The GROW model: achieve your goals

Video conferencing: the pros and cons

Job interviews: the questions to ask
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Increase in number of women in work helps curb rise in unemployment

Rather surprisingly, figures published by the Office for National Statistics show a smaller than expected rise in unemployment, partly because there has been a quarterly increase in part-time employment for women. This is good news, but highlights the degree to which men are being harder hit than women by the recession.

John Philpott, Chief Economist at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development comments: "The relative improvement in the labour market is due to a rise in part-time and temporary jobs, with employers who need to recruit remaining wary of hiring full-time staff given uncertainty over the strength of economic recovery. Women are the main beneficiaries of a labour market where part-time work is rising while full-time jobs continue to be cut.”

Christmas parties under threat?

One of the most prominent casualties of the economic downturn has been corporate hospitality and Tim Stevens, MD of leading Christmas party specialist Best Parties Ever, is concerned that this may spread to the seasonal office get together. The company is emphasizing the benefits of rewarding employees and calling for businesses across the UK to realize the value of the office Christmas party by launching a ‘Save our Christmas Parties’ campaign.

Stevens said: “For many, the company Christmas party is often the only perk in the year, particularly in times when pay rises are few and workloads are increased. The long term impact of not holding a party can be damaging in terms of productivity and performance.”

Stevens predicts that there will be less prestigious events and a rise in the number of smaller, lower budget departmental parties.

If you agree that employees deserve a thank you for all their hard-work and achievement, you can show your support for the ‘Save our Christmas Parties’ Campaign now by registering your vote at www.bestpartiesever.com

Be Green in the office as well as at home

Most of us our doing our bit recycling and regenerating at home but what about at work? With a quarter of UK workers clocking up more than 48 hours per week, many of us spend more time in the office than we do at home. Which got www.officebroker.com thinking about starting a crusade for being green in the office. So, whether you are a fully fledged eco warrior or a new kid on the green block, www.officebroker.com have put together some top tips on being green in the workplace. Well worth a look.

The Definitive Personal Assistant and Secretarial Handbook

The Definitive Personal Assistant and Secretarial Handbook is the ultimate guide for all management assistants, PAs, secretaries and executive assistants. Written by Sue France, former Times Crème PA of the Year, it deals with every aspect of these vital administrative roles and the necessary skills, including: relationship management, communication and confidence, the secrets of body language, listening and questioning skills, coping with pressure and stress, dealing with difficult people, time management and personal organization. Set to become a bible for all assistants world wide it will help you to maintain a professional image and achieve resounding success.

Event UK still going strong despite downturn

The second edition of Event UK took place 22nd – 23rd September amidst the deepest recession for decades. Duncan Reid, Event Director, said: “In terms of figures we were 7% up on visitors to the event, which is a great achievement in these times; total attendance including exhibitors this year hit 3,688 Although we maintained our exhibitor number, at around 300 companies, we saw less exhibitor personnel on the stands, reflective perhaps of the reduced workforce in the industry.”

The figures place Event UK as the biggest show outside of London – and the primary show for the UK events industry.

“Event UK has shown that the industry is resilient and the audience is committed to maintaining high standards and continues to innovate come what may” commented Reid.

The 2010 dates are September 21st to 22nd at the NEC. The show will be co-located with Leisure Industry Week, Call Centre Expo, SME and Group Leisure Travel Trade show again as well as the new incentive and Promotional Marketing show.

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AF International aid workplace health and safety

Employers have never been more aware of the importance of work space and equipment cleaning and providing a healthier environment for their staff to work in. No company wants to see illness and absenteeism strike amongst their workforce!

Which is where AF International comes in. They understand the importance of employers complying with health and safety guidelines and understand the concerns of the employee by providing quick and easy cleaning solutions that have a minimum impact on their busy working lives.

AF International’s cleaning products have been tested by independent laboratories, who discovered that Phone-Clene, Headset-Clene, Foamclene and Maxiclene concentrates were all shown to kill 99.9% of various bacteria within only two minutes, and are so effective that the bug free surface they create lasts up to 24 hours.

Phone-Clene is ideal for use on shared hand and head-sets, as well as mobile phones. This product is the front line defence against sickness as it deals with germs spread by particles that are breathed out. Headset-Clene offers complete sanitisation of the entire headset and ear or mouthpiece which is ideal in ‘hotdesk’ situations.

AF International’s products can be viewed at www.af-net.com

Folder Fashion at your Fingertips

As always, Avery® is on hand with a quick and easy solution to organising your office documents with style. When it comes to your folders and files, everyone knows it’s what’s on the inside that counts. So dress your folders to impress and get hold of some new Avery coloured ReadyIndex™ Dividers. Taking inspiration from this season’s latest looks, they now come in a choice of pinks, blues and pastels, enabling you to co-ordinate similar projects and find that essential report without compromising your individuality.

