

# How to Be Influential as an Assistant

You have incredible power to influence, no matter what organisation you work for, explains Joan Burge

In my 33+ years as an administrative trainer, I have constantly encountered the same scenario: Assistants don't feel they have a voice and don't feel they have much influence in the workplace. However, that could not be further from the truth.

Assistants are in the prime position to influence; understanding this and how to impact your influence will yield tremendous results in your professional career.

By the end of this article, I hope you will walk away not only with the realization of the influential power you have in your role but also with practical ways to strengthen your influence.

There are many ways you can, but a few that stand out:

## Business Strategy and Acumen

Business acumen is the ability to understand and make decisions in an organization's best interest. It requires a comprehensive understanding of the organization and its business needs, as well as how to work within the organization's business processes. As Assistants, we have the incredible opportunity to work as strategic business partners and live out that definition with an in-depth understanding of our companies. From this understanding, we can form more advanced strategies.

If you desire to grow your influence, commit to continually better understanding your company so you can impact the work you do with better strategies. Often, when we start a new job, we dive into learning about the company and its processes until we are comfortable doing the role we were hired for. But don't stay there.

When you start to feel comfortable and get the hang of things, challenge yourself again. Dive deeper into your company's operations. That is taking an advanced course on your new company's software tool, or it is



shadowing different departments so you can have a better grasp on the working parts within your organization. Come up with a plan within your company and pitch it to your leaders so you can know your company like the back of your hand.

This advanced business acumen will help you better understand how to influence your strategies effectively. As a result, you will also be able to influence others who turn to you for your advanced business acumen, which brings me to the next influential factor: leadership.

## Leadership

Now, you may see "leadership" and immediately dismiss it. You don't have the title one would consider as a leadership role. However, reconsider what it means to be a leader. I have said it many times, and I still firmly believe: you do not need to be a manager, senior executive, or even a Chief of Staff to be a leader. Every Executive Assistant and administrator is a leader, which means you have an incredible chance to influence.

The new receptionist who you are training? You influence through your guidance. The executive who just confided in you after a family crisis? You influence through your communication. Is the room full of power players engaged in hurtful gossip? You influence through your response. All of these examples demonstrate an act of leadership and an incredible opportunity to influence.

You, as an Assistant, are an influencer by trade. You work closely on high-impact projects, manage responsibilities to free up your executive's plate, and communicate endlessly to convey essential messages across various mediums (more on that next). Yes, Assistants, you are influencers by trade because you are leaders by trade. You lead through your attitudes, attention to detail, work ethic, and support.

## Communication

Interestingly, the study of communications often doesn't receive the notoriety I believe it's worth in universities. It is because people feel they don't need to learn how



to talk. Why study something you have been doing your whole life? However, in my experience, few people know how to communicate with positive influence.

That's the thing, too; we are constantly influencing each other through communication. The key is that we need to learn how to influence positively. Think of when someone hasn't been warm, hospitable, or friendly to you. Instead, they have been rude, abrupt, and dismissive. Has that not made you angry and want to pull your hair out?

Consider also when communication has been unclear or confusing; something that should take minutes ends up taking hours. Clear, friendly, and proper communication then becomes a powerful tool to drive influence, positively shaping attitudes and enhancing efficiency.

Communication is rather nuanced; I talked about this in my last article for Executive Support Magazine, titled "[Six Must-Have Skills for 2024](#)". There are many mediums through which we communicate and many different people with whom we do so. Therefore, it is worth learning the nuances of the people we communicate with and how we are. Pay attention to your leaders, how they communicate, and how they prefer to. Study, read, assess, and reevaluate; communication is an art, and those who do it well have an incredible impact.

Effective communication skills are the heartbeat of our successful partnerships. I cannot think of many more influential people than a skilled communicator.

## Career Development

I continue to be amazed by the amount of time and energy put into training executives, CEOs, managers, and other leaders while overlooking the educational development of administrative professionals.

However, more and more companies are changing as they see their administrative team's immense impact on their success. If your company is one of them and offers education programs to advance your career knowledge, take advantage of it.

If your company is not, though, advocate for yourself. Knowledge is powerful, and we all have something to learn. The more solid understanding we have, the more we can guide others and, really, the trajectory of our team's success. Investing in your ongoing education regarding your professional responsibilities is the foundation for your career development.

Growing your career development with ongoing education can happen through several means, such as having a mentor you regularly meet with, taking on new work responsibilities, completing a long certification program, or attending classes in person. It can be as simple as joining an organization, reading a book, or subscribing to Executive Support Magazine.

Committing to ongoing professional development is essential for Assistants to become more influential. When you excel in your career and reach new heights, the joy you find in your work will be contagious. Others will be influenced not only by your knowledge and responsibilities but also by your sheer passion as you thrive in your career.

## Personal Development

Personal development is like professional development in that it takes deliberate time and attention. I smile as I write this, as it seems simple, but how many of us spend time on personal development daily? Or even a few times a month or a year?

Think of personal development as something outside of your professional career that will impact it. Learning a new

language may not directly impact your immediate job; however, it could open even more doors in the future. Getting a handle on your finances and setting better budgets may not impact your career responsibilities, but it will significantly affect your life and your ability to make the career choices you desire.

How does personal development impact your ability to influence? There are very few things we can compartmentalize in our lives. Our physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual health all impact one another. When we grow personally and invest in ourselves in each of these areas, it's going to impact the person we are overall and make us stronger, healthier individuals. As such, we will be better poised to influence, as others around us will take note and naturally incline their ear to what we have to say.

## Conclusion

As I wrap up this article, I want you to understand that you have incredible power to influence no matter the company you work for.

By elevating your business acumen, strategic decisions, leadership awareness, and communication skills and growing your career and personal development, you sharpen your influential sword and ability to wield it.

Making yourself heard does not mean you are the loudest voice in the room. Take a step back and reevaluate your points of impact. You might be surprised by the depths your influence reaches. We all have a role to play and influence through what we do. The question is, what will you influence someone towards?



**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).