Management Support Fellowship Award 2007

Plus

Now There is no Excuse For Not Having a Computer Backup!
Keyboard Design for the Information Revolution
It’s A Communication Showdown
Avery leads the way in office organisation with everything from labels and software for mail merging to filing accessories and business cards – all designed to make your life simple. Now, to help make life even easier, the Avery online scratchcard game Everyone Wins is giving you the opportunity to win hundreds of cash prizes of up to £10,000, as well as thousands of HMV and Amazon vouchers, with a guaranteed prize every time you play.

DeskDemon members play for free!
Exclusive codes to access the virtual scratchcard are only found in special packs of Avery products, but DeskDemon have 500 of these packs to give away free! Simply fill in the form found at www.deskdemon.com/pages/UK/services/avery-everyonewins to enter the free prize draw to be in with the chance of winning one of those £10,000 prizes.

But don’t worry if you’re not one of the lucky 500 to receive a prize, codes will be available in over a million packs of Avery products such as Addressing Labels, Indexing Dividers, Desktop Accessories, Business Cards, Identification Labels, Trimmers and Guillotines until the end of 2008.

www.deskdemon.com/pages/UK/services/avery-everyonewins
4 Editor’s Letter

Keyboard Design for the Information Revolution
By Nicole Matoushek

8 It’s A Communication Showdown - Video And Live Meetings Square Up, Face-To-Face
By Richard Jebb

38 Now There is no Excuse For Not Having a Computer Backup!
By Vic Thomas
Greetings and welcome to the September issue of PA Enterprise. It is an exciting time at DeskDemon. We have many new projects in the works to make DeskDemon even more helpful to our users! Keep checking back to see what is in store! One of our exciting projects recently launched is our JobDesk. If you are looking for a job or just curious about what opportunities are available, pop over and check out the positions in your area. Create your profile, upload your CV, create email alerts, and more.

Even more exciting are the finals of the Management Support Fellowship Award Programme. Our finalists have each submitted a Day in the Life feature to help you understand their job and qualifications better. After reading each candidate’s submission, take the time and give your support to the finalist you find most deserving. What makes this programme so special is the fact the grand prize winner will be voted by those who know the job the best, you, their peers. Voting will close on October 31st, 2008.

Also in this issue, find out how to reduce musculoskeletal discomfort and work related injuries, such as RSI. Keyboard Design for the Information Revolution will show you how to evaluate your keyboard and give you pointers on how to find the right keyboard for you. Plus, if you have ever suffered from a computer crash, you’ll appreciate the importance of backing up your data. There are many easy ways to back up your computer data, read about some of them in Now There Is No Excuse For Having A Computer Backup.

Once again, don’t forget to cast your vote for your favourite finalist for the Management Support Fellowship Award Programme. We hope you enjoy this month’s issue of PA Enterprise.

Until next month!

Susan Silva
Managing Editor

susan@deskdemon.com
Pret delivers
sandwich platters for office lunches
(with a FREE lunch for you!)

Go to www.pretdelivers.com/allnatural, place an order over £30 and,
as a little thank you, we’ll treat you to a free sandwich.

Just pop in, log on or call (easy peasy).
Keyboard Design for the Information Revolution

By Nicole Matoushek

Creating a safe and comfortable computer set up or office work environment has become an increasing focus during the Information Revolution that started in the 1990s. The Information Revolution is best described, as a worldwide shift to information and technology resulting in more computer based job opportunities and home computer environments. The proper office and home computer set up is important in reducing musculoskeletal discomfort as well as work-related injuries. There are several different components to the computer workstation set up including: the keyboard design, mouse or trackball, monitor, work surface, chair, foot support and work organization factors. All of these components need to be evaluated to assess and improve office workstation postures. This article will focus only on keyboard design.

Keyboard Design: The fundamental ergonomic risk factors that are typically present in a computer set up include: awkward postures, static positions and highly repetitive tasks. Methods of reducing these ergonomic risk factors with an office or computer set up involve maintaining neutral joint postures, alternating tasks, implementing stretch breaks and providing adjustability to the workstation set up. The keyboard is one of the primary components of the computer set up that can result in poor postures, static positions and highly repetitive tasks. The purpose of keyboard design is to promote neutral postures and reduce the strain on the working joints, muscles and tendons. By improving and promoting neutral arm, wrist and hand positions, computer related injuries can be prevented.

Good Postures: When typing and using a keyboard the good postures involve keeping the shoulders, wrists and elbows in a straight and neutral position. For the shoulder, ideally the arms should be hanging loosely at the sides, with the shoulders in about 0-15 degrees of flexion. The elbows should be at about mid range or between 80 and 90 degrees of flexion. The elbows should be level or slightly higher than the keyboard. The wrists should remain straight and neutral. The hands and fingers should be loosely relaxed, with fingers curved or flexed slightly.

Bad postures: Common postures that are observed with keyboard use and should be avoided include: excessive shoulder flexion or abduction, elbows that are flexed or extended beyond 80-90 degrees of flexion, wrists that are flexed or extended or ulnar deviated due to the position of the keyboard. Alternative Keyboards: Alternative keyboards can help keep wrists straight and in a neutral position, thus reducing the stress and strain on the joints and muscle and tendon structures. Alternative keyboard designs include:

• Split keyboards: split keyboards are designed to promote a straight position of the wrist. This is accomplished by either separating the key pads and increasing the distance between the right and left hand sides or by tilting the keyboard pads away from one another.

• Tented keyboards: tented keyboards divide the right and left sided key pads and tilt them up like a tent. This position reduced forearm pronation.

• Built-in wrist rests: this feature helps provide additional support to the wrists and forearms; care must be taken to avoid excessive contact pressure onto the peripheral nerves.

• Sloped keyboards: traditional keyboard design uses a positive slope of the keyboard, meaning the back of the keyboard is higher than the front of the keyboard. A positive slope of a keyboard often causes excessive wrist extension and thus an increased pressure within the carpal tunnel and increased strain to the working tendons. By contrast, a negative slope or neutral slope, where the plane of the keyboard is either level or slightly higher in the front, often promotes a more neutral wrist position.

• Key position: the position of the keys is classified as straight, concave or curved. The various positions of...
the keys allow the fingers to work in a more neutral and relaxed position.

Guidelines for Evaluating Keyboard Design:

The following guidelines can be helpful with keyboard selection:

• Verify that the keyboard is compatible with existing computer hardware and software.
• Make sure the individual keys are easy to depress. Additional effort on individual keys can increase effort and strain.
• Verify that the keyboard is compatible with the alternate input devices such as the mouse, pen tablet or trackball.
• Evaluate the workstation design to ensure the keyboard fits properly with the workstation and does not cause more severe or additional musculoskeletal stress or discomfort.
• Evaluate the posture and size of the keyboard user to ensure it is an appropriate fit.
• Assess whether the keyboard may affect the users performance or productivity.
• Verify that all necessary components are present on the keyboard. For example, not all alternative keyboard contain number pads, if the user requires a number pad, select the appropriate model.
• Allow the user to try several different models.
• Allow the user to try the keyboard on a trial basis.
• There is no one keyboard that fits all; a comprehensive ergonomics workstation evaluation is necessary to evaluate the individual workstation, keyboard user and postures.
• The ergonomic evaluator selecting the keyboard should be experienced and knowledgeable in ergonomics.
• Train the user on the proper use and maintenance of the keyboard, and instruct the user it may take several weeks to get used to a new design.
• Follow up with the Comprehensive Ergonomic Program and reassessment of the workstation to ensure worker safety and comfort.

Laptops: As the trend of remote office environments continues to grow, so does the use of laptop computers. The laptop computer does provide lightweight and portable computer access to allow the user unlimited flexibility. However this luxury does not come without adverse effects. The laptop computer keyboard is an ergonomic debacle. The keyboard is concentrated on a single flat plane thus eliminating the ability to separate, tilt, tent or replace the position of the individual keys and keypads. There is virtually no adjustability to improve the positions of the shoulders, elbows, wrists and hands. However there are some guidelines to use that will promote user safety and comfort.

Guidelines for Laptop Users:
These guidelines can be used to reduce musculoskeletal strain and fatigue from laptop use.

• Try to set up laptop as ergonomically as possible, some hotels and airports offer docking stations, use airplane food trays or pillows to promote the neutral postures.
• Set up the laptop so that neutral positions of the shoulder, elbow, wrist and hands can be maximized.
• Use a chair that is stationary and does not have arm rests, so that the position of the arms can be adjusted.
• Use regular keyboard if available.
• Avoid resting the wrist on the wrist rest while typing to avoid compression. Rest wrists while not typing.
• Use larger joints such as the hand and arm to move from key to key as opposed to stretching fingers and wrists.
• If the key touch is light and the keypad is shallow avoid pounding on keys.
• Use or plug in mouse as opposed to using the glide screen.
• Try to maintain a neutral neck position. Avoid looking down for too long, tuck chin and keep head balanced over the shoulders.
• When carrying the laptop, use a padded shoulder strap.
• Take frequent stretch breaks to reduce the strain from awkward postures and static positions.

Summary: The keyboard is only one piece of the ergonomic puzzle. In order to effectively reduce the musculoskeletal discomfort and injuries that result from computer set ups, it is essential to evaluate and adjust all of the components. There is no one keyboard that fits all, careful assessment and evaluation of the individual keyboard user is essential when recommending an alternative keyboard design. Keyboard design principles help to maintain neutral joint postures of the arms, wrists and hands. In addition to improving working posture the keyboard user should always keep the keyboard centered with the monitor, perform frequent stretch breaks and alternate tasks.

Nicole Matoushek, MPH, PT has 15 years of experience in clinical managed care and disability management. She is founder of http://www.ErgoRehabinc.com She has developed numerous managed care, ergonomics and work injury management/ prevention programs and training courses. She is dedicated to helping others succeed in the workers compensation sector.

She has authored two books “Acquired Hope: A Journey of Advanced Recovery and Empowerment” and “365 Days of Abundant Hope” both available on amazon.com and http://www.acquiredhope.com

Nicole lives each day in hope and is passionately dedicated to helping others succeed in obtaining abundant health, wealth and a fuller life!

The Secret to Getting Rich: http://www.inspirednhopeful.thesGRprogram.com
We live in an era when many forms of traditional communication are heading online, when demand for video communication and video conferencing are on the rise and we spend much of our working lives opposite a screen. I’m a freelance copywriter, a communications professional, so I’ve decided it’s time to ask, is the value of face-to-face meetings diminishing; do they face a redundant future?

The case for Video

Video is being used increasingly for team meetings, conferences and even for meetings between clients and suppliers. Statements attempting to explain why include: the rapid adoption of broadband; the need for increased staff productivity and decreased capital expenditure; issues relating to travel as a result of international terrorism and the need to reduce everyone’s carbon footprint. All of these are touted as the reason that companies see video conferencing as viable alternative to regular meetings and conferences. Why video is set to take over. But we’ve been here before haven’t we? Video was much tipped to kill the ‘Radio Star’ in the early 80’s, yet has so far not managed to kill anyone. And I think it is unlikely to be any more successful with the professional event and meeting organiser, as despite the best efforts of video and its techie cohorts; face to face meetings are on the rise. In the UK, where I live, meetings and conferences contributed £12billion to the economy last year.

What is it about video anyway, why does it aspire to cause so much destruction? Is it really so aggressive? Perhaps we’ve all got the wrong idea about video.