Each pack contains a colourful contents sheet that you can customise to suit your needs. The free Avery Wizard™ software, available at www.avery.eu to download, means personalising your contents sheet has never been so easy.

Meanwhile, the six or twelve part dividers work perfectly to separate your documents leaving you smart, polished and organised. For more information visit www.avery.eu

Evolve gives consumers an even greener option for volume printing

M-real’s QuickEcoBox is a great choice for consumers who want to use eco-efficient paper for volume copying and printing.

The QuickEcoBox has 2,500 unwrapped sheets in an easy to open and use box. It’s an efficient solution as there are no reams to unwrap, just a box of paper ready to go straight into the printer. It is available in A4 products of Evolve 75, a 75% recycled, 75 gsm paper, and in 80 gsm Evolve Everyday and Evolve Business, 100% recycled papers.

So, if you want trouble-free results on all your volume and everyday print jobs, you can’t go wrong with the Evolve QuickEcoBox. It delivers excellent print and environmental performance as well as great value for money. For more information visit www.evolve-papers.com

Evolve

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PA Enterprise venues

Dolce La Hulpe Brussels introduces Passkey

Dolce La Hulpe Brussels is the first hotel, resort and conference destination in Belgium specially designed to host conferences, meetings and special events, and now the four star hotel is offering Passkey - the worldwide leader in online group reservations.

A web-based solution for managing group hotel reservations, the system allows Dolce La Hulpe Brussels to offer its group guests access to real-time event information with speed and security.

Event bookers are able to instantly view their block information in order to monitor event pick-up and pace, and can also run reports, analyse trends as well as submit and modify rooming lists, all on one screen.

Dolce La Hulpe Brussels features 4,500 square metres of International Association of Conference Centers certified meeting space that includes two auditoriums, 35 meeting rooms with the most cutting-edge technology, an innovative incentive programme in the purpose built meeting rooms, all on one screen.

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For further information or to book, please contact Valerie Germain on valerie.germain@dolce.com or call 0791 777 3832.

Oh so cool party venue!
The festive season is nearly upon us and it’s time to start thinking about a cool place to host your Christmas Parties. The Valmont Club has quickly established itself as one of London’s most-in-demand venues for Private or Corporate events. Located on Fulham Road, Chelsea, the club is split into 4 main areas, each with its own distinctive décor. The Electric Salon creates a bold first impact, while the private booths, designed with velvet panels and antique lighting, provide the perfect setting for decadent, dangerous liaisons. The neon lounge features a spectacular lighting system, where neon strips pulsate in response to the music being played.

The club offers a wide range of canapes and other dishes to party guests. www.thvalmontclub.com

Thank Pink!!
Filofax and Pink & Black support Breast Cancer Campaign

Pink and personal – with love from Kylie!
Your chance to bid for a unique organiser personalised by Kylie Minogue

Filofax is supporting Breast Cancer Campaign with its fabulous range of pink organisers and accessories. Having already raised nearly £550,000 for the charity, Filofax will donate £2.50 to the charity for every special edition leather organiser it sells and a similar proportion for every other item in the range.

Filofax has also donated a unique organiser to the charity, signed by Kylie Minogue, which will be auctioned at Breast Cancer Campaign’s Pink Ribbon Ball in London.

To help keep your health as well as your social life in the pink, the Breast Cancer Campaign personal organisers contain the latest breast awareness information, a pink ruler and papers plus some special diary reminder stickers. You can choose from the stylish lizard print pink leather (£43) or the equally pink and practical leather-look organiser (£23). There is also a matching pen, passport cover, accessory case and purse – from just £20!

For further information on Filofax and Breast Cancer Campaign visit www.filofax.co.uk

Have your cake and eat it!
Who said you couldn’t have your cake and eat it? Go to Tossed, the next generation of healthy eating venues springing up around London, and tuck into their new range of cookies, cakes and muffins without feeling guilty.

The cookies are sugar free and sweetened with fruit juice, yet they taste divine and for those on special diets, they also come in wheat and gluten free options. The range includes the No Sugar Double Chocolate Chip and the No Wheat Oatmeal & Raisin, priced at £1.95 each.

The cakes and muffins are made using spelt, sweetened with agave nectar instead of sugar, are low GI and low in fat. Delicious flavours include Apple & Cinnamon, Strawberry & Vanilla and Chocolate & Cherry, all priced at £2.00 each.

Together with the new range of gourmet coffees and teas, Tossed is taking healthy eating and drinking to a whole new level. Indulgent yet healthy breakfasts, big, tasty main course salads, soups, wraps, and freshly made smoothies, this is a place where healthy eating meets indulgence, and where treats can really claim to be ‘good for you’.


