Executive Support magazine

Free Ebook for Administrative Professionals Month 2022

SHIFT HAPPENS:
The Skills You Need in a Changing World

The Essential Training Resource for the World's Administrative Professionals

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Top 10 skills of 2025

Analytical thinking and innovation

Active learning and learning strategies

Complex problem-solving

Critical thinking and analysis

Creativity, originality and initiative

Leadership and social influence

Technology use, monitoring and control

Technology design and programming

Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility

Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

Type of skill
- Problem-solving
- Self-management
- Working with people
- Technology use and development

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum.

SHIFT Happens

The headlines in some of the world's newspapers would have you believe that the role of the Assistant is on its way out and that artificial intelligence is about to steal your job. There is a grain of truth in that.

If you look at the new Global Skills Matrix from the World Administrators Alliance, the Level 2 role, which is reactive and purely task-based, is certainly at risk. If you can do something twice in the same way, it can be automated.

But the administrative profession is so much more than calendar, travel and email management. It's why we worked with the World Administrators Alliance to produce the Global Skills Matrix: to clearly show how enlightened businesses are using their Assistants more strategically. A proactive, strategic administrative professional, utilised properly, is at the heart of ensuring that a business functions properly.

A large part of the misconceptions around the role lies with the US Bureau of Labor. It only has one classification for the administrative role – that of the Level 2 Assistant. It's something we're working at changing. But the good news is that Glassdoor is currently listing the Assistant role as one of the key jobs of the future. And when you look at the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs' report, it is not hard to see why.

Coming out of Covid, 83% of businesses are scaling for remote work, 84% are accelerating digitalisation and 50% are accelerating automation. The world of work is rapidly coming to the realisation that the most valuable skills of the future will be human skills: problem-solving, working with people, self-management, technology use, service orientation, emotional intelligence and attention to detail. The role is not going anywhere.

As a company, we have adjusted to the changes in not only the ways in which you are working but also the subject matters in which you need training.

We are running both online and in-person training with a huge selection of topics from over 70 of the top trainers in the world. We are also offering conferences in all formats, and our LIVE conferences this year from London and Seattle will be hybrid for the first time. And of course, our magazine subscription now has both print and digital options as well as digital licence options for businesses that want to subscribe on behalf of all their Assistants.

The World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs' report also tells us that 50% of staff will need to be retrained by 2025.

Our profession is here to stay. It is not going anywhere, but it does need to adapt to the new ways of working. It's a profession in an acute state of change. Our message to you this Administrative Professionals Day is to be front and centre when it comes to asking for the training you need.

Our team can help you to explore which trainers and topics will best help to future-proof your role and the roles of your colleagues. We have business case letters that will help you to structure your requests. We're even happy to talk to your HR departament about the new Global Skills Matrix and how to best utilise the administrative function for your business. Just drop us a line at info@executivesupportmedia.com if you want to set up a chat.

Lucy Brazier OBE

Take Your Seat at the Innovation Table

If you want a seat at the innovation table, you must take credit for your ideas and make them happen says Dinah Liversidge

WRITER
DINAH LIVERSIDGE

According to the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report, the number one skill that will make you stand out in an over-crowded, ever AI-developing marketplace, is a combination of analytical thinking and innovation. Whilst this might, initially, sound like great news for most Executive Assistants, clearly being core skills in their role, it is also a challenge to fully embrace this way of being and working. Most companies claim to want these things yet show little history of embracing them or promoting the people who champion them.

When companies talk about being leaders in innovation, what do they really mean?

Innovation used to mean ground-breaking technology or novel pharmaceuticals. Now, the speed of progression in these areas has created so much noise, it is becoming ever more challenging to stand out. Innovation in how staff areas are designed and how staff are shown that they are valued may have been sneered at by traditionally profit-driven businesses in the last couple of decades, but they are starting to attempt a catch up. Take a look at the photographs of any company website now, and you'll see areas that show their values of 'investing in our teams' and 'putting people first'.

Likewise, strategic or analytical thinking used to be all about minimising overlap, maximising efficiency and building profitable partnerships. Focus is going to have to shift to longer-term strategies for the people who make the business stand out from their competitors. This includes investment in apprenticeships, mentoring schemes, and training for both professional and personal development. Without this strategic investment there will be no future for the business and little reason for staff loyalty. EAs are ideally placed to lead in this area. Ask for investment

in your development to be part of your remuneration package and show them why it will enable you to add value.