TV the One-eyed God

It’s true that video communication has well and truly penetrated our lives; we’re used to seeing everything on a screen. The television has been the one-eyed god of our living rooms for decades and video-conferencing technology builds its success on the continued development of this visualised form of worship. It is perhaps not surprising then that when management hear the words ‘video conferencing’ they charge as if approaching the divine conferencing solution.

But the reason video fails to completely consume us is all too apparent, it lacks the ability to radiate the most essential elements of human communication: you can’t build a relationship with a screen and you can’t interact with someone fully on an emotional level, unless you’re sharing the same environment.

When a meeting is a video-conference, it lacks character and influence and there are subtle, ‘human’ benefits to a ‘real’ face-to-face meeting.

The Case for Live Meetings

What about the inspiration and determination gleaned by the individual from being in a room full of hundreds of enthusiastic and energetic peers. Or that invaluable feeling of
empowerment developed after spending a day or two in the company of fellow employees, sharing drinks, expressing ideas and rubbing shoulders with the big wigs. You can’t discount the value of the sales commitment offered by third-party dealers after attending a series of rousing speeches and inebriating beverages. Video-conferencing simply can’t provide the riches delivered by genuine human interaction and it’s a mistake to overlook the human aspect of anything, especially business.

There’s another issue with anything on a screen. It’s simply less effective than meeting face-to-face.

Make the Message Stick

A meeting that involves real people creates far more intense emotions, you can’t help but feel involved and live meetings offer the opportunity to get your message across on so many different levels, meaning the message sticks in the memory that bit longer. Ask yourself this question: What did I watch on TV a few weeks ago? If you can remember, can you remember how you felt whilst watching; the emotions it stirred in you? Most people can’t remember the plot line from their favourite soap a few months back. Do the same exercise on the last event or meeting you attended, I’m willing to gamble it’s a lot easier to pinpoint how you felt there. What it comes down to is that sitting in front of a screen is a less effective form of communication than actually meeting. The other people can’t see you, so you don’t have to concentrate; you don’t have to conform.

Establishing the Right Tone

When you see something on screen it’s emotionless, it doesn’t appeal to all five senses. And therefore has less impact. In many cases, the person talking isn’t even aware if you’re watching or listening, and certainly has no feeling for the mood you’re in and therefore what the appropriate tone of voice is. And as a freelance copywriter, I know how important it is to get the tone right. Communication in any form simply misses the target when the tone is wrong.

Video technology can be used to great effect as part of a conference or seminar and there are situations where the ‘human aspect’ of meetings is less important, at these times video-conferencing can save time and money. Being able to download a conference or seminar you missed to watch at your convenience is a massive bonus and adds to the success of the live event.

Clearly, there’s a place for video-conferencing in the business world, as there is with much new technology, everything has its place and its role should always be to enhance and hone the delivery method. Video and live meetings can get on well; many of them work in harmony creating great effects together, so let’s stop putting them at loggerheads.

Surely video doesn’t really want to kill anyone, it’s just been misunderstood. Use all communication in any way that is appropriate for the format, use your imagination, but don’t use video conferencing as a replacement for real meetings and conferences as you are unlikely to achieve the powerful results these face-to-face human interaction activities deliver.

Richard Jebb is a Freelance Writer who specializes in writing for business. Copywriting, Marketing literature, Public Relations, Award Entry Submissions and Website Content are just some of the business tools he can make work for you. To contact Richard Jebb email him at richard@wordsthat-work.co.uk. http://www.wordsthat-work.co.uk
Plan to pamper yourself

Your Sasco Year Planner now comes with added pamper factor! With our exclusive 2 for 1 offer, you can treat yourself to a FREE beauty treatment when you buy one of equal or greater value. Choose a facial, massage, manicure or any other treatment offered by our participating salons.

There are hundreds of salons to choose from and wonderful pampering services just waiting for you, so go on, indulge yourself! Finding a salon near to you couldn’t be simpler. Just click on the Pamper Yourself icon on www.sascoplanners.com and you can start searching!

Win a Spa Day & more

While you are swooning over salon treatments, you can also enter our online prize draw to win the ultimate pampering experience – one of 10 Luxury Spa Days for 2 or 20 x £100 / €145 Spa Seekers vouchers. What could be more relaxing!

Great looking planners

Sasco are the leading brand in visual planning. Our planners look great on the wall and work hard all year round to help you keep track of all those important dates and events in your working life. Whatever you need to plan, Sasco have a solution for you.
Over the past year, we have posted many excellent nominations. Each month you chose the best of the best. And now, it’s time for YOU to choose the individual that will represent the profession as an ambassador and take home the amazing first place prize of £10,000!

The Management Support Fellowship Award is special, not just because it celebrates the vital role of Executive PAs and secretaries but because it’s the ONLY award where the winners are decided by their peers and that’s you! After all, you’re the people who know best!

Our finalists have each submitted a Day in the Life article to help you understand their job and qualifications better. After reading each candidate’s submission, take the time and give your support to the finalist you find most deserving. Voting will close on October 31st, 2008.
MICHELLE CORR

Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

BCCM/BCTC is a not for profit public/private sector partnership, which draws together key stakeholders from both the private and public sector to provide a united and common approach to continually improving and regenerating Belfast. The growing membership scheme represents over 400 city centre businesses with one aim of making Belfast a city of international class. Strategically signed in 2002, Belfast City Centre Management Company formed a Strategic Alliance with the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I joined the company originally in April 2005 as a temporary administrative assistant. I worked in this position for four months. Unfortunately, just before I was due to sign on as a permanent member of staff, personal circumstances meant that I had to move away for a year. BCCM decided to keep my post open until my return in July 2006 when I rejoined as the Senior Administrative Officer.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for? (please mention if you have many bosses and the roles you perform for them, if it differs from boss to boss).

My role as Senior Business Administrator is extremely varied. My daily duties consist of:

- Diary Management
- Assisting with the co-ordination of the Belfast Awards
- Co-ordinating high profile meetings
- Event management (Retail Forum, Chamber AGM)
- Market Research and reporting
- Customer Relations Management
- Communications (Mail shots, City Business magazine distribution)
- Supervising Staff
- Travel Arrangements
- Design and presentation (company website, Belfast Awards presentation)
- Office management
- Ordering/Purchasing

I also am Personal Assistant to the City Centre Manager and provide secretarial support to:

- Senior Management Team (3 people)
  - BCCM Chairman
  - BCCM Board of Directors (18 directors)
  - Executive Chamber Council (24 members)
  - Office team (14 in total)

I also provide ad hoc duties to external partners such as Belfast City Council and Department for Social Development as and when needs be, co-ordinating meetings and mail shots and distributing important information.

In theory I have 4 bosses, i.e. City Centre Manager, BCCM Chairman and the three Senior Managers to whom I provide managerial support. In reality this number is much greater as I often provide managerial support to the Board of Directors and Executive Chamber Council to whom the company is accountable and therefore priority is given to these members. My role for each boss varies from secretarial support to personal assistance, organising travel and events, booking conference facilities and catering etc.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

In January 2008 I was promoted to Senior Business Administrator and was given responsibility for supervising two Junior Administrative Assistants. My job role has changed from solely providing administrative support to supervising larger projects, managing the office, taking on some HR duties and my role as an administrator has broadened to include more important tasks such as producing evaluation reports which are distributed to the Board of Directors. Becoming a Supervisor has provided me with new challenges and opportunities, enhancing my skills and abilities daily.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

The three most important skills I use at work are:

- **Time Management:** As a PA and Administrator/Supervisor a number of colleagues in various fields rely on me to organize and assist the implementation of tasks, alongside the completion of responsibilities that fall under my remit as well as my own.

BCCM is continuously inundated with new projects, tasks and research, all of which needs the support of an efficient and effective administrative team. As most of our projects are time sensitive, I find it useful to take 10 minutes at the start and end of every day to evaluate my priorities, schedule work and effective administrative team. As most of our projects are time sensitive, I find it useful to take 10 minutes at the start and end of every day to evaluate my priorities, schedule work in my personal calendar including the admin team calendar and let everyone else know what I am working on and what my time restraints are. This ensures that all tasks can be addressed and completed within their necessary timeframe. I also keep a Priorities List which I update daily. This lists all the tasks currently outstanding stating the details of the task, deadline date, etc.
who is responsible for completing the task and who the finished article is to be sent to.

Empowerment: This refers to both self-empowerment and the empowerment of others. There is no better motivator than to attempt something you have never done before and succeed at it. I believe that in order to stay happy and content within your working environment it is important to take on new challenges with a positive attitude. By approaching new things in this way you can push your own boundaries and do things you never thought you could do before. This also comes into play when supervising staff. Rather than shadow employees or simply tell them to do something, it is much more productive to inspire them to look at new challenges in the same way. By giving employees this sense of trust they can learn to grow within their role.

Communication: This is probably the most important skill in my job. With the wealth of information that passes through our office it is crucial to maintain and improve lines of communication, be it with external bodies or with colleagues in the workplace. One example of how I exercise this skill is to consistently provide my colleagues with feedback in relation to tasks set to ensure that they are secure in mind that all tasks will be complete within the timeframe set. I also have check-ins with the two admin assistants to ensure that they have the resources and support they need to complete their job roles.

What does a typical day look like for you? If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in.

There is no such thing as a typical day in BCCM. Every day is different from the last with new challenges always appearing. There are a few regular tasks every day such as every morning and evening I take the time to plan out my activities, I regularly update the company website, I have regular meetings with my manager to track progress of the admin team and I ensure I am on hand to complete my PA duties at all times. The main task I am involved in all year round is the co-ordination of the Belfast Awards which is a massive gala ceremony that myself, my manager and a small event management team put together every year to celebrate the successes of business in Belfast. Other tasks include market research on topics such as trade waste, events evaluations etc. both collating responses from surveys and drawing up the reports to go to the Board of Directors. I also do some design work in-house. I designed the corporate website, the on-screen graphics for the gala ceremony of the Belfast Awards for two years running, various leaflets and presentations. I enjoy being able to exercise this creative flair as gives me the opportunity to develop my skills further in other areas. The various projects I would be involved in are too many to number but a breakdown of these can be found on the company website (www.belfastcentre.com - key projects).

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

When I first joined the company the biggest challenge I faced was learning to cope with the demands of providing support to such a large number of people. In the beginning I was the administrative officer and was completely overwhelmed by what was expected of me, trying to keep track of all the tasks I had to manage. The first thing I did was to draw out a chart of everyone who would be relying on my skills and prioritised them the time constraints required to complete each task.

In order to develop my time management skills I sought approval from management to participate in a time management course and a course aimed at managing multiple objectives and deadlines. I planned and developed a colour coding system and set new procedures in place so that tasks coming in could be quickly categorised and put on my list in order of urgency. I also took the time to get to know the people I would be working with as forging strong relationships in the beginning can greatly affect the way the working relationship progresses. Through all these measures I was able to complete my assigned tasks within deadline and to a high standard. As time progressed and I found myself becoming faster and more efficient at completing my tasks, I took the time to evaluate the way the office works and took the initiative to make some changes, i.e. outsourcing the distribution of our magazine, which meant less work for the already over-stretched staff and it also saved the company over £12,000 per annum. Now that I have recently been made a supervisor over two junior members of staff I am finding new challenges every day and I am really enjoying being pushed to my full potential.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success.