PA Enterprise campaign

Colour and style with Pink & Black notebooks
Pink & Black’s stylish range of notebooks and diaries will add a gorgeous flash of colour to your handbag or desk this autumn – and you’ll be supporting Breast Cancer Campaign at the same time. Pink & Black has raised over £180,000 so far and continues to support by donating 10% from every sale to Breast Cancer Campaign.

The chic notebooks and diaries are available in a variety of sizes and formats, including wirebound and casebound notebooks, project books, pocket notebook, A5 and pocket-size diaries. All use premium quality 90gsm smooth paper for minimal ‘show through’ allowing you to write on both sides of the sustainably sourced paper.

Prices range from £2.50 to £9.75 and they are available from retailers and stationers including WHSmiths.

www.pink-and-black.co.uk

Thank pink it’s Friday!
Breast Cancer Care is encouraging people to celebrate the most relaxed day of the working week throughout October by getting ‘in the pink’ and taking part in the charity’s Pink Fridays fundraising campaign, to support the 46,000 people who are diagnosed with breast cancer every year in the UK.

Getting involved with ‘Pink Fridays’ is easy to do and can include anything from a tea break with pink food and drinks to a pink speed networking event at work or a girls-night-in pink clothes swap party. And if you’re not free on a Friday why not give a Saturday or even a ‘blue’ Monday that Friday touch with a Pink Fridays fundraiser?

Anyone thinking of holding a Pink Fridays party can register for a pack full of party ideas and fundraising tips, as well as posters, balloons, games and more to help you raise money.

Visit www.pinkfridays.org.uk or call 0870 164 9422.
BROther GOES PINK FOR CANCER RESEARCH UK

Brother’s special edition of PT-1000P pink labelling machine is currently supporting Cancer Research UK. Perfect for labelling everything from folders, CDs, DVDs and filing cabinets it’s the must-have tool for busy PAs. And most important of all, the manufacturer’s profit of £2.50 from the sale of each PT-1000P has been donated to Cancer Research UK. This has been so successful, that by this month, the labelling division of Brother UK will have donated £75,000 Cancer Research UK to support the Charity in its fight to beat breast cancer. 

Mike Kelly, head of labelling at Brother UK commented: “The office remains the biggest market for Brother’s range of P-touch labelling machines because organisation is key to the running of a successful business. In general it is down to PAs and Secretaries to ensure an office is run efficiently and professionally. It remains a fact that the majority of PAs and Secretaries are female, consequently to support the Breast Cancer division of Cancer Research UK with donations from the sales of a product used widely by females seemed logical. “Pink is both popular with many office staff as well as being the colour chosen by charities working in this area of research. It was relatively easy for us to produce a version of our popular PT1000 in pink and redirect the profit to Cancer Research UK. Initially we set a target of a £25,000 contribution to the charity, however we are now in the third phase of this project and it is our intention to continue with this product into 2010 to reach our revised target donation of £100,000, subject to demand.”

WIN a special limited edition PINK labelling machine from Brother!

Simply email your full contact details to pa-competitions@deskdemon.com by 16 Nov. Six readers picked at random will receive this fabulous limited edition PT-1000P pink labelling machine absolutely FREE!

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Video Conferencing – will it work for my company?

By Nermine Shaker

One of the wonders of modern technology is the ability to use audio and video services to facilitate discussions between people in different locations. This ability, known as video conferencing, can be a major convenience in a world where communication across the globe is necessary.

It can be vital when individuals need a face-to-face conversation, when visual cues not present in telephone communication may be of importance, or if a physical meeting is impossible due to travel considerations or time constraints. It is not ideal in every situation, so it is important to consider its downsides in addition to its benefits.

A little history

Video conferencing has been possible since television was invented. Simple systems have been around since the 1930’s, such as the German Reich Postentralamt network in Berlin. NASA developed a much more complex mechanism during the first space flights, but it was too expensive and could not be used for business meetings.

The use of telephone, which would have been ideally suited for such meetings, was difficult to implement since the picture quality was low and it was difficult to compress the size of video for transmission. Finally, in the 1980’s, digital technology made it possible to use telephony for videoconferencing. This was done over the Internet in the 1990’s, and services such as NetMeeting and Skype allowed people to communicate remotely.

The basics

Systems for videoconferencing consist of input and output devices for both audio and video as well as a channel for data transfer (usually the Internet). Cameras, computer monitors, microphones, and speakers are often sufficient to conduct a successful videoconference. A company that conducts only occasional videoconferences may be outfitted with a desktop system, which consists mainly of several add-ons to its existing computer systems.

The business that has more frequent videoconferences, however, may want to consider a dedicated system used solely for these meetings, which is more advanced than a desktop system. This is more costly though, and the equipment may be more complex.

