

What are the key attributes of an effective Executive Personal Assistant?

The role of the Executive Personal Assistant is growing exponentially. From humble beginning the Executive Personal Assistant is now normally university qualified and required to perform demanding roles on behalf of their boss such as preparing executive reports, making presentations, attending and even making strategic contributions during executive board meetings; etc.

Executive Personal Assistants have a highly visible and demanding role in blue chip corporations and government organisations.

So what makes an effective Executive Personal Assistant effective in the eyes of their Boss?

1. Understanding the Business Strategy

Fundamental to the role of senior executives in any organisation is the formation and delivery of the business strategy. These senior executives need the support of a high quality team around them if success is to come. The Executive Personal Assistant is at the core of this team and needs to be able to speak the language of the senior management team or Board. The old adage *“Once you know why, you’ll figure out how”* applies to the role of the Executive Personal Assistant. Executives and Senior Managers who enable their Executive Personal Assistant to gain this understanding get the significantly enhanced performance.



Source: BMTG Ltd. The Effective EPA
Advanced Certificate Executive Personal Assistant

2. Understand the Wider Business Issues

The Executive Personal Assistant is the eyes and ears of their boss. The ability to listen and to communicate across the organization is a key skill that should be encouraged and learned. It is not so much as having the ear to the ground but it is more about being able to separate the wheat from the chaff. A clear understanding of the priorities, motivations and issues of others across the organization is invaluable to the Executive Personal Assistant in the daily tasks.

3. Operates Efficiently and Effectively

Senior Executives are busy people and need to rely on the Executive Personal Assistant to provide support not only efficiently but also effectively. Efficiently in terms of the Executive Personal Assistants time and effort but also ensuring that their Boss is operating efficiently. They say that efficiency is about getting the job done on time and effectiveness is about getting the job done correctly. Some would say that it’s not “what you do” but “how you do” it but I tend to disagree. It’s about **both**.

There is no point hammering out a 20 page report for your boss in 30 minutes if it is full of errors. Conversely there is little point issuing the same report 3 days late with no errors. The Executive Personal Assistant should aim to deliver the report on time with no errors. That is being both effective and efficient.

4. Is a Natural Problem Solver

I may challenge the use of the word “natural” as problem solving is a skill that can be learnt. Some people do have a natural tendency in this regard but if they do not the effective Executive Personal Assistant can benefit significantly by attending Problem Solving training and applying these tips and tricks in their daily routine. It can be as simple as asking WHY? enough times to get to the real root cause of an issue. However; fundamentally it is realizing that finding the solution does not have to come from yourself but will come more easily from involving others that differentiates a great problem solver from a good problem solver.

5. Is a Rigorous Planner

“People don’t plan to fail; they fail to plan”. This applies not only to the Effective Personal Assistant’s role of course but is one of its most critical aspects. The Executive Personal Assistant is not just planning their own work but is to all extents and purposes planning their bosses. Efficient planning is not normally a solitary task. The effective project manager does not plan in isolation – they include their team. The Executive Personal Assistant does not normally have this luxury. The Boss is always too busy to sit down and get involved in the planning but still naturally expects it to go smoothly. Therefore rigorous planning is essential – but so is insisting that the boss does at least review his plans with you.

6. Is a Strong influencer

Not all Executive Personal Assistants work for the top person in the organization. The majority operate at executive or senior management level and have to influence not only downwards but across and upwards.

Being able to recognize when to use some or all of the 7 key influencing tactics of *Consultation, Rational Persuasion, Exchange, Ingratiation, Coalition, Upward Appeals* and last but not least *Pressure* is a skill that can be learned and one that delivers excellent results.

The Executive Personal Assistant who tries to influence using the Boss’s position of power (the pressure tactic) may find it difficult to get an effective response and is more than likely to experience passive resistance. Whilst the pressure tactic has its place the effective influencer using all the tools available to them.



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