Not all companies have a trailblazer at the helm

Now, before you all shout about Bill Gates or Richard Branson and how they have consistently promoted and encouraged true innovators and change-makers, please acknowledge that these leaders, and a few others like them, are the exception to the general rule. Most corporations talk about innovation and analytical thinking as a way to attract talented employees that they

then prevent from being either innovative or analytical, with red tape and the 'we've always done it this way' brigade. Challenging the status quo often results in people putting up walls; it takes determination to keep chipping away.

I highly recommend the book A Peacock in the Land of Penguins by BJ Gallagher and Warren H. Schmidt. It takes a unique look at the challenges facing the different 'birds' that make up a business and explores the challenges they face when forced to work in the, highly conformist, land of the penguins.

If you are inclined, however, to truly apply the principal that every company is going

to want to develop in the area of innovation, then you have to ask how you are placed within your organisation to provide these things. Is your role seen as a strategic one, or more reactive? Traditional Assistant roles have changed, but often the views of other team members have not. It's up to you to evaluate whether you are perceived as you should be in the bigger picture and, if you are not seen as a strategic partner and an asset, it's time to deal with that.

How can you be seen as a strategic innovator in an Assistant role?

One of the common themes of recent articles about the role of the Executive Assistant is that they are not a strategic asset to the business they work in, but, rather, a 'nice to have' reactive role that frees up time for the executive to be a strategic leader. The implication is that the role will be replaced by AI, an obvious casualty of progress. I have been surprised by how little the authors of these articles have understood, researched or spent time working in the role, or with an EA themselves.

Assistants are required to be middle management and have been taking on this role since the late 1980s, when head count became the latest way to make more profit and large swathes of mid-grade management roles were absorbed by the Assistants in each team. Assistants everywhere were picking up responsibilities, budgets and longer days, being delighted that our skills were being put to better use, whilst muttering in quiet corners that 'a bit more money might be nice to go with it' but rarely saying so.

Plenty of Assistants are busy talking themselves out of the very strategic roles they seek

And herein lies the problem for many Assistants: they rarely put their ideas forward (including the suggestion that they deserve a review of salary) and they talk themselves out of being the innovative strategic business partners that they seek to be. Ask any senior Administrator to record and share exactly what takes up their time in a month, and you'd think you were looking at a strategic, core influencer

in the business. Ask them casually in conversation, and you'll often hear the word 'only' or 'just' to minimise the idea that they deserve credit for any of this.

Add to this lack of self-promotion a lack of self-investment and EAs will not be seen as credible partners by their executives. How much did you invest in your own development in the last year? The truly exceptional, innovative, and strategic EAs are working with coaches and mentors, attending industry-leading training events (often paying for these themselves) and contributing to publications like this one to be seen as thought-leaders in their field.

While I love a team-player, if Executive Assistants want a seat at the innovation table, they have to be prepared to risk being the centre of attention, taking the limelight for a while and – I know, this is getting really uncomfortable – take credit for their ideas and making them happen. What's stopping that from happening already? In my experience it is a combination of these:

1. Working for a manager who is not a leader

If you work for a reactive manager, rather than a leader or people-developer, they are not really listening when you put your ideas forward. This is out of your control and the likely way to change this is to look for other opportunities yourself (either in a different area of the company, or elsewhere).

2. Your language

Your own language is holding you back and keeping you thinking small. Until you stop the head-talk about why nobody is going to take you seriously, or how your opinion isn't relevant, you will be creating your own truth here. This is within your control; I am not suggesting it is easy, but with support and mindset, you can choose to end this behaviour of self-deprecation.

3. A past experience that did not go well

We have all been in one of those situations where we wish the ground could swallow us up. At least, we've had this experience if we've dared to take the risk of speaking out, putting forward ideas, risking making a mistake. The good news is, once we've got back up and gone for it again – despite that awful moment – we get the chances we were hoping for to make a difference. There comes a time in your life where you have to ask yourself a tough question or two,

and if you're planning to step out of your current 'I'm not enough" place and become a strategic partner, then now is a good time to ask those questions. I suggest you start with 'what am I getting out of staying where I am?' You do not have to share you answer to this, so be honest. The reason we choose to repeat behaviour, or to fail to challenge our patterns that have become habits, is because we get something out of it staying as it is. That voice in your head, keeping you small, that imposter, is costing you the chance to risk being innovative. It's time to challenge it.

The first project I was given to work on at SKB, when I returned to work after my car accident, was to organise an event about innovation. It was to shape my career with them for the next eleven years. Why did it have such an impact? Because the audience were the top innovators in our business, from every country in the world. I spent a week with them, watching how they communicated, how open they were to 'crazy ideas' and how prepared they were to try new, often scary, things. I was inspired by them to be less afraid of making mistakes or looking foolish, and more open to the possibility that I had something new to add.