Cost effective solution

Video conferencing has numerous attractions. It is more cost effective today than it has previously been, with high-speed internet and hardware prices falling. Often times it is a much more budget-friendly option than traveling to conduct meetings. Many different software options are available, so a company can pick and choose what it needs.

Video conferencing makes it possible for employees in different offices to have quick meetings or ones without much advance notice; this is especially attractive to companies with multiple locations. Often, individuals do not even have to leave their desks to attend the meetings. The technology has also made it possible for many to telecommute and work from home.

Online networks have even begun to use videoconferencing, allowing businesses to more quickly and easily form relationships with others. Banking industries, for example, have taken advantage of this. Companies can even conduct interviews with potential employees, allowing for many of the pros of an in-person interview while maintaining the flexibility of a phone interview.

Not all plain sailing

There are several shortcomings that need to be considered, however. As hinted at previously, videoconferencing systems can be quite complex, so expertise may be needed to set them up. These systems may also be quite expensive, so it is necessary to consider how useful they will be to the company before spending a large sum of money on them.

Also, a successful videoconference requires not just one, but both locations to have access to high-speed Internet.

But perhaps the largest issues that many have with video conferencing are matters of personal comfort: eye contact and self-consciousness. In terms of the former, while eye contact is absent from normal telephone communication, many find that it is uncomfortable in a video conference which can give the appearance that the participant is avoiding eye contact since his or her focus is often on the screen, not the camera. To compensate for this, some systems have cameras located in the center of the screen.

Video conferencing is more widely used.

As for the latter issue, many people, used to typical telephone communication, are not yet accustomed to having their appearance captured and sent remotely. This, however, is likely to become less of an issue as video conferencing is more widely used.

Positive advantages

Video conferencing is an application of various technologies that can be of great use to many businesses. Not only can meetings be conducted more easily, but also other events, such as networking and interviewing, can be made much easier. Video conferencing is not without its drawbacks, but as people become more accustomed to this method of communication, and as technology advances further and becomes less expensive, many of these issues will diminish or completely disappear. For now, it may still be a cost effective and flexible way for people to meet and discuss important issues for the company.

If you’re thinking of using videoconferencing in your business, you may want to talk to a telecom management professional. They can help you find what is best for your business and assist in its implementation.

Video conferencing can be of great use to many businesses. Not only can meetings be conducted more easily, but also other events, such as networking and interviewing, can be made much easier.

About the Author

Nermine Shaker has generated millions of dollars worth of savings for her clients. She is a Partner at The Sygnal Group of Abilita, a telecom consulting firm that offers telecom expense management, telecom auditing and VoIP management to businesses of all sizes. Find out how to lower your telecom expenses at www.SygnalGroup.com or visit our blog at www.TelecomExpertise.com
Supervisor Training – the jump from Team Member to Supervisor

By Kate Tammemagi

People are usually appointed to the role of Supervisor because they have excelled as Team Members and have demonstrated qualities that indicate that they have the potential to go further. They are generally very experienced, respected by their peers and confident in their role.

The newly appointed Supervisor can expect to feel a little uncertain when they begin their new role.

But for some, the jump to the Supervisor role is not an easy one and their confidence can be badly knocked.

By following these tips, the transition can be made smoother.

Address the cause of the uncertainty
Managers understand that this jump from team member to supervisor is one of the biggest jumps on the career ladder. Many managers want to help, and often begin by sending the supervisor off to Supervisor Training to acquire people and performance management skills. This is like sending someone off to learn how to read maps, before you tell him that he will be using the maps to steer a ship!

The first step is to give them a good framework appreciation of the context and the role of the supervisor is time well spent. This will put in the firm foundations for them to go on to become successful and effective.

Defining the role
Use a framework to help define the role of the supervisor in a planned and methodical way to your newly appointed supervisor. The framework is made up of the key topics that cover the context and role. Tell them about the ship, the fact that they are the captain, that they have a crew and that their role is to get the boat to the destination.

Spending the first few weeks giving the new supervisor this framework appreciation of the context and the role of the supervisor is time well spent. This will put in the firm foundations for them to go on to become successful and effective.

Suggested framework topics:

What is the company trying to achieve?
This is one of the most important framework topics for any role, and yet it is the one that most people leave out completely. Talk your supervisor through your organisation, your business purpose, your customers, the different departments, and how it all works together. Take them round other departments, and let them talk to personnel in each one if possible. Your goal is to give them a good appreciation of where the output of their team ‘fits’ in achieving company goals and objectives.

Where the role of the supervisor fits within the company
Prior to being appointed, the individual will be familiar with the company, but will have a ‘team member’s view’. This is similar to a person’s view when they are a child, and now we want them to have a ‘parent’s eye’ view.

Explain the management structure to the supervisor, in terms of the responsibility of each manager, their objectives, goals and targets. We want the supervisor to have a much better appreciation of the priorities of each manager so that they will be better placed make sense of their own objectives and targets.