Over the past two years my achievements have been very significant. Apart from my own personal progression through on the job learning, I also decided to pursue academia in order to benefit the company I work for and to further my own career prospects. In April 2007 I successfully completed my NVQ Level 3 in Administration, my Technical Certificate in Administration and my Key Skills 3 in Number. I am currently in the middle of completing my NVQ Level 4 in Management and have recently started a degree in Business Studies. I am a student member of the Charted Management Institute and hope to become a fully fledged member once I have finished my NVQ 4.
My other achievements include saving the company £12,000 on distribution costs, £2000 on stationery costs, and £1000 in postage costs this year alone. I also designed the company’s website and maintain this daily.

One of my biggest achievements would be the success of the Belfast Awards for two years running as so much work goes into this event from such a small team (4 people, myself included). As a co-ordinator for the Belfast Awards (a huge gala evening with over 400 guests), I assist in mystery shopping, managing the launch event, Gala ceremony and after party, as well as providing support to applicants, processing applications and I am involved with all of the back-end support for the event i.e. choosing centre pieces, chair coverings, menus etc. I also design the on-screen graphics shown at the awards ceremony.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)

In two short years I believe I have made an impression within the organisation which was recognised recently by my promotion to Senior Business Administrator. I put my success to having a genuine interest in what the company does and by treating it as if it were my own. If the company succeeds, I succeed and I am always on the lookout for things I can do to improve the way in which the company operates. I take pleasure in celebrating our successes and knowing that I have the support of the company behind me and knowing that they want me to succeed makes a huge difference to the way I approach my work. This positive attitude, taking my own initiative and striving for success has, in my opinion, made me stand out to my superiors and helps me gain recognition in being a valuable team player, which in turn improves my prospects for career progression.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

There are two parts to my job and therefore I will address these both separately.

As an administrator, I enjoy the daily challenges given to me and the feeling of satisfaction at dealing with these challenges. When I don’t succeed at what I set out to do, I enjoy the learning process that takes place to ensure I succeed the next time around. I also enjoy being one of the main lynchpins that holds the organisation together and knowing that people are depending on my skills and knowledge to make their lives that little bit easier. As this award recognises, this job is to provide support to other people and it gives me great satisfaction that because I am good at my job, someone else doesn’t have to stress so much about theirs. Although there are times when it can be difficult, and often people in support roles don’t always get the credit they are due, I like the feeling of being in the background, being one of the cogs that turns a complex machine and knowing that even though I may not always be seen, I am always important.

As a PA the main satisfaction I get is knowing that my boss can depend on me to take up some of the slack and make his life that bit easier. His job is high-powered and often very challenging and to be able to relieve some of the pressure even if it is just making him take time for lunch makes me feel I have an important role to play. It is also nice to have a strong relationship and a role model encouraging me to further myself and appreciating my work.

Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

This is my first time in a supervisory position over two junior members of staff and I am keen to mentor them and help them appreciate the finer details in becoming an exemplary member of the support staff. I think in the beginning of a career in administration it is easy to become disillusioned about the important of the job as you are usually left doing all the smaller jobs that give little reward. It will be my aim to ensure that my staff understand the value of their job and the positive effects that their efforts can bring to creating a great working environment. Already I have initiated one of the staff members on the same NVQ 3 in Administration course that I completed last year to provide him with the all the necessary tools and motivation he will need to progress in his career. I see personal development and empowerment as key to the self-esteem of staff members which will in turn greatly affect the way in which they approach their jobs. It is nice to finally be able to pass on some of my experience and skills to other people and watch them grow as I did.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

- Just because you are in the background doesn’t mean you’re not important. VALUE YOURSELF!
- Understand that it is OK to say no if you feel overwhelmed. Sometimes we are taken for granted and need to stand up for ourselves. You are a superstar...not superhuman!
- Be flexible and take critique positively
- Forge strong relationships early... when you are in a support position for someone you get on well with, it makes life so much easier!
- If a senior member of staff sounds off, don’t take it personally...when you provide support on a daily basis it is easy to be seen in a support position in other areas. Grow a thick skin!
Your M&S makes it easy to choose the perfect gifts for clients and staff. Ordering couldn’t be simpler, and we can deliver direct to their door.

Win Over Clients
Thank a favourite client or impress a new one by sending one of our magnificent hampers. They’re filled to the brim with everything that makes Christmas special!

Win Over Clients and Win a Chance to Receive a Luxury Hamper (see details below)

Reward with Gift Vouchers
Everyone loves M&S gift vouchers. The perfect choice to reward and motivate in a way they’ll appreciate and remember: Satisfaction guaranteed.

Win and Indulge Yourself
We have three exclusive hampers to give away filled with tempting treats. For your chance to win, simply visit:

http://www.desk demon.com/pages/uk/events/mands/ms-sep08
Natural diamonds are formed in specific conditions, many billions of years ago from carbon deep within the Earth where high pressures and temperatures conditions combined to produce the diamonds. Diamonds are valuable and rare because it is not easy to retrieve the relatively small amount of industrial and gem-quality diamonds from extreme conditions of hot African deserts or the icy cold of Canada, even with all the sophisticated equipment we have nowadays. Approximately 250 tons of ore is mined and processed to produce a one carat polished diamond of gem-quality. Few are large enough to be polished into diamonds.

A little background?

Natural diamonds are formed in

De Beers, established in 1888, is the world’s leading diamond company with unrivalled expertise in the exploration, mining and marketing of diamonds. De Beers, and its joint venture partners, operate in 25 countries across five continents employing around 20,000 people. From its mining operations across Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Canada, De Beers produces and markets approximately 40 percent of the world’s supply of rough diamonds.

As part of the company’s operating philosophy, the people of De Beers are committed to Living up to Diamonds by making a lasting contribution to the communities in which they live and work. De Beers encourages sustainable working to ensure long-term positive development for Africa, and returns approximately US$4.7 billion to the continent every year.

A little about the product?

Diamonds are the hardest and strongest stone known, and can only be scratch by another diamond, so are very suited to be worn every day as a gemstone in jewellery, i.e. engagement and wedding rings. As it is scratch resistant, it stays well polished, and hence the innovative advertising from De Beers that “a diamond is forever”! Tip: If you own diamond jewellery, store them separately, so they do not scratch each other.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

Although what one plans to do often never happens, as each day brings new challenges and new projects to resolve, and tackle. I could be trying to find accommodation for an overseas colleague, who has arrived in the office without accommodation for the night as everywhere is fully booked due to say a fashion week, to locating a colleague urgently who is overseas and out of contact, or liaising with the team regarding the team meeting agenda or minutes, or liaising closely with venue finders, or just catching up with my archiving and document management. At all times, as my boss’s work is often sensitive and confidential, I have to exercise confidentiality and discretion. My boss is often out of the office, so we liaise via email/blackberry, mobile, and SMS. I peruse his emails to check anything urgent or that I can assist or liaise on, diarise any appointments made with him direct, and to keep in the loop.

Often I am asked by non-admin staff what it is that I do as I seem to be so busy. So for two weeks I listed my tasks as I did them each day, and it ranges from 35-45 tasks on average a day and one day I was shocked to find that I had managed to do 50 tasks! Sometimes a task is listed as one but actually within that task there are lots of tasks, i.e. recharging my boss’s expenses is one task, but within that task, I have to reconcile the expenses by locating the matching receipts, on discovering a flight has been charged twice with differing amounts, liaising to obtain a refund, prepare a breakdown spreadsheet, liaise with the overseas offices to get a purchase order number, then advise accounts to process the recharges. A simple task of raising purchase orders could include, if a new supplier, liaising with new supplier for bank details etc, completing and submitting form to set up new supplier details on company system to obtain new vendor number, and if problems with creating purchase order on system, liaising with accounts payable for assistance.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

I’ve been with the company for five years, the first year in the Legal Department as PA to the Legal Director and the last four in the Finance Department. I transferred there from the Legal Department and was PA and Team Secretary to the Head of Finance and his team; then two years ago promoted to PA to the Finance Director. The Finance Department deals with the financial side of the company’s business, such as budget management, cashflows, pensions, payroll, account payables and receivables, tax and VAT. My boss, as an Executive Director of Finance and Administration for the
company, manages all strategic and financial planning and policies, facilities and risk management, and is involved in several Committees and is Director of various Boards. He also heads a team of 20, as well as having five Managers reporting direct to him. Thus, my job is very varied and very busy, with extensive diary/travel management, meetings and documentation and queries that invariably pass through a busy office. My tasks could range from making the tea, to organising transportation and accommodation for visiting staff from our overseas offices, to researching rewards for the team and to software requirements to streamline the work processes.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

My role’s responsibilities has increased over the last year, there is much more work accountability and control over my work; taking ownership of all enquiries, resolving or escalating (or identifying alternative contacts) as appropriate; more challenging projects such as organising presentations/workshops, budget planning meetings involving numerous busy people, to re-arranging waitlisted flights and changing appointments at the eleventh hour, to creating the secretarial intranet, an online office manual for the benefit of secretarial and administrative colleagues. There are new duties and new software systems to be learnt, and continuing professional development.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

The three most important skills that I use at work is organisation, prioritising, and forward thinking/staying one step ahead. To meet deadlines and be efficient for the smooth running of our department, I have to be very well organised and have everything at the tip of my fingers. To be ready and flexible for anything, e.g. personally deliver conference materials to a venue the night before, if no one can do it, and the first to be at a venue to check all is in order, table layout and seating plans, equipment working, setting up etc, and have a Plan B if Plan A fails, and make sure everyone is in the loop, so nothing is left to chance. I have many conflicting duties, so have to prioritise each different requests from the many that I receive, and thinking ahead by providing solutions and suggestions, for instance, if one of our internal large meeting room is needed all day, and someone has blocked an hour here and an hour there, I would find and book an alternative for those hours to make a swap, or if a dinner venue is unavailable, to give alternatives as a solution. It is much more helpful and efficient to give an alternative than a negative. If my boss is unavailable for a certain date/time requested, I would give suggestions rather than say he is unavailable.

What does a typical day look like for you? (if you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in.

A typical day could be like this:

- 8.50am Arrive at office, gather paperwork and to do’s from locked cupboard (we have a clear desk and restricted documents policy) and organise for the day ahead, take daily FT and coffee into boss, review diary for the day, and check emails.
- 9.30am Morning walkabout to touch base with the team, and to check the whereabouts of the team (if boss is looking for any particular team, I would need to know!), tidy up the communal areas, check copier and printers, top up with paper (my view is a well looked after office equipment is less likely to breakdown and saves repair costs), weekly check of stationery cupboards and tidy deliveries, distribute faxes, collect post
- 10.00am Greet and meet visitors and obtain refreshments from internal coffee shop. Open post, sort and distribute. Answer and deal with queries from colleagues: when is boss next available, who to contact with regard to such and such an issue, documents needs binding, the air-con is too hot/cold, there are flies in the office, where is a meeting room located, arrange security for next week’s visitors, organise flowers/gifts for a retirement, liaise with in-house travel agents to reschedule flights, book accommodation, car hire, liaise with overseas office regarding meeting timings, accept events/function invites, re-scheduling and re-scheduling diaries, sending out outlook invites, typing up complicated itinerary for boss’ business trip making sure all contact details, confirmations are accurate, taking and vetting numerous calls, and so on.
- 12.40pm Go to gym class/or it could be a working lunch to attend a Webinar or Travel Meeting
- 12.40pm Lunch in the staff restaurant, catch up with colleagues from other departments.
- 1.50pm Prepare for next meeting.
- 2.00pm Brief meeting to discuss recycling schemes progress/or attend a Values Workshop.
- 2.30pm Finance software training/or attend a diamond floor tour
- 3.30pm Check and respond to emails, prepare documents for boss’s meetings next day, update secretarial share point; follow up receipts for Barclaycard statements from team; collect signature book and distribute signed documents, deal with IT queries, log issues, liaise with Switchboard to co-ordinate conference phone, assist overseas’s visiting colleagues to print colour documents off and scan, liaise with auditors regarding dates of meeting; raise purchase orders, locate a document for
a colleague, arrange courier for post, organise signatories of directors for legal documentation; researching venues and reporting back to boss.

