

Give her a T.I.E

Effectively Utilizing your Executive Assistant

By Bonnie Wooding

We are going to work on the presumption that you, as an intelligent, canny business person, have hired the best Executive Assistant (EA) you can find. We will presume that this person is highly skilled and capable of working at a certain level of expertise. And if you don't have this person working for you, we will presume that you are going to hire asap.

Your EA can make or break you. She/he can be your best ally or your worst nightmare. And which one is entirely up to you. Because, as the boss, you set the tone of this relationship.

I want you to consider for a moment – in your business, what you expect from your partners and what they expect from you? What is important? And why?

I consider the “top 10” Partnership Success Factors to be: make the partnership a win-win, adopt a shared vision, ensure good communication, maintain an environment of trust, leave your ego and control at the door, use the strengths of each partner, always be courteous and diplomatic, honor your commitments, celebrate success, respect the right to disagree.

Does any this reflect the relationship you have with your EA? Because, and let me say this as plainly as I can – this is the most important partnership in your career. With a loyal, dedicated, proactive, intelligent and empowered EA as your partner, your opportunities are limitless.

Consider the following two scenarios:

Scenario 1:

Your assistant answers the phone and you overhear the following:

“Ms. Jones office, Anne Smith speaking. May I help you?”

“I'm sorry, she is not in”

“No, I'm sorry, I'm not sure when she will be back”

“No, I am not aware of that transaction”

“Can I have her call you when she returns?”

Scenario 2:

Your assistant answers the phone and you overhear the following:

“Ms. Jones office, Carol Black speaking. How can I help you?”

“Ms. Jones is in a meeting at the moment and will be tied up for the next hour. Is there something I can help you with?”

“Yes sir, I am aware of your transaction. Rick Brown and Peter Boyd are also working on that with her – perhaps I could transfer your call to one of them?”

“Certainly, I will transfer you now. And I will let Ms. Jones know that you called and that you have spoken to Mr. Brown”.

Everyone wants the second assistant – and everyone seems to have the first one. Why? What makes them different?



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The difference is the T.I.E.: Trust - Information - Empowerment. Carol wears the T.I.E., Anne does not. Anne's role, as defined by you, does not include trust, information and empowerment.

Trust - I want you to think for a second on the trust you have in your Assistant. How much to you really trust her? And I am not talking about running off with your credit card. How much to you trust her to do her job? How much to you trust her to ensure that you can do your job?

This relationship is all about trust. You must trust her to act on your behalf. This does not mean she is making your decisions – it means she is carrying out your directions. But she is doing it autonomously, without you micro-managing. Negotiating contracts with vendors, speaking to clients, giving directions to your staff, attending meetings on your behalf - do you trust her to act?

And she must trust you - to support her, to respect her skills and abilities, to always speak highly of her (you can't expect your staff to take direction from someone you refer to as "my idiot assistant").

And the most important trust is **Information**. Do you trust her enough to tell her everything she needs to know in order to run your office?

Which takes us to "The Chat".

Ideally, you arrive into the office at least 30 minutes prior to your first meeting. You and your assistant go into your office (one of you has picked up the coffee), shut the door and forward the phone to voicemail. You sit and talk – about everything. What's new – what's happening – client issues – deals, current and pending. You will talk about your goals, what you are striving to achieve – long and short term. You discuss staff – any issues, politics, who is doing great, who you are watching. You will cover upcoming trips and their purpose, special events, edicts from "on-high", upcoming meetings, and so on and so on.

This Chat can be once a day, once a week or once a month, depending on your business. But it has to be consistently regular.

And this chat is completely separate from your 1:1 meeting, where she reports to you on the status of her work and you give her your input.

By ensuring your EA knows everything you know about what is happening in your office, you ensure that things do not get missed, that the important things are done. You have an extra set of eyes and ears – you can delegate with confidence because she is aware. Just think of all the advantages of having someone that knowledgeable, who is on your side, and whose goal is to ensure that you succeed.

But this can't happen if you treat her like a mushroom. You all know the mantra – knowledge is power. The more your EA knows, the more powerfully she can act on your behalf.

Which brings us to **Empowerment**.

There are many misconceptions about empowerment. The term empowerment has come to have different meanings in different contexts. For this discussion, empowerment includes self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, choice, dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, and capability.

EAs that are empowered have taken control of their own careers to ensure that they are on the very cutting edge of their profession. They constantly upgrade their skills, both soft and technical, to stay on the very top of their game. And you encourage her in these efforts, by giving her the time and support she needs to accomplish them. You insist that she belong to her professional association, that she attend



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administrative education conferences, seminars and workshops. Because, after all, you are the one that benefits.

An empowered EA, with all the assurance, self-reliance and capability that goes with knowledge and trust, will ensure your clients, your office, and your staff will be handled with the poise and surety shown by Carol.

An Executive Assistant is a highly trained, very skilled professional. It is a tough job requiring a cool head, a thick skin, a keen sense of the absurd and the tenacity of a bull dog. You need to recognize that her skills and knowledge can be vital to the operation of your business. EAs can and do perform an extraordinarily wide variety of roles - office manager, researcher, facilities manager, event coordinator, project manager, marketing coordinator, sales assistant, desk top and multimedia specialist, travel agent, bookkeeper, communications facilitator, tech support, production assistant, document manager, and operations coordinator, to name but a few.

Who else in your business wears so many hats, so capably?

So, give your EA a T.I.E. You will both benefit.

Bonnie is an Executive Virtual Assistant, who provides one-on-one support for busy entrepreneurs. Researcher, project manager, marketing & sales assistant, desk top and multimedia specialist, travel agent, mind reader and magician, she is a dedicated professional with a high level of integrity, who will competently attend to all your personal and professional matters.