The purpose, objectives and goals of the team
This is the output of the supervisor’s team, and must be explained clearly in order to ensure the supervisor has a clear focus. Shifting goals and priorities is part of their working life and they must get good at being flexible - but did you tell them this? Ensure that your new supervisor understands what is expected, what they must cope with, what they must live with, and what they can change.

The supervisor’s role with the team and each team member
Help the supervisor understand ‘who do I need to be now?’. It is useful to use good analogies and examples - like the Captain of the ship or Coach of the ball game. This helps tease out the role in terms of winning respect, encouraging others to high performance, improving the team, using those targets positively and celebrating team goals.

The supervisor as an influencer
Emphasise the importance of the supervisor ‘walking the talk’ and ‘talking the talk’. From day one, the supervisor needs to understand that their behaviour is influential.

A successful team needs to believe their work is of value to their customers, that their company is worth working for and that their efforts make a difference to the customer and the company. Ensure the supervisor understands that they must now send these positive messages to their team members. A team will never win if the supervisor is being negative about the company, the team, or the customer. A positive ‘can do’ team culture comes directly from the supervisor.

Team and performance management processes
A supervisor must become very competent in using your internal processes and team processes effectively. Help the new supervisor understand that ‘I am just not good at ...’ is no longer an option! These are skills that can and must be learnt over time - but it is important to accept that they are part of the role.

Ensure that your new supervisor received adequate training in ‘What is my Role?’ as he or she begins their role, and you will see them hit the ground running!

The purpose, objectives and goals of the company
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Ensure that your new supervisor received adequate training in ‘What is my Role?’ as he or she begins their role, and you will see them hit the ground running!
The GROW Model: Part 1: Exploring your goals or issues

GROW is an acronym for:
G = Goal    R = Reality    O = Options    W = Will or Way Forward

Remember, before you start:
• Write from your heart - do not spend too much time thinking about what you are going to write.
• Remember, your answers will never be judged.
• Your answers are totally confidential - be totally honest with yourself.

Consider each question individually.
You may find that some questions have more meaning and depth for you at this particular moment in your life than others. Feel free to answer the relevant questions and leave gaps for the ones that are not relevant. You may even find that your answers trigger some additional questions. That’s fine too, simply jot them down.

Only answer the questions that seem important and let the other ones go. The aim and purpose of going through this process is to identify an issue, a topic or a goal that you wish to work through using the GROW model.

Once you have gone through the model yourself, you can then apply it any time, any place and anywhere.

Enjoy the process, keep an open mind, be receptive to whatever crops up - write it down even if it appears to make no sense at all to you in the beginning. This is not a time for judging or criticizing yourself.

The questioning process starts by establishing a goal in order to give you something to aim for. Further questions help you to clarify where you are now and remind you what you have done about the issue, the topic or the goals so far.

Questions are then used to help you come up with different options that you could do to move yourself forward in terms of your issue or topic. Then you will select a particular option to work on.

Your answers will be used to create a plan of action for that all important first step.
The GROW model avoids many of the problems of other processes. For example, have you ever heard someone say, “This is our objective and this is what you will do about it?” It appears sensible at face value but it involves only the goal or the objective and it doesn’t belong to you. Unfortunately, it employs a command or control style of management - the ‘do as I say’ approach.

Another example: “We have a problem here, what do you think we might do about it?” This gives us reality and options but no goal and no will. GROW covers all aspects. As you follow the questions and practice using the GROW model for yourself, you will see it covers all the stages of a successful coaching process.

It may be that you want to take your time over answering each relevant question. Do take that time. This is not a test of seeing how quickly you can rush to the end. Sometimes we procrastinate and think other things are more relevant than spending time on ourselves. This is not true. About an hour of your time spent working through the following questions will be of a great benefit in the weeks, months and years to come.

Firstly, you need to establish the issue, topic or goal that you wish to be coached upon. This may take something between 5-10 minutes, but it’s up to you how much or how little time you want to spend on it.
This may be in the area of career, relationships, finances, self-esteem, desires, achievements or any other area that is important to you at this time.

Here is an example to get you thinking on the right wavelength: “I feel as if my job is taking over my life but it pays well and I need the money!” Another might be, “I seem to be doing everything around here, what about some me time?”

When you have written your answer, consider the following:
• How real is it?
• How important is it to you right now?
• Have you written your topic or issue down in several sentences?
• Or is it just a few words?

Your next step is to write your topic or issue in one sentence that you can easily keep in your mind.

Have another look at your topic or issue. Have you written it in positive or negative terms?

If you have phrased your goal in the negative, take a few moments to re-phrase it in positive terms. (What you do want rather than what you don’t want)

Is your topic or issue specific enough to become a goal?