- 5.30pm Tidy and lock papers away and leave desk clear, before leaving the office for a networking function or attend IQPS branch function, or cooking dinner for the family at home.

**What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?**

My biggest challenge that I faced at the company is to raise the most funds with two colleagues for a charity of our choice within three months for the Company’s “Show We Care Day”. It meant using up every spare time I had after working hours and at weekends, to research, plan, target and campaign for sponsors, market and promote, to formulate and achieve the ideas, and putting it all into action and producing a fun and active day for everyone and raise funds at the same time. There were lots of obstacles to overcome, some relating to legal issues, others trying to encourage people to take part and contribute their skills, and so on. It turned out to be a 24/7 operation, and I was buzzing. It was hard work but fun and a great sense of achievement to be able to help the charities of our choice, charities that help Aids orphans (Fikelela) and providing sustainable agriculture for the most vulnerable (GardenAfrica). I also required a lot of nerve to approach shops and strangers for free samples, for example, often at underground stations, free samples are given out and I had to ask for more than one. Armed with boxes with my colleague, I would locate where the “boss” was and asked nicely if he was the “boss” and then explain about the fundraising in the office, and often, they are happy to help and would fill up my boxes with the samples. It pays to be polite! We raised £6,600 in three months, which is a lot of Rands.

An excellent and amazing result.

**What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success?**

My work related achievement was meeting Archbishop Desmond Tutu, patron in chief of the charity I raised funds for and having breakfast with him and Princess Irene of Greece and Denmark (Prince Philip’s cousin); and being nominated for the company’s Values Awards last year, for living the company’s values.

More down to earth achievements are creating and implementing an intranet site for my secretarial and administrative colleagues, an online office manual to share ideas and best practices relating to our work, a central share point for documentation and information and to save re-inventing the wheel. I started by canvassing colleagues about the idea, liaising with IT to discuss solutions and our Legal Department to discuss legal issues, testing, finalising and launching. It has received much support and encouraging comments. I also saved the company archiving costs by halving the storage space needed and saving stationery costs by re-using the lever arch folders instead of archiving them, which is environmentally friendly too. By transferring old files from hard lever arch folders to soft cardboard folders, and re-using the lever arch folders for new files, the bulky lever arch folders are not archived for upwards of ten years with the old documentation wasting space and storage costs. I also refreshed my boss’s non-existent filing system. As he is financial he wanted it to be numerical and as I worked better alphabetically, we compromised with both numerical and alphabetical and happily, it works very well. I am a supporter of IQPS, and its Central London Branch, and it has been a challenge to organise several events for the branch meetings, writing articles for the branch newsletters, and recently contributed on the working party of IQPS for its future and continued success.

**How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)**

I got to where I am today in my career through passion and enjoyment of my work, creative efficiencies, hard work, determination to promote the secretarial position as a profession (that it is just as important a role in a company as any senior staff), and enthusiasm. I have worked in all areas of law, in travel, in property, estate agents, investments, design consultants, in government, training consultants, and mining working my way up from an office junior to typist, to Office Manager and PA. Each time, I hope I have left my mark! I do not strive to be a good PA but to be a brilliant PA.

**What do you find most enjoyable about your job?**

I most enjoy about my work is the interaction with people, being able to help and provide solutions to challenging projects. Completion of a difficult project is most satisfying, i.e. identifying a software to streamline the completion of 125 Inland Revenue Forms on a computer rather than have them handwritten individually. I also enjoy providing the full PA support to my boss, little things like topping up his desk printer with paper, sharpening pencils, tidying up his office, and switching off his office equipment when not in use when he is away from his office on long trips, and even making him coffee. To me this enhances and creates a good working environment for him, enabling him to concentrate on the things that he does best and making effective decisions, without concerns and distractions.
Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

I have often mentor or pass on my skills to colleagues. A colleague may need a Powerpoint presentation created urgently, but unable to do so as she did not have the required Powerpoint skills, I was able to help, or it could be they needed my local knowledge to find a restaurant, shop or somewhere economical to stay, or even directions to a venue. I have offered advice and helped with financial issues; finding the most economical bookings, always on hand for any requests, even to provide pumps to blow up balloons and decorate an office, and ideas for gifts. I have provided a “buddy” service to new colleagues/temps, advising on office procedures and processes, who to contact etc. I thrive on new technology/systems and colleagues often seek my advice on IT issues and I pass on my knowledge without hesitation. Always giving and sharing, I have been told I am a brilliant mentor by my peers and colleagues, a great motivator and team member. I am always thoughtful and helpful with whomever I am in contact with, often giving up my personal time to do so.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

My advice for success? Believe in yourself and the great things you can achieve. Be true to yourself and stand up for what you are good at. Be positive and positive things will happen. Get a job that you are happy in and enjoy doing, as it helps you to accomplish great things and it really does give you the edge and confidence to do so with brilliance and flair. Dress for the part, look professional and you will be treated professionally. Treat PA as a career as a profession, and raise profile of the role: PA’s are like diamonds, unique and special by nature. Always follow up with a thank you letter/email after every meeting/function/hospitality, good for keeping in touch and you never know when you may need their assistance in the future. Treat everyone you meet with courtesy and respect. Make maximum use of all technology, the internet is a godsend, Google for any information you need and put deskdemon.com in your favorites (the news alerts are great). Keep up with professional development and skills. Finally, keep networking, you learn so much!

In a nutshell, enjoy, have fun and smile!
LYNN HAWKINS

Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

I work for a well respected water utilities company that supplies water and sewerage services to a large area ranging from North Somerset to Dorset, Wiltshire to West Somerset. The company has approximately 2,300 employees, with about 500 based at our headquarters in Bath and all other staff located throughout the region.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I have been with the company for nine and half years and have looked after seven directors over this period.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for? (please mention if you have many bosses and the roles you perform for them, if it differs from boss to boss)

I am a Personal Assistant to the Director of Compliance and Sustainability and his team of staff.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

The organisation of both internal and external meetings has increased, as my Director’s role has grown. My company’s Information Technology has advanced, which means I can now book meeting rooms, buffets, refreshments and car parking spaces electronically on my PC . This also applies to any IT problems or building maintenance issues.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

Confidentiality, initiative, organisational skills

What does a typical day look like for you? (if you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in) .

A typical day includes electronic diary management, checking and dealing with emails, dealing with the post, organising many and varied internal/external meetings including booking hotels, dinner, buffets, refreshments, meeting rooms etc. Liaising with attendees of meetings, arranging agendas, PowerPoint presentations, dictation (shorthand or verbal) of meeting notes. Cover three Directors’ and the Chairman’s phones at all times. Deal with any customer complaints or enquiries by phone or letter, as necessary. Book travel, hotels and conferences for my team. Electronic filing and paper filing. Photocopying and printing are amongst the many ad hoc jobs that a PA does in a day.

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

I had a boss who was a bully and being a non-confrontational person, had to deal with this in a professional way. I ignored his attitude for six months, but then felt enough was enough. I decided a more assertive approach was called for, so put this into practice upon his return from a business trip abroad. He soon got the message and couldn’t do enough for me after that.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that effect) made a significant difference to its success?

When I worked for Rotary International on a fundraising project for Polio Plus, I stayed on for an extra two and a half years to manage the full term of five and a half thousand covenants, which helped raise the total fund in the UK, Ireland and Gibraltar to over £9 million.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)

I have worked in different sectors throughout my career, firstly training to be a secretary, then progressing to personal assistant. My employment has been very diverse - concrete manufacturers, large electronics company specialising in top secret work, Rotary International, plastic bag manufacturers, water utilities. I also did some temping, which was a great experience, as it gave me a lot of confidence - and of course, a variety of secretarial jobs.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

I am lucky to be in a role that is very varied. I also enjoy working in a large, modern, relaxed, open plan building, which is the headquarters of the company and this means I get to meet and talk to lots of people.

Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

In my previous job as PA to the Managing Director in a large factory, I was fortunate enough to be able to pass on many of my secretarial skills to a lady who was a receptionist and wanted to become a secretary. ✤
What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

Always try to look smart and well groomed so that you look the complete professional - which you are! To smile and be polite costs nothing, but brings its own rewards. Remember you are never too old to learn new skills and when you do - share them with your colleagues. Treat people with respect, as you would wish to be treated.
Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

Shell Aircraft is part of the Shell Group and has three different functions, one is the Corporate Aircraft which operates to serve the flight requirements of the Shell senior management team, the second is the Advisory which offers aviation-related expertise on safety issues in specific areas world-wide, and the third is Special Project which works with the industry on researching safer ways to operate aircraft which could include its equipment fit. Shell Aircraft are based in Heathrow (where I work), Rotterdam, Houston and Calgary. We have a team of 90+ working throughout the four locations.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I have worked for Shell Aircraft for just over 16 years and in my current role as Office Manager and PA to the MD since 1996.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

My role at Shell Aircraft is very varied, that is one aspect of the job I really like. I work as Office Manager at the Heathrow offices and PA to the MD who is now located in our Rotterdam Office. My role involves ensuring that the office is running smoothly and to budget. I support the MD ensuring that he stays out of trouble and gets to his meetings on time, which sometimes can be a hard task. I also work closely with the other Directors as and when required. As part of the management team I am required to travel to our other offices in Rotterdam, Houston and Calgary. This is not as great as it might sound as you usually only get to see the offices or an airport and Calgary in winter is very cold.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

My role has changed considerably over the last 12 months, especially with the relocation to Rotterdam. This move has impacted on how I support and communicate with my boss, virtually is certainly more difficult, and you need to ensure you use all the technology available. We regularly talk on video cam and share files over the network. My role as a Line Manager has also grown. The support I give to my direct reports, through the difficult time of redundancy notices, has truly tested my skills to the limit.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

Listening – Sometimes people just want to share, they don’t want answers.

Coaching – Direct lines need to be developed and sometimes a gentle point in the right direction is required.

Organisation – Certainly need this when you are juggling so many balls.

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in).

Everyday is different, you might plan to do a certain task, and then an email or phone call may direct you elsewhere. Prioritising is key to success. I get involved in everything from arranging a handyman to come and fix something, ordering of new IT equipment/mobile phones to organising meetings, travel and conferences to publishing information on our intranet website.

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

My biggest challenge has certainly been the relocation of our offices to Rotterdam. We found out about the move some 24 months ago, so it has been very difficult for personnel to keep motivated and focused on the now and the future (most of the staff involved have been with Shell Aircraft for 10 year +). We are nearly there and are well into the recruiting of our replacements to handover our roles. Training others to do your job is hard, when you are not involved in the future of the company anymore, so I have tried to coach them into feeling that they are still involved in the future and it is the training and handover that will make it so. It will then be the time to concentrate on new beginnings (my next big challenge).

