



Taking the **Lead**

Administrative Assistant as Strategic Partner

Donna Rawady

An effective relationship between the executive and his or her assistant can exponentially increase the effectiveness of both. Crucial components of the success of your partnership with your assistant include how highly you value the partnership, how clearly you set expectations and standards

for performance, and how you participate in the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship. If this kind of strategic partnership is less of a reality and more of an objective, there's good news. There are multiple strategies that can help you and your assistant elevate and fine-tune your support of one another. Here are a few strategies that may help you get started.

Position and jump-start the shift.

As in any business situation, if you're exploring a significant shift in one's role and responsibilities, how you position the exploration is crucial. Talk with your assistant and let her know that you are taking the time to think about how she might become more of a strategic partner. To start, ask her to schedule a meeting for the two of you next week. Ask her to come prepared to discuss at least one area where she feels you communicate really well and one area where she feels you can improve communication with her. Let her know you'll come prepared to offer her the same feedback. Then prepare for the meeting and be ready to listen. Once you meet and have the discussion, agree to at least one action plan where you'll each be working on your respective improvement opportunities. Set a reasonable target date when you can both discuss your successes and challenges in doing so. You can use this feedback model again as it relates to different aspects of your leadership from your assistant's point of view (i.e., project management, delegation, the needs of your management team, etc.).

Raise the bar for the basics.

The most efficient assistant offers top-notch support with day-to-day demands and minutia. And the most efficient manager delegates effectively. Brainstorm alternatives for increased support with the basics. Here's an example relating to managing incoming email. You might create three computer folders within your email application:

1. Immediate review/action (today)
2. Pending action (two to three day turnaround is OK)
3. For review (at your leisure)

Ask your assistant to monitor your incoming email and distribute messages into the appropriate folder. Often it's small time savers like this that have the most significant day-to-day impact. And this process helps to keep your assistant in the correspondence loop.

Meet with your assistant regularly.

The strong recommendation here is that in addition to your impromptu meetings, phone conversations, and emails, schedule regular brief meetings (ten minutes) where the two of you have the uninterrupted opportunity to discuss upcoming demands, expectations, and needs, from both perspectives. These meetings should be treated as a priority and take place at least three times a week. If

you're primarily on site, every day isn't too often. If you're generally off site, you'll adjust the recommendation accordingly. Ask your assistant to come prepared with a checklist of what he or she needs to discuss and you'll do the same. A common denominator found among professionals is their desire for their assistants to anticipate. The surest way for an assistant to anticipate your needs is to keep her or him informed.

Periodically explore changes or expansions in your assistant's role and responsibilities.

Ask your assistant to prepare and document his thoughts about the following and schedule a date for the two of you to discuss.

1. Where specifically does he feel he may be able to expand his responsibilities to best support you?
2. If he's swamped in a particular area of detail, what are his recommendations for specific strategies that will allow him to eliminate some of the pressure and increase his availability?
3. Where does he feel he may need more mentoring or training?

The information from this discussion will provide a basis for exploring how you might revise,

support, or enhance his position, ultimately elevating his contribution to your success, and yours to his. To start, the change may be minimal but significant. For example, you might agree that his new responsibilities include suggesting specific changes to your calendar based on what he sees as your upcoming demands.

Appreciate and recognize your assistant's contributions.

We all know a simple thank-you goes a long way. However, highlighting an individual's specific contributions to your success during a thank-you is more powerful. And in addition to the traditional thank you card or gift during this celebratory month, you may want to take the time to give something that is especially chosen with your strategic partner in mind. **BSM**

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a strategic partnership
that will benefit both of you?*

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