Do you need to add something else to make it specific?

If you have written your topic or issue down in several sentences?

How important is it to you right now?

How real is it?

How will you know that you have achieved your goal?

What do you notice that shows you what you have achieved so far?

What do you think you might not know?

Another might be, “I seem to be doing everything around here, what about some me time?”

When do you want to be in this position you can see in the future? What time scale do you have in mind?

Congratulations! You have now completed the GOAL section of your personal GROW model. In my next article, you are invited to explore the realities of your current situation. The “R”, the “O” and the “W” of the GROW model.

Prepare for change!

About the Author
Ronnie Slade is passionate about Self-Improvement and Self-Development and has been successfully helping people find their niche and empowering them to prepare for change since 1981.

http://followronnieslade.weebly.com

This is a unique opportunity for you to identify and establish an issue, a topic or a goal that you wish to work towards achieving.

So, if you are ready to have a go and you want to be inspired by your own ability to find a goal, you are about to identify your goal and make it happen for you!
Seven questions to ask during a job interview

By Robert Hosking

Of all the questions an HR Manager may ask you during a job interview, the last one could be the most important – and trickiest to answer: ‘Do you have any questions for me?’

This simple query can stump even the most prepared job candidates. Yet, it offers a golden opportunity to set yourself apart from other applicants.

Asking well-thought-out and pertinent questions allows you to steer the conversation and expand upon your top skills, qualifications and attributes. Here are some questions to consider – and the reasons they’re worth asking.

**Q1** Is there room for growth and advancement?

Given the high costs associated with hiring and training new staff, employers are looking for job candidates who will stay with the organization for a while. Asking this question shows that you are ambitious, goal-oriented and eager to grow with the firm over the long term. In today’s economy, companies seek applicants who are adaptable, with a willingness to take on new challenges and adjust to changing business conditions. A discussion on this topic can also help you determine what career paths are available and what your professional future with the organization would be like.

**Q2** What types of staff development programs do you offer?

Employers value workers who keep up with the latest industry trends and developments. By asking this question, you can emphasize your dedication to expanding your skill set. You’ll also get insight into tuition or association membership reimbursements and professional development offerings. HR managers appreciate job seekers that have an interest in remaining intellectually challenged, as these employees can often take on greater responsibilities in the workplace. Also, skilled employees can serve as a resource in the office, providing training and transferring knowledge to their colleagues.

**Q3** While researching your firm I learned that the company recently (fill in the blank). Can you tell me a little bit more about this development?

Impress interviewers by doing your homework. Review the company’s website, marketing materials, executive bio and recent annual reports to get a good sense of the organization and its leaders. Asking a beyond-the-basics question shows that you’re a serious candidate who’s interested enough in the position to scratch beneath the surface to learn as much as possible about the firm. Also, inquire about the organization’s future plans and where the position you’re applying for fits in the company’s overall strategy.

**Q4** What skills/attributes are needed to be successful in this position?

Discussing the top qualities that the HR manager is looking for in a candidate provides you with an opportunity to highlight how you’re the best fit for the position. Offer anecdotes from your professional life to demonstrate your technical aptitude as well as soft skills. If the position requires primarily working autonomously, you may encounter problems if you’re not the best candidate for the position.

**Q5** What would an average day in this position be like?

This question can help you gather information that allows you to better evaluate your interest in the job. You need to be clear about the expectations of the position and ensure you’re on the same page as the employer. The job listing may not include enough detail for you to fully understand all that is involved. You might learn about aspects of the role that don’t appeal to you, such as the expectation that workers stay at the office until late evening, or be reassured that the opportunity is right for you.

**Q6** What do you enjoy most about working here?

Companies are looking for candidates that not only have the right background for the job but also are a good fit for the work environment. By asking about the employer’s response, you can emphasize your willingness to work in an environment that suits one employee might not be right for another worker, so this question provides a good opportunity to assess whether your personality and work style are a match for the organization. For example, if you thrive in a relaxed environment and the hiring manager says that he likes how fast-paced the work style is, it might not be the best fit for you. Or, if you value frequent communication with your superiors, you may encounter problems if managers are rarely in the office.

**Q7** What are the next steps in the hiring process?

This is an important question to ask at the end of the meeting. You need to know when the company plans to make a decision and when you should follow up. The interviewer’s response may also give you insight into his or her interest in hiring you. Keep the door open for further communication by asking the interviewer for a direct phone number and the best time to call before you leave.