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success?

One of my biggest achievements was a refurbishment of our offices. There were issues from some members of staff and the new open plan environment when they were used to having their own offices. I worked with the contractors and with staff members to ensure that the end result was one of great success. Everyone was happy with his or her new workspace and, I believe, felt included in some of the decision-making.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)
I have always worked in the Business Support function, first started off as an office junior and within the two main companies that I have worked with Shell (16 years) and Balfour Beatty (15 years) have worked my way up through the ranks to a PA role to the MD and/ Directors.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

I mostly enjoy the variety, no two days are the same, and the people are also great, the thing I will miss most when I move on at the end of this year.

Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

I have three line reports at the moment that I mentor. As I mentioned earlier, we are currently going through considerable change as a result of the relocation to Rotterdam. This move has required all of the business support members (including myself), to deal with difficult news and make difficult decisions. I have arranged for everyone to make use of the outplacement facilities available, and ensure that we have had up-to-date training to ensure that we are ready for our new roles in 2009. There has also been the opportunity to travel to our Rotterdam office on more regular basis to assist with the development of the support team there.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

- Listen, don’t presume you know everything.
- Coach, don’t preach.
- Lead by example.
- Respect others, everyone has a part to play, however small.
Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

The organisation is called TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) and is a non-profit organisation which provides advice, training, research and consultancy to social landlords and their tenants in order to build up the partnership between them. It is a UK wide organisation with an office based in Scotland, England Ireland and 2 offices in Wales. I am based in the North Wales office in Llandudno Junction.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I have been with TPAS for 10 years 8 months starting off as an Administration Officer and in the past 4 years have been translating all TPAS’s correspondence from English to Welsh. 3 years ago a staff restructuring took place and I was made Office Manager.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

My role is to provide an effective and efficient customer focused administration support and to provide essential administration support to the team of 5 at the North Wales Office. I am the organisation’s translator and provide translation facilities to the organisation as a whole. I manage the office with regards to office administration and any office duties such as maintenance of equipment, stationery orders, invoicing, diary management, housekeeping. I also line manage the administrative assistant on a daily basis. I provide support to 3 members of staff in my office and I’m line managed by 1, however, I also occasionally provide support to staff members in the South Wales office and the Director on corporate events/duties.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

No changes have been made in the past 12 months.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

My ability to translate English to Welsh is my main skill as it is a specialised and much needed skill in Wales. Other skills include my meticulous attention to detail and good organising skills which ensures that office systems have been streamlined and standardised and all events are thought through in great depth.

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in.

There is no typical day in TPAS. Each day begins with the usual logging down telephone messages and passing them along to the relevant members of staff, then opening and logging the incoming mail. After that it’s a quick check of any overnight emails and dealing with them. Following on from there the work is varied. It’s usually dependant on the Project Officer’s workload - providing administrative support/ translating documents/mailouts/ statistical reports/newsletters etc. We have an annual conference each November therefore a great deal of support is needed to ensure this is run smoothly and each May I arrange and co-ordinate our Annual Participation Awards Ceremony. Throughout the year, we hold various seminars/briefing events and training courses which again I arrange and co-ordinate. I line manage the administrative assistant who works 3 days a week and cover her duties on the 2 days she does not work (i.e. basic administration tasks).

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

The biggest challenge was finding out that the lease on our office premises was running out and that we could not renew it. I needed to investigate new properties and costings as well as the actual cost of moving (redirection of mail/telephone calls/removals/ decorating etc). The new property had to be in a central location, within our price range, disabled friendly and accessible by public transport. At the time 2 members of staff had just left and we were in the process of recruiting their replacements and an additional part time administrative assistant therefore there was only 2 of us to manage the actual ‘move’. The outcome was good - we had an ideal office, centrally based at a price we could afford. We are still at the same offices, now with 5 members of staff.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success?

My biggest achievement at work would have to be the Annual Participation Awards. These began a few years ago as part of our annual conference - it lasted half an hour presenting 3 or 4 awards to a handful of people. In 2003 I took over the organisation of the annual event and it has since got bigger and better. They are now seen as the Participation Oscars that takes place as a whole day event, presenting 9 awards with over 160 delegates. I take this event on solely with only...
a little administrative support as I feel it’s easier that way. I am extremely proud of this annual event.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?

Before joining TPAS, I worked in the Estimating Dept of a Building Construction company - that as my first job. I went on from there to TPAS, where I’ve been for nearly 11 years.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?
The creativity and variety of my job is most enjoyable. I also enjoy working with a great team.

Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

I am a line manager of one administrative assistant and when I am on annual leave she has to cover parts of my work. I have therefore had to provide her with some in house training on various parts of my job and will continue to do so as the increase in workload continues. I have also had to provide training to my replacement when I went on Maternity Leave.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

Organisation is the key to effective administration and if you have good procedures and systems in place, it makes your work life a lot easier.
Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

I work within the Specialist Equipment Division at A-Plant, a leading equipment rental company. We operate five businesses focused on different product groups – from powered access machines to rail equipment. Our division is one of three and we operate nationally.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I’ve just celebrated my second anniversary with the company.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

I am PA to the MD of Specialist Equipment and I also support five Operational Directors who oversee 52 depots. I mainly look after the MD and his needs which range, from diary management, compilation of reports, preparation of spreadsheets, organizing travel arrangements to the general admin functions a PA carries out. My role for the OD’s is one of a central point for communication, so organizing travel, making sure they submit relevant reports and data, purchasing, and the odd word processing task.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

The current MD came into the role in October so there has been a transitional period for that. There have been many changes within the company and our procedures, a lot of the time consuming part of my job has been added to our intranet whereas it was paper based previously.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

Organisation skills, dealing with a number of different projects, people and problems daily means I need to be very well organized to keep ahead of them.

Problem solving skills, again dealing with a number of problems ranging from last minute travel arrangements, IT problems to name a few means that I sometimes have to be able to think on my feet and help someone find a solution to their problem.

Communication skills. A lot of the work I do is via email and the telephone and so I have to be able to communicate accurately to various people in order to convey the correct message, ensure deadlines are achieved and that people understand what is needed. I could be dealing with a customer, a depot manager or one of our Senior Directors.

Communication skills. A lot of the work I do is via email and the telephone and so I have to be able to communicate accurately to various people in order to convey the correct message, ensure deadlines are achieved and that people understand what is needed. I could be dealing with a customer, a depot manager or one of our Senior Directors.

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in).

There is no typical day in this role, generally through the day I chase purchase queries, raising purchase orders where necessary, collate a variety of pieces of information from attendance lists for meetings, organising relevant travel arrangements. Typing minutes of meetings, drafting memos for the MD, along with recording data on various spreadsheets. Making sure that the Directors and the depots adhere to deadlines and company procedures.

I also provide cover if the PA for another MD is on lunch or leave.

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

When I first started with the company I inherited a number of systems which my new boss needed overhauling, I was trying to get used to a new company and their procedures and at the same time, change to suit my own needs and that of the MD at the time. At the time of my joining the company I had only recently started working after taking a career break and I forgotten how much involvement it took.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success?

I can’t think of anything specific but I do get lots of feedback from my boss and the Operational Directors when I organise things for them. They all trust me to get the job done and that I will check with them if there is anything I am unsure of. It’s a great feeling when people say thanks and appreciate what I do whether it be large or small.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)

I started out after college and moved through various companies as a Secretary, but an opportunity to work as a Receptionist with a local Chamber of Commerce started my current career path. I was trained up as a PA to the Adult Guidance Manager and she invested a lot of time in me and gave me some excellent skills. I took a career break, started working for myself as a project manager and what would be termed as a Virtual Assistant now. I returned to college and updated all my IT qualifications.
before returning to work in this position.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

Everything! I love the job because of the variety and the people and the company are excellent to work for! Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so? My boss and I work out of a satellite office so I don’t have that opportunity at this moment in time.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

My advice to any prospective PA would be: don’t undervalue your ability. Have confidence in what you do and people will have confidence in you.
Which means recruiting good people, Execs receive the best possible support; part of my role is to ensure that our Senior Group Functions are based. The first part of my role is mainly focused on our Group Chief Executive, Nick Buckles, making sure his days run as smoothly as possible. I also look after Grahame Gibson, our Group Chief Operating Officer, when he’s in the UK - although he spends most of his time in our US office, and I work closely with Jennifer, his US PA. We have a fantastic friendship although we’ve never met.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

The Executive Support Team has been through a lot of changes over the last 12 months and after a long period with a succession of leavers, new joiners and long-term temps, we finally have a settled team of great people, which I’m really pleased about. The next stage is to organise more team building to really strengthen what we’ve done so far.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

Relationship Building: I really believe that a lot of what we do is building relationships, knowing who the go-to person is for anything that the day can throw at you. I try to put myself out to help other people, partly because I enjoy it, but also because I know that I’ll get that help back in spades. Its very easy when you work for the big boss to do the ‘don’t you know who I am’ routine to get what you need, but its much more rewarding to get the assistance you need from someone who really wants to help you.

Multi-tasking: I once was told that you can do 5 things at a time plus or minus two. This is a very good rule of thumb. If you’re doing more than that, you won’t be able to do anything properly.

Prioritising: I have learned not to use my inbox as a to-do list, and to focus on what needs to be done, rather than what I’d like to do.. although it is a struggle sometimes. Writing down everything that you need to do is really useful, as it separates it into a proper ‘task’.

Other key skills are the ability to mind read / read upside down / type like lightening / use Google like a pro / have a memory like an elephant / sense of humour (hugely important) and a healthy dose of perspective.

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a “typical” day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in)

This was yesterday...

8am I start my day on the train on the way to work, checking overnight messages on my Blackberry. With one boss in the US and offices all over the world, it isn’t a 9-5 job, although it’s not often that it becomes intrusive.

- 9am I arrive just before 9am and make a cuppa for myself and Nick, if he’s in. We try to have a catch-up most days at some point during the day, if he’s in the office, but if he’s out for any length of time, we catch up on the phone. He asks me to reply to a couple of letters, and to rearrange some appointments, and I remind him that we have the next quarterly management review meeting coming up in September, and that we spend some time talking about the structure and agenda for the meeting.
- 10-12pm I spend the morning rearranging those meetings and organising an induction visit for a visiting VIP from the US.
- The post arrives late morning and I sift through everything, disposing of an enormous amount of junk mail in the recycling bin, and putting the rest into files for Nick and Grahame to review when they’re in the office. I scan and email one urgent personal letter to Grahame - his car tax is overdue.
- 12-1pm - After lunch at my desk - I know, I know! I get an email from Jennifer, our COO’s PA in...
the US. She’s been asked to get confirmation that Graham has no criminal record in the UK, as this is a legal requirement for our Greek company and he sits on their Board. I speak to our Legal team and they get in touch with Graham’s local constabulary to get the necessary paperwork.

- 1pm - I take a telephone call from a disgruntled member of the public, who complains that one of our Cash vehicles was parked on a kerb near his work. I take his details and ask Terri, the PA to the Managing Director of our UK Cash Company to ask someone to respond to his complaint. The PA in our India office emails me to see if I can get a start date for one of the regional managers, as they’re preparing an internal memo to congratulate him on a promotion. Get this information from HR and write straight back - he starts his new job tomorrow...

