you are holding on to the idea that you can do it better on your own, it's time to ditch it.

Dena Plotkin, psychotherapist and collaborative strategist, says collaboration requires us to intimately understand the needs and desires of our colleagues. This is one of the main ways that collaboration differs from teamwork. In teamwork, there is the assumption that everyone is on the same page. Everyone is working together and is aware of it. Working together is the goal, and the goal is a result of how well the team works. This is why I believe both are needed; a collective team working towards a common goal is imperative, but so is embracing and supporting individuality. A stellar Assistant needs to understand both to support their team successfully.

As I emphasized in my previous article, we will not go as far without the support of others. We need to tap into the strengths around us and make sure we work well with one another to truly excel as Executive Assistants.

6. Executive/Leader Support

Nowadays, I receive many requests for in-person coaching for the executive support team. I think it is because Executive Assistants may get so bogged down in their tasks that they forget the primary purpose of their job, and many executives are not getting the support they feel they need. However, many capable, highly intelligent Assistants *can* contribute to the executive's



success. I know it sounds obvious, but truly, we need to remember that the core of our careers is to support our leaders.

If we are going to be stand-out Assistants, we always need to refocus on this as our mission. Consider ways that you can support your leaders in the little details. Sending concise and direct emails, filtering info, eliminating their busy work, and executing efficient meetings takes a lot of weight off their shoulders. Keep these details in mind while you look at the bigger picture and the purpose of your job.

Another way we can support our leaders well is by being proactive and future focused. Look at what's on the horizon for your company, career, and your executive. This will help you and your leader immensely.

Otherwise, you are just being reactive. AI is a helpful tool, but remember, it does not hold the creative and strategic thinking you have, and it's what is needed to do your job of executive support well.

Pay attention, listen, and observe. What's essential to one executive may not be important to another. It's up to us to know them well and cater to what they need to do their best jobs. In turn, you will be raising the bar in your own professional life.

Conclusion

For 2024, we will need to invest more in ourselves to further advance the success of our careers as Executive Assistants.

We are more than task doers – executive teams are working at full speed, and tech is growing. They need an Assistant who works as their strategic partner, an excellent communicator, a team player and collaborator, and an Assistant who takes their core mission of executive support to heart. This year, invest in the training you need to be just that: a priceless, rare Assistant. I know you have it within you.

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.