Finally, at the close of the interview, take a moment to reiterate your enthusiasm about the open position and the company. Thank the interviewer for his or her time and be sure to follow up with a thank-you note. It’s imperative for both HR managers and job seekers to ask the right questions during the interview process as it’s a chance to learn about one another and determine if the position is a good fit. Asking smart questions will not only show your passion for the role but also give you better insight into both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

**About the Author**

Robert Hosking is executive director of OfficeTeam, the nation’s leading staffing service specializing in the temporary placement of highly skilled administrative and office support professionals. OfficeTeam has more than 325 locations worldwide and offers online job search services at: www.officeteam.co.uk.
PA Enterprise interview

Adam Fidler

In this issue, we interview Adam Fidler, a board level PA who works for the Principal of a college in the North West of England. He explains how he came to work in this profession, describes his goals for the future, and gives his advice for PAs who want to advance their career.

Q Can you tell our readers a bit about you and who you work for?
I’ve been a Board Level PA for eight years now; other than a two year break from the secretarial field (I went into secretarial recruitment), I’ve always worked as senior administrator or management assistant. I never thought I’d stay in the profession for this long, but when you are passionate about what you do, and earn a reputation for being good at it, it’s hard to give up a role which has been your bread and butter for so long.

I currently work as the Executive Assistant to the Principal of a large college in the North West of England. I’ve worked for some high profile organisations such as Bank of America and Boots PLC, and it was always my ambition to work for organisations who employ thousands of people, so this is the first time I’ve moved away from those blue chip firms and worked in education. My current role, however, is probably the best I’ve ever had. I have managerial responsibilities, including line managing a team of PAs, and acting as right-hand-man to the person right at the top of the College.

I’ve always been ambitious within the remit of this role, and made myself a promise several years ago: if I wasn’t PA to the Chief Executive of a large organisation by time I was 30, I’d leave this profession all together! Luckily, I secured my current role just before I hit 31 – so, I just managed to stick to the commitment I made to myself all those years ago!

Q You have an interesting story about how you became a PA. Can you share your early years with us?
I remember a school teaching saying to me (after she’d found out I wrote shorthand): “I can see you as being PA to a member of the Royal Family one day”, and perhaps that set my hopes high. Organisations and structures interest me, so I suppose it was inevitable I’d end up in an office environment as my vocation.

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At the age of just 13, I taught myself shorthand. I found an old shorthand textbook, belonging to my great uncle, who was a police administrator, in the loft of our family home, and I was fascinated by the fact that you could write in squiggles and understand it! It was like writing in a secret language. After I’d taught myself shorthand, and tried several systems, I then decided I wanted to prove I could ‘do’ shorthand so in addition to undertaking my GCSEs. I sought permission from my school to allow me to go to night school. I studied shorthand, and subsequently typing, and by the time I was 14, I had 90 words per minute shorthand to examination standard. It was interesting, because I always made use of my shorthand at school, and in the English lesson, I’d take down the lecturer notes in shorthand and then write them back when I got home. My English teacher was intrigued and said one day “You’re a dark horse, aren’t you – writing in shorthand”!

Then, having shorthand as a skill, my mother suggested I should do typing as well, so I taught myself to touch type, and at evening class did my typing exams. When we had IT lessons, I used to show off to my class mates that I could type without looking at the keys! They were in awe because they couldn’t do that! By the time I was 15 years old, I had examinations in 140 words per minute shorthand, and an advanced typing qualification.

At the age of 14½, I secured myself a temporary job doing paper rounds, or working in shops during college holidays, I was working in some quite well-known firms in the UK, which gave me a real insight into the business world, and a very diverse background in terms of industry experience. I may have been lacking life experience, but I was putting my skills to good use, and earning a pretty decent hourly rate for a 16 year old – I saved every penny and it helped me to purchase my first property at 21.

I’m an advocate of education and learning skills, and always envisaged that the future PA would need to be highly skilled and well educated to secure those top jobs. So I gained a degree in business studies to secure my long term future. The combination of graduate coupled with true secretarial skills is a rarity in the UK, so I’m glad I pushed myself when I did to get a degree under my belt before going into the workplace.

At the age of 16, I undertook temporary work during my college holidays, and as my skills were so advanced for my age, I was always employed as a senior secretary, often covering for a secretary in a director or head of department. Even then, I never thought I’d end up as a career PA, but the experience was fantastic and it gave me a real insight into organisations, culture and bureaucracy!

Whilst my college friends were doing paper rounds, or working in shops during college holidays, I was working in some quite well-known firms in the UK, which gave me a real insight into the business world, and a very diverse background in terms of industry experience. I may have been lacking life experience, but I was putting my skills to good use, and earning a pretty decent hourly rate for a 16 year old – I saved every penny and it helped me to purchase my first property at 21.