- 1:30pm - looking for dates for an IT Strategy Forum for 10 IT Managers around the world to come to the UK in September. I have confirmation from almost everyone that they can make the date I’ve proposed, I’m just waiting for the Hong Kong office to get back to me in the morning.

- 2.30 - 4pm Spend some time researching some flight options and visa requirements for a visit to Kenya, and talking to our Comms team about an internal event that Nick’s hosting in a couple of weeks. Get some bad news that one of my team has been signed off sick for three weeks and so our current temp has been asked to stay with us for an extra three weeks to provide cover.

- 4pm - speak to someone who claims he is from an Investment Bank in New York who has a proposal for Nick and needs just five minutes of his time. I try to refer him to our M&A specialist in the Finance Department, but he won’t hear of it. It’s Nick or no-one.

- 4:30pm Visitors arrive for a meeting with Nick, so I pop down to reception to bring them to his office and make refreshments all round. Make a mental note to not provide biscuits next time - they never get eaten, and they somehow end up on my desk. Speak to our Investor Relations manager about a lunch date that she’s been trying to put into Nick’s diary. Update the contact details for the senior management team in the Business Continuity Plan for our Facilities team.

- 5:30pm -Finally arrange for a lift from our HR Director for Nick as he’d decided to run to work the next day. Do an expense claim form for my trip to London last week and put it in Nick’s signature book for first thing in the morning.

- 6pm - help one of the PAs unjam the drawer that her handbag (and car keys) is stuck in... we work out that it’s not locked, the lock is jammed, but anyone who could help has gone home. Help! We look at the nearby drawer, figure out the lock mechanism, wiggle the lock with a steel ruler and the handbag is set free..

- 6:20pm - Write out tomorrow’s to-do list, and then walk to the train station.

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

I think that the biggest challenge was that I started in a newly created management role. G4S had recently gone through a merger and a relocation, and some staff were still very unhappy about the changes. The PA to the CEO and the PA to the CFO had both left within a short space of time and there was a lot of uncertainty about what the new role of Executive Administration Manager would mean for the rest of the PA team. My role had been advertised nationally, so the job spec and my salary were public knowledge, and while most people were welcoming, there was some resentment - even hostility - towards me when I arrived. It was a difficult transition to make and it took time, perseverance, a lot of pep talks from my husband and some more personnel changes, but we are now a solid team. I was lucky that I started alongside another senior PA as well as having a good friend already working here.

We quickly became allies and our combined style of good humour, helpfulness and professionalism, has now become the norm amongst the existing and newly recruited PAs. I am particularly proud of the fact that we recently had two temps providing secretarial cover while we were looking to fill a newly created PA role. Both temps applied for the job, because they loved working here as “everyone was so friendly and helpful”. I count that as a real achievement.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that effect) made a significant difference to its success?

I think that the craziest thing happened in my first few weeks at G4S. Our Chairman hosts an annual pheasant shoot, which I have the dubious pleasure of organising. I’m a vegetarian and anti-blood sports, so it’s one task that I really dislike doing. My contact at the estate is always saying so it’s one task that I really dislike doing. My contact at the estate is always saying that everyone was so friendly and helpful. I count that as a real achievement.
call from the Chairman’s PA in Denmark - the Danish High Commissioner and his wife have had their guns impounded at Heathrow, as they did not think to bring their gun licenses with them! And to make it interesting, they’re flying back to Copenhagen from Gatwick the following day - so somehow I have to get unlicensed guns across London - and find loan guns for them for the shoot.

Luckily G4S has a security team at Heathrow, so they were able to help me with my ‘gun running’ (once all the necessary protocols were gone through) and the shoot estate is amazingly helpful and manages to secure the next-best-thing to the required guns, which all prove satisfactory. Phew, job well done I thought. But no. The only feedback I got was that the chauffeur was too early to pick them up from their hotel to go to Gatwick the following day.

**How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?**

My first proper PA role was working for three Directors at one of the major record companies. One of my bosses was the newly appointed Director of HR, who had previously worked as PA to the CFO. Although I found it extremely difficult working for her; as she had no real need of a PA - she still did everything herself. I learnt an enormous amount from her approach and attitude to the role. The other two bosses were very definitely in need of a PA. One travelled an enormous amount, knew exactly what he needed and just needed someone reliable to do it, and to occasionally take out for a nice lunch! The other needed organising from ‘the bottom up’ - new filing systems, diary systems, team management systems -- you name it. From these three different bosses, I learned a good deal about the kind of PA I wanted to be, about the standards expected, about working and adapting to different personalities and the importance of knowing your way around an organisation.

I then went to work for a much smaller company - a design consultancy in Soho. I’ve always been interested in design and I thought that a smaller company would allow me to get more involved with the running of a business. I have to say that this move was a real mistake. The office was a start-up, rapidly losing customers, and the owner, who was independently wealthy, had no real interest in moving the business forward. My day was spent chasing outstanding invoices, fobbing off suppliers, ordering stationery, making endless trips to M&S across the road for clients/staff/customers/tea breaks and I soon realised that I was being paid a great salary for being an office dogbody. No-one seemed to have any interest in the business, and so I handed in my notice.

I then landed a dream job at a larger design consultancy in Hammersmith. This was my first managerial role - I looked after the Chairman and also the team of PA/Design Assistants. Although the people were fantastic, the company lost two major clients about six months after I joined, and I was made redundant on a last-in-first-out basis. However, I did get the loveliest reference from the Chairman, which I still read with pride from time to time.

After a few months temping, I went to work for the Vice President of Legal at an internet service provider. I stayed with this company for nearly 5 years, with a fantastic team and a lovely boss, all of whom I’m still in contact with. The company was sold in 2006 and of course Legal were one of the first to know when the process started. My boss decided to leave for a complete change of direction, and my friend Kim told me about the job here at G4S. I came for an interview, ‘just to see’ and then another, and then another... and realised that it was time to make the move. One of the best things that working with lawyers taught me was the ability to look at a situation calmly and logically and see it as just a problem waiting to be solved. I can’t understated how useful this mindset is - it immediately takes a huge amount of stress out of dealing with the random things that are thrown at you.

**What do you find most enjoyable about your job?**

The people. I have a great boss, he’s incredibly straightforward and easy-going, a real pleasure to work for. I also have fantastic co-workers, both those that I know in our building, and the people I deal with daily all around the world. I really do feel as if I have friends I’ve never met.

**Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?**

Not at the moment, although it’s something I’m planning to introduce in the future. We have some less experienced PAs at G4S, and I’d like them to see me and the rest of the Exec Support Team as role models/mentors.

**What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?**

Focus on building relationships with key people. These are the people that can help you get things done - receptionists, the guy in the postroom, IT, other PAs, your customers and suppliers. Know what your company does, how it is structured, and what part your boss plays in the overall picture. Read the internal newsletter, subscribe to Google Alerts on your company. Know what’s important to your boss and know their strengths and weaknesses. How can you help? Keep your skills and your CV up-to-date, and keep an eye on the job market. No matter how much you love your job, it never hurts to see what’s on offer and to know your market worth. If nothing else, you’ll know there’s something better out there.

And remember it’s just a job. Your friends and family and your health and happiness are what really matters. ►
Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

The company I work for is IPC Media Ltd, a Time Warner Company it is the UK’s leading consumer magazine publisher with approximately 90 brands and selling 350 million magazines every year. The Head Office is based in London with offices also in Croydon and Poole in Dorset.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different?)

I have worked for the company for 32 years and in my current role for over 10 years.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

My role within the organisation is the Personal Assistant/Office Manager to the Editor of Woman’s Own Magazine.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

My role over the past 12 months hasn’t changed much but I am getting more involved with actually writing an compiling a page in the magazine.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

The three most important skills I use at work are communication, understanding and working on my own initiative.

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in.

As well as looking after the Editor I am the main contact for the 25 staff on the magazine. I answer all reader enquiries either on the phone or by e-mail, organise meetings, travel arrangements for readers coming to London for makeovers, all the contributors payments and I compile the Chat Room page for the magazine every week. There are many more but it would take up too much room.

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

My biggest challenge has been to help organise and take part in the Woman’s Own Children of Courage Awards that is held every year at Westminster Abbey. Ten children are awarded medals for their bravery and courage. Over the years the presenters have been The Queen Mother, Princess Diana, Prince Charles and Cherie Blair. The ceremony is then followed by lunch at the House of Lords, it is a star studded event and I really enjoy taking part in such a humbling occasion.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success?

I am often called upon by the Editor and the Art Director to give my opinions on the front cover of the magazine and sometimes they have changed the cover lines after making my comments.

How have you got to where you are today in your career? (A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?)

I have made my way up the ladder starting my working life as a filing clerk to where I am today. I have also done other jobs within various other magazines but within the same publishing company including production and commissioning.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

The most enjoyable thing about my job is that no one day is the same and I work with a great bunch of people.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

During the school holidays we have work experience girls and boys in the office wanting to learn about how a magazine works and the different roles within it so I take them under my wing and show them.

• The key advice I would offer to PA’s and Secretaries would be to have great organisational skills and enjoy your job.

DON’T FORGET TO VOTE!

DON’T FORGET TO VOTE!

DON’T FORGET TO VOTE!
Maximise productivity with our 2-roller laminators.

There are lots of ways you can help the environment in everyday office life. Recycling is only one of them. Some of the latest business machines which combine great performance with power saving technology such as automatic power shutdown or anti-jam can save time, money and waste, making life better for everybody.

**GBC SureFlow™ and HighSpeed™ Laminator range**

GBCs range of Sureflow and high speed laminators can assist you on saving energy; the full range automatically shuts down after 1 hour when not in use. To save even more energy use the unique GBC Hi-Speed pouches which mean up to 30% less power is required to laminate a single A4 document.

**GO A SHADE GREENER and get fitter,**
visit [www.greenersafersmarter.com](http://www.greenersafersmarter.com) for your chance to win a Raleigh bike.*

Ideal for A4 documents that need protecting ‘in a rush’ can save more than just time - it can save money and frustration.

---

*Terms & Conditions apply
Please tell us a little about the company/organisation you work for, including what it does, the size, sector and your location.

I run my own virtual assistant company, www.VirtuallySorted.com, which is based in Glasgow but works with clients and virtual assistants across the country using a flexible team which expands and contracts to facilitate our workload. All our VAs are UK based, fully tested and trained before they work with any of our clients, protected by strict confidentiality agreements.

I also run the Society of Virtual Assistants (www.societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk), a free to join organisation with over 350 UK-based virtual assistant members. We meet online once a month in our popular SVA Chat sessions and also have a forum where VAs can meet and discuss topical issues and challenges.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I’ve been working as a VA for nearly 4 years although I’ve been in administrative roles for over 10 years working in the music and advertising industries, so I’m used to fast-paced hectic environments facing “unusual” challenges on an almost daily basis!

One of the things I really love about my job is the constantly evolving scope of work I get to cover, which combines my problem solving skills with the practical application of administrative skills.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

I have the greatest boss in the world – she thinks in the same way as I do, is hugely talented and is actually very hard to escape – in fact, she is me!

As a VA I work for up to 40 different clients dealing with everything from audio typing, market research, call answering, general PA duties, conference organisation etc., no two days are ever the same.

As “boss lady” it’s also my job to manage our workflow by delegating tasks, make sure everyone gets paid and to generate new business. I suppose I’m quite unusual as a PA in that I have control over how, when and where I work.

The team has completed most general secretarial type jobs remotely, the only thing we haven’t quite mastered yet is virtual coffee (although we do occasionally send out Starbucks coffee cards as thank you gifts).