Embrace your core values

Most EAs I have had the privilege to coach and mentor have several values at their core in common; others before self, always giving my best, being truly present for others, sharing best practice, helping others to achieve. Are you seeing a pattern here? EAs are amazing people. These are values that every business wants (and often claims) to have at the core of their business. These are the values they want their customers to think of when they think of them.

What these values are not yet seen as, however, is innovative or analytical or strategic. And I say 'not yet' because I believe they are core to being all of these things. What we need to communicate effectively to executives and board members and – ultimately for many – shareholders is how and why these values are both these things.

In this depersonalised world of online commerce and AI, customers are going full circle and moving back to the concept of supporting smaller, ethical and regional businesses. They are doing this for largely value-based and often environmental reasons and these eco-consumers use

WRITER
DINAH LIVERSIDGE

every business. Corporations are following the example of the smaller, ethical firms as they see how they appeal to and attract new customers. Keeping these customers is going to require that businesses 'walk the talk'; in other words, they will have to have values not just as part of a clever strap-line but as a way of working and at the core of how they treat their customers, their staff and their suppliers.

This is excellent news, as the core values that you work from daily have been, until now, viewed as non-strategic and impossible to measure in terms of profit. These values are going to be the way a business keeps it customers for the long term. We, as customers, want our expectations surpassed and our 'experience' to be one that we want to share, in our Instagram feed, with our friends.

Become involved to have an impact on strategy

Grab every opportunity to join project teams or committees that are looking at the way your business needs to evolve for the next decade and make sure you speak up about how vital it is to be more value-based, driven and focussed if you want to appeal to an evolving market. And do your research; how are your clients/customers/consumers making their ethical choices heard? I regularly see news stories that show shoppers having impacts on how big brands make their goods, pay their staff and test their contents.

Act on this today

If you are feeling motivated, how about starting to shift your executive's thoughts about you as a strategic and innovative partner? Taking action right away is one of the behaviours that make great innovators. Here are my suggested next steps:

1. If you don't know them already, ask your executive what their goals are for the department/business for the year.

2. Take a look at all the actions you perform in your role for the next two weeks and write them all down, along with how much time they took up. I recommend you do this on a pad and leave it open next to you, so you do it as you go.

3. Review both lists and note how much time you are spending on tasks that are not related to your executive's goals.

4. Review how many of the things on your list of tasks are things you repeat regularly but have yet to find a way to automate. Automate them.

5. Each time in the next three months that you are about to go to your executive with a problem, consider two solutions that you can also discuss. Let them see that you have strategies in place to handle situations that impact the long-term success of the team and the business.

Taking the risk to innovate, to stand out and say, 'I see a better way of doing this' or 'have you considered this?' comes back to those inner conversations that we allow to talk us out of opportunities. We call it a 'comfort zone' for a good reason and hey, if you are comfortable as you are, then I'm happy for you. If you're being honest with yourself about the future of your role, however, they you've got to put your internal voice to bed and start believing in your own ideas.

Once you free up time that is currently being invested in repetitive, non-strategic tasks, what impact might you have on the business? How often have you had to say no to a project because these tasks have been taking up your time? Which areas of the business would benefit from your experience? These are questions worth exploring with your mentor and ultimately with your executive.

Dinah Liversidge is a coach, mentor, writer, speaker, celebrant, podcaster, and host. Dinah helps people go from "thinking outside the box", to "no-box thinking". Her total belief that "there is no box" has allowed Dinah to overcome several, serious, health challenges, not least a road accident which resulted in eleven years in a wheelchair, and major heart surgery in 2013. Today, walking again, she is living proof of the power of thinking yourself out of a box, and has created a life and a future she was told were not on her horizon.

https://dinahliversidge.com/

Reskilling: The Future Skill that is Needed Now

Jason Liem argues that our relevance is determined by reskilling; our ability to learn the needed expertise for the future