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You contribute part of your success to establishing goals and sticking to them. What are some of the more important goals you have set for yourself and how did you manage to stick to them? I suppose sticking to goals, and making them, is a commitment you make to yourself. We all know that secretaries and administrator are employed and then left to their own devices—many stay in the same job with only the hope of one of the senior PAs leaving to give them chance for promotion, or some just leave one firm altogether as there isn’t the scope for them to move round. That’s a real shame, but part and parcel of the profession we work in. Yes, a good secretary can influence his or her manager to allow them to develop and undertake training courses, but the only person who can make a real difference is the individual—who needs to take responsibility for their own career. So, from early in my career, I set myself regular goals and aspirations. I tend to call my goals my ‘wish list’, and find that the simple act of writing down my ‘wishes’ meant I was closer to them and more able to achieve them. So, as an example, recently I undertook a teaching training course, which means I am now a part-qualified teacher—something which had been on my ‘wish list’ for several years. Now I’ve put my mind to it, and achieved it—I can cross it off the list and move on to the next item, and so on. Some goals take years to manifest or for you to find the time or resources to do them, but never lose sight of your vision and where you want to be. As silly as it sounds, you’re more likely to achieve something if you set yourself regular targets and keep adding to your ‘wish list’ than if you don’t. See yourself in that new job, imagine the surroundings in which you’re going to work, and pretend to feel how it will feel for you when you have reached your goal… it’s amazing how it works, but you’ll draw opportunities towards you that help you get nearer and nearer to those goals…. You are active in EUMA. Can you tell us a bit about what EUMA is and what your role is? EUMA stands for European Management Assistants. EUMA is a not-for-profit association of secretaries, PAs and office managers with over 1,300 members in 26 countries throughout Europe. We’re the only pan-European association, and aim to give secretaries and PAs training, development and networking opportunities to boost their career. EUMA also gives office support staff a ‘voice’ and has real influence in the secretarial industry; we’re often consulted on a number of current issues facing today’s
Adam Fidler interview continued

secretaries. One example is that EUMA is delighted to be working with the French government on a brand new secretarial qualification called Euroast (European Assistant), which will provide a new accreditation for PAs which is recognisable in all European countries.

I have been the UK National Press Relations Officer for EUMA now for just over five months; I’m loving every minute of it. My role is all about promoting the benefits of being a member of EUMA. I’ve just returned from EUMA’s annual conference – this year it was held in Slovenia. It’s remarkable to meet PAs from all over the world, who share the same stories, same aspirations and the same passion for their roles.

Q You have achieved many of your goals – would you like to be in five years from now?

I’ve made no secret of the fact that I’ll have my own business one day. Doing what, I hear you ask? I’m an asset you are to have around. Others, and you’ll soon prove what expectations high, of yourself and command will follow. Set your and the behaviours and respect you share is always to view your role in a ‘managerial’ way… So, don’t accept that you’re just a secretary or PA, but view yourself as a ‘manager’ and the behaviours and respect you command will follow. Set your expectations high, of yourself and others, and you’ll soon prove what an asset you are to have around. The only limiting thing about being a PA is the PA’s limited ability to think outside the box, and get more involved in things outside of the job description.

Q What is your ‘golden nugget’ of advice for inspiring PAs who want to advance in their career?

At the start of my career I was lucky enough to work in the group headquarters of large FTSE 100 firm in the UK. The group headquarters where I worked was fairly stuffy and old fashioned, but it was a fantastic grounding for me and the lady I worked with went on to become PA to the Chief Executive. Her name was Kim. One piece of advice that Kim taught me, and I pass on to other secretaries all the time, is not to be afraid to use your own initiative. Take the initiative! If you wait for your boss to give you permission to do something, you’ll wait a long time – so go ahead and do it anyway. You won’t always get things right or spot on, but you’ll gain more respect by taking the lead, than waiting for someone to ask you to do something. Ask yourself: “What can I do to take this activity/project one step further?” – by taking things step further you’re adding even more value, and your boss and the organisation as a whole will appreciate it.

Another solid piece advice I’ll happily share is always to view your role in a ‘managerial’ way… So, don’t accept that you’re just a secretary or PA, but view yourself as a ‘manager’ and the behaviours and respect you command will follow. Set your expectations high, of yourself and others, and you’ll soon prove what an asset you are to have around. The only limiting thing about being a PA is the PA’s limited ability to think outside the box, and get more involved in things outside of the job description.

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Q You have achieved many of your goals – what would you like to be in five years from now?

I’ve made no secret of the fact that I’ll have my own business one day. Doing what, I hear you ask? I’m not quite sure about that yet, but I hope it will be an opportunity to share my experience and knowledge with others. It may be secretarial recruitment, or a training facility, but I have no doubt that I’ll be an entrepreneur before I’m 40! I’d also like to do more writing and much more teaching… I’m currently teaching shorthand to a group of secretaries at the college where I work. I’m a good teacher, if I dare say so myself! If the teacher is enthusiastic then the students will be too. I’d like to do more teaching in my career over the next few years.

Q Would you like to be in five years from now?

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