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The Future of the Administrative Profession – Surviving or Thriving?

In this age of great economic change, it is essential that the administrative professional rises to the challenge and thrives.

It's important to recognize the difference between surviving and thriving, because the key to success is available to those who successfully manage to cross the divide between the two.

The global economic meltdown brought sweeping changes across many continents as companies made drastic changes to many types of employees, including the administrative profession. So encompassing was the economic climate, that no vocation was immune.

Before the crisis, the administrative profession operated differently. Training budgets were ample; opportunity for advancement sparkled like diamonds for the taking. Administrators handled many tasks, and had backups, cross training, and team-shared projects.

Post-crisis, many people lost their jobs and took any available position, even ones they were greatly overqualified for. Others could no longer afford to retire. Single income households became dual income households, often due to pay cuts and shorter hours. Training budgets dissipated, opportunities dried up, and assistants had larger workloads without staffing backups. Single support Executive Assistants now juggled multiple managers.

We've come through the crisis, and now the economy is slowly healing. Much has changed for the Executive Assistant and administrative professional, and in order to thrive in this new working environment, it's up to both to



operate wisely, using their savvy to make the right decision regarding the right question at the right time.

It would be easy to simply throw up one's hands and say, 'It's okay to just survive!' but we know that excellence goes far beyond

the basics. Success is met when we exceed expectations; when we go the second mile, and when we work diligently to remain relevant and competitive. Thriving is where we find contentment, advancement and opportunity.

We must know and grasp the many changes in today's workplace, some of which are listed below, so we can leverage them to succeed and thrive in the profession.

1. There are now four distinct generations employed in the workplace [Veteran, Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y]. By 2018, a fifth generation, the Millennial, will enter the work force. We can benefit from all the generations because each has different strengths. Bridge the gap with each other. It's not 'them against us.' It should be us trying to elevate the profession!
2. Be Bold! If you hear people speaking negatively about another assistant, walk away from the negativity or else speak up for that person to advance the profession. Demonstrate your leadership skills. It's the small victories throughout the day that will build your reputation in the department.
3. What's in a name? There are more than 40 titles in the profession; yet no earth shattering new titles have come about. I would like 'secretary' to be a retired title that just goes away. It takes the profession back to where we aren't anymore; now, we are strategic business partners.
4. Technology: Since executives are now so tech-savvy, they need to know how they can best utilize their assistant. How do they use them to an advantage in this modern world? It's changed a lot since taking a letter and pouring coffee forty years ago. And it is changing again as executives recognize that administrators aren't just for typing emails or making travel plans; they can be project managers, ambassadors of their manager's vision, and more. And assistants need to work with the same devices their executives use!
5. Training and Development: Organizations are investing more than ever before in *specialized* training. Companies are realizing that this is a career. Assistants invest in themselves; but they need to see that they are valuable. Brian Tracy says you need to invest in yourself, because when you do, you take that with you for the rest of your life. Assistants need to see themselves as valuable assets.
6. Succession planning for senior-level Executive Assistants: We are at the critical juncture of a work exodus and entrance of new faces assuming leadership roles. Companies are seeing the value of planning as they anticipate the departure of their most experienced assistants within the next few years.
7. Competencies: calendaring, travel, task organization, projects – these are fundamentals, critical foundational skills needed to fully mature your career. These core competencies are your strong core foundation. Now you must build on top of these because today so much more is expected and necessary for Executive Assistants and Administrative Assistants!
8. Cross-training and mentoring: Open your heart and be a mentor to others.
9. Coaching: there is a greater need for coaching Executive Assistants on increasing performance, professional presence, and raising their standards in the role.
10. Stress: Administrative stress levels are higher due to changing priorities and fast deadlines. Being confident, prepared and honing your skills is a great way to handle this.
11. Virtual support: Executives travel internationally and support is now often delivered virtually. How skilled are you in handling offsite support across time zones?
12. Mindset: Do you see yourself as working in a career of your choice? Or are you getting a paycheck? Trust me, it shows!
13. Frumpy or Fabulous? Create a modern view of the Administrative Assistant. Brand yourself as modern, fresh and relevant. If it's time for updated eyeglass frames or a new hairdo, then do it. Consider it an investment in yourself. (See point 5).
14. Leadership is not a job title – nurture an active, vital vision of leadership. Propose ideas. Be creative. Bring solutions, not problems.

To become a thriving, not just surviving, successful assistant, you must ask yourself: 'How will I manage myself?' Remember, *your* career belongs to *you*. Is it healthy? Is it strong and thriving? Or is it anemic or in need of urgent care to revive it?

To help you get started, here are some tips to change 'survive' to 'thrive':

- Strategic thinking – learn about this and implement it at work and home.
- Presentation skills – volunteer to make and give presentations whenever the opportunity arises. Yes, you may be fearful but you need to rise above your fear to see what you are capable of doing.
- Branding – establish your own professional brand and demonstrate it consistently every day. My Chief Executive Assistant, Jasmine, has the calmest professional demeanor and she is that way no matter what happens! It's a precious, valued part of her brand.
- Self-management (managing your thoughts and emotions). Use your passion and energy for work. Be kind. Think the best of others. Manage yourself before you start managing others. That means you exhibit good boundaries.

Wherever I travel, I advise the Executive Assistants and administrative professionals I speak to or meet through coaching sessions to 'Live it, be it, own it!' Fortunately, it only takes one person to make a BOLD difference in your career, and that person can be you!

about the author



Joan Burge, a renowned author and administrative expert, has been a visionary for administrative training and development since 1990. One of the first to venture into the administrative training industry, she has become an international administrative expert, trainer, author, and consultant. Joan Burge equips Administrative Assistants, executive assistants, and office support professionals to move beyond task work to higher-level functions that meet the ever-changing demands of today's workplace. In addition to being editor of the weekly e-zine, *Monday Motivators*™, Joan is the creator of the Star Achievement Series®, World Class Assistant™ Certificate Program, more than 40 customized workshops and seminars for administrative professionals, and most recently - Adminology®, a NEW mindset for a NEW decade.

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