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

The VA industry is growing rapidly with more and more people realising that, with improved technology, remote working is a practical reality which can give you a better work/life balance and improve productivity whilst saving costs.

This has meant a larger market for our services, it has also meant increased competition, which has encouraged more VAs to specialise in niche industries or sectors.

At the annual National VA Conference in April there were certainly more people working on a professional basis rather than as a lifestyle business, which is a trend I wholeheartedly welcome.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

Prioritisation. With so many different clients to look after, it’s important to keep on top of deadlines and balancing your workload. I’m very anti multitasking for this reason – as Mr. Stephen Covey says “The main thing is the main thing” which is difficult to accomplish if you have three phones ringing, a fax to send and a document you are trying to type! We have a unique turnaround guarantee of next working day for our regular clients, so in order to keep our promise we regularly assess progress of work and re-prioritise it accordingly throughout the day.

Having an eye for detail. Because of the way we are employed, each and every piece of work which goes out of the office has to be perfect, and we couldn’t do that without a natural eye for detail. It’s the little things that count. Having the same measurement abbreviations throughout a piece of text for example, or making sure that all the fonts are consistent. It’s very difficult to teach so when we take on a new VA we have a series of tests they must complete before we even start to show them how we work.

Saying no. PAs and secretaries are by their nature helpful people. You want to say yes to everything – it takes a lot of effort to train yourself to say no. But if you agree to complete a task which is unrealistic, then you are actually not helping them at all. We find that lots of clients aren’t used to working virtually and will often ask us to work in a non-efficient way (e.g. using badly designed templates for example). As virtual assistants it is our job to suggest and improve how we work. It can be done in a nice way, but saying no is an important tool in my box of tricks. What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in).

Virtual assistants have the ability to work from anywhere with a broadband connection which is useful as my boyfriend lives in London and I can happily travel up and down from Glasgow to see him. I am slightly unusual in that I have an office rather than working.
from home. I do have a home office, but I use it mainly for planning rather than working. My office is literally four blocks from my house so I've managed to eliminate the daily battle with the rush hour.

So the day starts at 9am by switching on our VOIP phones for the 20 different clients who we provide call answering for. We'll forward any answerphone messages via email, and acknowledge and assign any work which has come in overnight.

Generally we'll each have a To Do list to work through which we plan every evening at 5pm for the following day. This is the atypical bit – it can be anything from sending an email newsletter to typing a property report. Meanwhile throughout the day other pieces of work will come in and be scheduled too.

On top of that, we have weekly marketing, finance and team meetings all planned to make sure our business runs smoothly.

At 5pm we plan the following day and make sure we have completed all our tasks. The phones switch off at 6pm and then I get to go home. However, there are sometimes tasks which need to be finished off or checked in the evenings, so I often end up working quite long hours. The upside of that is that if I decide I want to go for a coffee with a friend or take the afternoon off to have my hair cut, it's really not a problem!

What is the biggest challenge that you've faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

About two years into the business I found I was working really long hours, paying out a lot of money on employees who weren't really pulling their weight and subsequently not being able to pay myself properly. Something had to give – I hated my job and for the money I was earning I would have been better off working in McDonalds! I decided to try business coaching. It was a huge risk, costing more money than I was bringing in and which I wasn’t 100% convinced would work – after all, I had tried everything to make the business work and I wasn’t capable of putting in any more effort than I was already doing. The distance and insight that the coach was able to bring to my business was invaluable. He taught me some business fundamentals, which I had never learned having a purely administrative background, and he instantly put in place some ways of bringing more money into the company so that I could free up my time to manage it properly – working on the business rather than in it.

A lot of the skills he taught required retraining my brain to think in different ways. It’s hard work! He also got me working with the numbers in my business so I understood where the money was coming in and where it was being spent. He even helped me to find and train new staff with excellent skills and attitudes – the skills can be taught, the attitude cannot. I’m happy to say that a year later the staff I recruited are still here and working excellently and the changes he made have more than paid for his fee.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that effect) made a significant difference to its success.

We had early success when won a regional New Business Award of The Year Award from RBS in 2005, beating off stiff competition from over 1,000 other entries. However, as only one in five businesses survive their first three years in business I regard that as my biggest achievement to date.

Creating the Society of Virtual Assistants was another success, albeit by accident. What started as a Scottish resource quickly gained momentum and recruited VAs from across the UK. Originally I had started it to raise the profile of what was then a relatively new concept in the UK, supporting each other at

How have you got to where you are today in your career? A little about your career progression. Have you moved up the ladder internally? Has your career spanned different sectors or have you worked for other companies but remained in the same sector?

My first job was as a nanny. There are huge similarities in the skills I use to manage children and the ones I use to manage bosses and clients – I’m not sure if that says more about me or them!

Having left school at 15, I eventually went back to college aged 20 to do an HND in Music Business Administration with Marketing in the hope of getting a job in the music industry. I got a work placement at London Records in the marketing department organising product launches, video shoots and parties for All Saints, Goldie, Asian Dub Foundation and Harvey Danger. That was so much fun that I went back once I finished college and temped for a while launching The Sugababes and 21st Century Girls.

A permanent job came up working for Sony Music Publishing in their film and TV department. The work involved finding music for films, adverts, computer games and TV programmes, negotiating fees, clearing them with the artist and licensing them. If you look very closely in Sony’s Playstation 2 game The Getaway you’ll see a blonde version of me as one of the “extras” – they were short of girls in the Playstation office and grabbed...
me when I was in discussing the music. Due to a number of personnel changes I ended up running the department for 8 months including introducing a new licensing system and pre-cleared music for use in TV programmes. Other highlights included having Gary Barlow make me a cup of tea and having Will Young of Pop Idol fame as my PA briefly. (See – making me cups of tea is a great career move!).

When they replaced my boss it wasn’t really the same place to work, so I made a sideways move into the advertising industry, which I had always been interested in. This job was a lot more secretarial, working as a team assistant for Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO supporting a team of account executives on the whisky (Macallan and Famous Grouse) and confectionery (Maltesers, M&Ms, Bounty, Snickers, Topic, Celebrations, Lockets and Tunes) brands. (Yes, I got freebies!).

Wanting to move back up to Glasgow to be nearer my family, I took a job at Euro RSCG Riley working as an Account Executive mostly on recruitment campaigns. When I had hankerings of starting my own business my boss was incredibly supportive and even arranged for me to be able to work part-time in order to get the business started.

Although the business has always worked full-time, I only worked part-time in it until finally leaving Euro RSCG Riley two years after starting up, having bought another VA business which increased our cashflow significantly.

What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

I enjoy the variety of tasks we get asked to do – life is never boring! I like working with different people, and although it’s sometimes stressful, I do like balancing the workload of all the different clients and hitting each one of those deadlines.

Are you in a position to mentor or pass on skills to colleagues, describe a situation where you have done so?

Through the Society of Virtual Assistants I provide a forum where new and aspiring VAs can ask all sorts of questions about working as a virtual assistant, not just from me, but from the 350+ other members and get their experience too. As an organisation, we promote best practice and are working to create a Code of Practice for VAs which we hope will be universally adopted to avoid some of the more common mistakes that inexperienced VAs can make when starting up.

I run monthly SVA Chats which focus on particular topics relevant to both new and established virtual assistants – for example, marketing or accounting. We also have an email-based SVA Start Up Course which takes you through everything you need to do to start your own virtual assistant business.

What key nuggets of advice would you offer to PAs and secretaries for success in their career?

Don’t put up with being ‘Just the secretary…” We have a lot more to offer than just making the coffee. You should be proactive about how you see your career progressing and make time in your schedule for reviewing it. Volunteer to organise events or to create reports. Suggest a better way of storing company-wide templates or procedures. Take responsibility for projects and make sure everyone knows you were responsible. We’re very bad at blowing our own trumpet – it’s unfortunately necessary in order to get the respect we deserve.➡️
I work for Connect Communications (Scotland) Ltd, based in Paisley with a small office in Edinburgh. We are Scotland’s leading contract publishers. The company has been running since 1999 and started with David Cameron, the Managing Director and a newly appointed secretary at the time. There are now 32 members of staff with 60+ clients and I’m proud to be part of the company today.

Our clients come from varied industries and are made up from both the private and public sector, they include The Law Society of Scotland, The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, BSkyB, The National Health Service and many Scottish Councils to name but a few. For our clients we publish a full communications package which take many forms but mainly newspapers or magazines. We provide a full communications package from editorial services to print and distribution. We are now breaking into the online publication market, which is proving very popular.

How long have you been with company and in this role (if different)?

I have worked with Connect since 1st March 2007. I started as Office Administrator/PA and progressed to Production Controller, my current role, in the space of one year.

What is your role within the organisation and who do you work for?

My starting role at Connect was as Office Administrator and PA to the Managing Director. My line manager is Mr. Alan Ramsay who nominated me for the monthly award which I subsequently won for the month of January. In this role I supported every single person in the company. I was the only office support member and as you can imagine my day to day tasks were extremely varied and plentiful! The role was very re-active, the work always came to me, I didn’t need to look for it, however I found it important to be pro-active and devise new systems to keep the administration function of the company moving forward. Prioritising skills were an absolute necessity in this role. I was very adaptable and open to supporting my colleagues with all manners of tasks and because of this my job spec grew arms and legs! My line manager passed over tasks to me permanently which he had always taken care of himself previously, he was very grateful to have my support.

As well as carrying out an important support role on a daily basis to all members of staff, I also had the challenging task of being PA to the MD. I love this part of my job and it’s a part that followed me into my new role. Thinking ahead of him is key to keeping him organised. I thoroughly enjoy managing most parts of his work life and have also helped him in the past with personal tasks, which I felt honoured he entrusted me to do with no hesitations.

I was always well aware how important my role was as Office Administrator. Without my support, my colleagues would have been under far more pressure and unable to meet deadlines. My MS Office skills came in very handy when my colleagues were trying to manipulate data from an excel spreadsheet without much success. They were always very grateful when I managed to sort their problems! I was also the “voice of Connect” as answering the main switchboard was also my responsibility. I enjoyed developing a relationship with the clients and suppliers I spoke to on the phone.

How has your role changed over the past 12 months?

My role has changed dramatically over the last 12 months. My role started to grow immediately after starting with Connect. My line manager and my colleagues soon realised I could handle more workload and hence the role became far more involved than I was originally interviewed for. The major changes, however, came in January this year when I was offered the role as Production Controller, only 10 months after being with the company. The previous Production/Financial Controller handed in her notice on the 21st January at 3.30pm and at 4.30pm I was offered the job, it was an extremely happy moment. My line manager and the MD had faith in me that I could do the job and offered it to me without hesitation. From that week I had to start training in my new role while of course still doing my Office Administrator job. At this time our Edinburgh team were moving office and I was the main co-ordinator of the move, this demanded a lot of my time. I also had to take the lead on advertising, reading CVs and interviewing candidates to replace myself on the front desk. The MD wanted me to be line manager to my replacement so as well as learning my new role I was also I earning to be a line manager for the first time. I felt as if all my birthdays had come at the one time! This was everything I had ever wanted in a career, responsibility, supervisory duties and of course still being a PA!

I was under a tremendous amount of pressure at the time as I had to take time out from training myself to
train my replacement. I had a deadline to train on my new role as much as I could before being left to take the reigns by myself come 28th April when the existing production controller left the company. I’m now two months into my new role full-time and in around four months I will start training on becoming the Financial Controller also. I can’t believe how much my role has changed and how I’ve progressed as a person since this time last year.

What would you say are the three most important skills you use at work and why?

The most important skill I have and use every day is my ability to stay organised. In the multi-tasking role I’m in, being organised is key to not only keeping my head above water but giving me that ultimate “I’m in control” feeling which leads me to feel very energetic and enthusiastic. The other skill I have and find very important is prioritising. When there are numerous tasks to be actioned, emails coming in by the dozen and lots of jobs needing tracked and monitored, I need to prioritise in order to not let out of my sight the most important tasks.

The third skill I’m glad to be able to say I have is the ability to be understanding. I witness on a regular basis my colleagues being under pressure and quite stressed on some occasions. Their stress could easily become my stress when they pass tasks to me, especially when I have a large workload of my own and my colleagues are popping in and out of my office regularly to give me more tasks. It would be easy to become stressed myself. However, I understand there is absolutely no benefit in doing so and far more benefit in realising that there are jobs to be done, the tasks will never end, my colleagues are under pressure and this is the way it will be most times when the business is becoming more successful and winning more clients. I have the ability to keep calm, gain perspective and get on with the job at hand. Everyone has a bad day, instead of taking it personal and having an awful day myself, I rise above it and get on with the job at hand and that is a great skill to have!

What does a typical day look like for you? (If you don’t have a ‘typical’ day, please give as much information as possible about the different tasks you get involved in) .

A typical day in my new role looks like this:

• Arrive at work before 9am, check emails, action anything that appears to be urgent
• Start working my way through my diary tasks assigned to each day
• Opening up the communication channels with my colleagues and printers alike on jobs that are due to happen that day
• Have some pro-active time and book print slots with the printers for future jobs
• Attend to any quote requests there may be for new jobs/clients
• Have some PA pro-active time and check the MDs diary entries and action accordingly
• Attend to line manager duties and help with queries throughout the day and assign new tasks
• Update the “Work in Progress” spreadsheet which records all existing and future work at Connect, this is our bible which
  • I am responsible for managing
• Dealing with re-active requests, problems and questions from colleagues, clients and suppliers
• At the end of each day, I take the time to look over the following day’s diary entries and prepare myself for the day ahead
• Tidy up emails, paperwork and my desk at close of play each day in preparation for a brand new day
• On a Friday afternoon I send out a weekly jobs list to the printers so that we are all aware of what jobs will be happening the following week
• Each day can be very different dependant on which jobs are being focused on but one thing never changes, my 3pm cup of coffee!

What is the biggest challenge that you’ve faced at the company, how did you tackle it and what was the outcome?

My biggest challenge I’ve faced at Connect was when I first started training for my new role while at the same time training my replacement. No matter how under pressure I became, I had to realise that there was a new member of staff who was relying on me to help them settle in to their new role and train them on the basics of the job. This was not the ideal time to be training another member of staff but this was the situation that was presented to me and I had to ensure that while learning my new role as much as possible, my focus was to make sure the new person was trained and comfortable in their new role. This was difficult however paid off in the end. As soon as my replacement was up to speed with the basics of answering the switchboard and diary management etc, I picked up my training again. I told the new administrator that my door was always open and if he had any questions or was unsure of how to do a task, to come and speak to me. This happened on many, many occasions and whilst encouraging him to search for answers himself, I was always happy to point him in the right direction. We’ve all been the new person once and as his line manager, it was my duty to make sure he was happy in his new job.

What are some of your work related achievements? Can you describe a particular situation or project at work where your input (or word to that affect) made a significant difference to its success.

When I started with Connect, one of my duties was to control the stationery stock and buy in stationery items. I soon realised the existing supplier set up
by the previous administrator was quite an expensive company and we bought everything from them. I shopped about and split up the stationery items between three suppliers and ordered from each supplier the items they were most competitive for. I then put together a spreadsheet analysis of cost savings and realised that if we ordered one of each item every month we were saving over £500 per stationery order. My line manager was extremely impressed and astonished and the financial controller was extremely grateful! Everyone was a winner except the company that I took the business away from however I now have a better relationship with them and as such they have re-negotiated their prices with us to our satisfaction.
This article explains what a (PC or Laptop) computer backup is and how it can now be done quickly and easily and hence why there is really now no excuse for not having a computer backup.

In this article having a computer backup means taking a copy of all of your software and all of your data held on all of the hard drives inside your PC. Having a full backup of this type means that should any or all of your hard drives fail or your computer is stolen, you still have a complete copy of everything that was on your computers hard drives.

Hard drives are very reliable, but they can go wrong. Also viruses can corrupt the data on your hard drives. If and when a hard drive problem occurs you will be glad you took the trouble to keep a full system backup. The alternative is reloading and configuring all of your software again and then there is the more difficult problem of all that lost personal data such as emails, documents, spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, Music, Videos, Photos etc.

In the past computer backups would have been difficult and time consuming as they might have involved using a lot of floppy disc. Alternatively you could have gone for either an internal or external tape backup unit. A tape backup would do the complete system backup for you, but it might take several hours to backup everything on a system containing perhaps only many megabytes (MB) of data, but systems today often have gigabytes (GB) of data. (Note, 1GB is 1024MB i.e. over a thousand times bigger.)

One method to backup your complete system these days is to use a DVD writer, if your computer system contains a suitable DVD drive. You can buy software that will backup your complete software and saves it to the hard drive in a number of compressed large files. Usually two of these large files can be saved to a 4.7GB DVD.
So if your full system backup produced eight of these large files you would then have to save these files to four DVDs. All this can be done, it just takes time and effort and a collection of rewritable DVDs. You must also remember to do this at regular intervals, and to keep 2 or 3 sets of these backup DVDs, so that you are never overwriting your current backup disks. However, there is now a better way and the next method is why there really is no excuse for not having a computer backup.

You can now get external hard drives that can simply be connected to your computer (PC or Laptop) via connections such as the USB connector. These external hard drives can be used to store even more data, but another very good use for them is as backup devices. When you purchase one of these external hard drives it may well come with software that allows you to do full backups as described above. These backups can be done easily and quickly in one step as all of your software and data is stored to compressed and possibly encrypted files on the external hard drive. Encryption of these backup files on the external hard drive is a very good idea as it means any sensitive personal data that is backed up is secure, just in case this external hard drive is stolen.

If you purchase an external hard drive that does not come with its own backup software then all you need to do is purchase the same type of backup software that was mentioned above when describing backing up to DVDs, but in this situation the software will simply backup directly to the external hard drive eliminating the need to copy files to DVDs.

So now you can do full backups easily and quickly at regular interval. There is however, another very useful feature that should come with these types of backup programs and that is to specify specific directories that you want monitored and if any file in these directories is updated or a new file is created then these files would be backed up immediately/dynamically to the external hard drive.

So for example on a Windows system you might specify that your “My Documents”, Desktop and Favorites directories be backed up dynamically. If you then created a new document and saved it in the “My Documents” directory a backup would also be saved to the external hard drive. If you then updated this document and saved it, the software would automatically backup the file again, possibly giving it a version number on the external hard drive so that if need be you could go to the backup and choose from a list of backed up copies of the same file. This could be useful if you deleted something for example from a saved Word document, but then later wished you still had that content, in which case you could go back to the older backed up version and retrieve the deleted text.

One other thing to consider is that if you keep your external hard drive permanently connected to your computer there is the possibility that a virus could corrupt this hard drive or if your computer is stolen the external hard drive may also be stolen. To guard against this situation you could also do the DVD backup strategy as described above occasionally, or you could invest in a second hard drive that is only used for the full backups and disconnected and stored somewhere safe between backups. If you decide to only connect your external hard drive to your computer when you do a full system backup, you could use the same external hard drive to backup any other computers you have, assuming the external hard drive has the storage capacity.

You may well have paid hundreds or even thousands of Dollars/Pounds etc for your computer hardware and software. You will have spent many hours configuring and adding data to your system in terms of documents, spreadsheets, music, photos, videos etc. So if you take all of this into account and look at the relative cost of purchasing an external hard drive just for backing up you system, you should now agree that there is no excuse for not having a computer backup.


From Click Digital Products Webmaster at http://www.ClickDigitalProducts.com

It’s a Digital World we live in and sometime we need help, click the following for more articles like this at Click Digital Products. http://www.clickdigitalproducts.com/technology/Tech-Info
12th Annual

Executive PA
Secretary & Administrative Professionals

Recognising Your Exceptional Contribution To Business

Some of the Inspirational Speakers Include:

- Jodi James
  Author; TV Presenter & Body Language Expert
  "NLP" & "Hidden Celebrity"

- Susie Barron-Strevley
  Managing Director
  CASTAUA
  PA Coaching & Training
  19 years as a PA & Executive Assistant

- Sharon Hockstep
  Winner: House Times Crème PA of the Year 2008

- James Sweetman
  Principal
  JAMIES SWEETMAN & ASSOCIATES
  Pre-eminence Business & Personal Life Coach in Ireland

- Tom Morley
  BSc(Hons) NLP
  Drummer & CORPORATE PUNK PIONEER

- Vanessa Price
  PA to CEO
  NHS TRUST
  Times Crème PA of the Year 2005

What Makes the Executive PA Conference the Must-Attend Event of the Year?

- The longest running, high-level conference on the market targeted at senior Executive Assistants & Office Administrators

- Features the widest range of topics from project management to communication strategies that will encourage & streamline your skills to fully your potential

- Highly interactive programme that includes:
  - Expert panel session on building a PA career
  - 5 Interactive Sessions on:
    - Communicating with confidence
    - Creating the mindset for success
    - Understanding team dynamics
    - Have fun with an energising drumming session
    - Chill out with a de-stress masterclass

- Hear from one of the UK's top motivational speakers Judi James to discover the secrets of confident communication

- Hear from Times Crème's PA of the Year 2008 and their journey to success!


Pre-Conference Workshop:
Negotiation & Communication Masterclass
Led by: Richard Mullender
Former Lead Trainer, Heritage & Crime Negotiation Unit METROPOLITAN POLICE
1st December 2008
The Grosvenor, London

Post-Conference Workshop:
Project Management Masterclass
Led by: Jenny Bonham
Founder BOREHAM ASSOCIATES
4th December 2008
The Grosvenor, London

Hear from the following outstanding speakers:

- Olive Strachan
  Director
  OLIVE STRACHAN RESOURCES LTD

- Jacqueline Noel
  PA, Managing Director
  DIESSEL UK

- Vanessa Price
  PA to CEO
  NHS TRUST

- Jenny Bonham
  Founder BOREHAM ASSOCIATES

- Sue Sargeson
  Vice President, Consulting
  ORACLE UK

- Joe Bulman
  Managing Director
  JSM TRAINING

- Tom Morley
  Corporate Fund Director
  The Lotus Exchange CORPORATE PUNK

- Beverley Davies
  Executive Assistant, Sue Sargeson
  VICE Head of Consulting
  ORACLE UK

- Alan Fredman
  Wellness Expert & Teacher
  THE LOTUS EXCHANGE

- Lachlan Tamowski
  Managing Director
  BRAVE NEW TALENT

Register Today: Call: +44 (0) 20 7017 7790 Fax: +44 (0) 20 7017 7824
Email: kmregistration@informa.com Website: www.IIRconferences.com/executivepa