WRITER
JASON W BIRKEVOLD LIEM
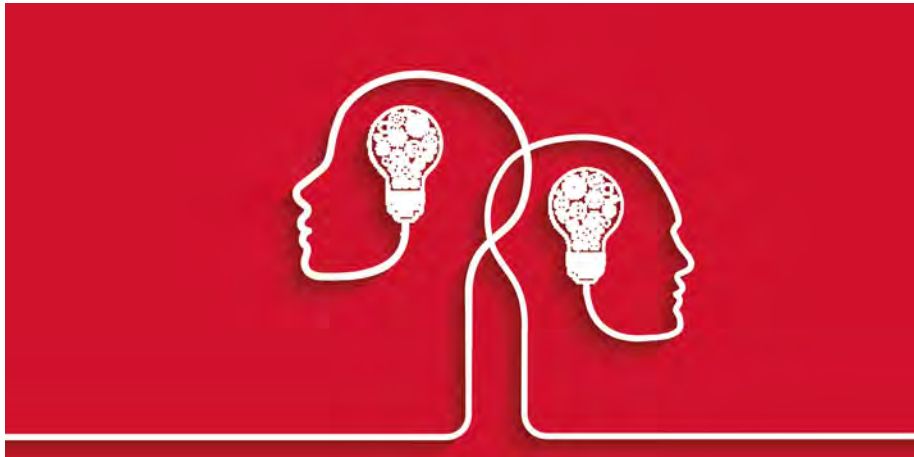
A tsunami of change has swept the planet and has rattled the foundation of what we have considered normal. The magnitude of change has left its indelible mark at every level – from the individual up to the societal level. It has awakened anxieties about financial health, job security and direction in life. For some it may even have shaken their sense of purpose. And this is on top of all the other things that have made a continental shift in our lives.

Everyone I know is grappling with the change to the normal rhythms and routines of life. Our plans have been upended and the way forward is unclear. Like all upheavals, it gives us a chance to see the world with fresh eyes.

When unexpected change hits, we all become tourists in our own lives. We begin to see with fresh eyes the things we took for granted. We rediscover the world has endless possibilities, but the limits of our routines have blinded us to this fact. Upheavals force us to take a good, hard look at our lives and to ask, "Where do I want to go from here?"

Moving Forward into the Storm

It takes very little to up-end what we've considered to be normal practice. Within weeks, if not days, the rules of the game have shifted if not been outright rewritten. Companies have closed, people have lost their jobs, and industries have collapsed.

This is a big, flashing neon sign of things to come. Most likely the next time it won't be a virus that slams everything sideways. It'll be in the form of something we are already anticipating – digitalisation, artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotisation. The writing is on the wall. Many of the career paths and positions of today will be extinct by tomorrow.

Learnability

Never have the skills of learnability, agility and adaptability been so needed. Organisations will come to value these skill sets more and more in their employees. This need is only set to grow in demand. People who have the drive to develop will gain an edge over others. It will increase the likelihood of remaining employable and relevant.

Almost all information is available anywhere and at any time. It only takes a few finger taps on a screen to find an answer. Of course, we need a critical eye to judge the validity of that answer. The truth is expertise and knowledge are not as appreciated as they have been in the past.

What does this mean? In short, what we know is less relevant than what we can learn. Our level of expertise is not that important. Our relevance is determined by our ability to learn the needed expertise for the future.

Where to Begin?

1. Be curious about being curious

A good place to begin is to consider where curiosity draws our attention. It can awaken at any time: through a casual conversation, a magazine article or a podcast. We never know when, where or what can awaken our curiosity.

2. Be open to experience

A few years ago, I took up sketching as a method of focusing my mind in a different way. My first sketches looked like the scratchings of an erratic, brainless monkey. I understood from the get-go that my sketches wouldn't be pieces of art, but lessons on how I could improve.

Most of us choose to play to our strengths over the awkwardness of trying to learn something new. Learning comes down to how we define it in our heads. Many people who are on the path of learning understand that to succeed you need to sometimes fail. They see failure as a teacher who educates us to adapt our approach. The learner understands that:

- Making mistakes means acquiring insight.
- Floundering means gaining know-how.
- Setbacks teach us how to bounce back.

3. Start with the end in mind

We need to clearly know where we want to go and why we want to get there. In other words, we need a well-defined goal and a purpose for achieving that goal.

The goal is what you want to learn. Your purpose is the reason why you want to achieve that goal. By starting with the end in mind, it becomes so much easier for us to map the way forward.

4. Invest in yourself by investing time

Demanding workloads and deadlines can make it hard to find the time to dedicate to our professional development. At least, that is what many of us tell ourselves. This same narrative gives us the permission to postpone learning. We tell ourselves we can do it tomorrow when things are a bit quieter. Then we tell ourselves the same fabrication the following day.

Ideally, our managers dedicate time to our development and growth. In many cases, managers don't even have time for their own development let alone develop others. Performance, efficiency and deadlines occupy most of their attentional capacity.

This is one of the reasons we must take ownership for our own growth. If it is important enough to us, we can make the time. A good part of this effort is to do most of the heavy lifting ourselves.

For example, if we actively search for a course we want to take, we can present our manager with the details and how we plan to work it into our schedules. We have not only shown our drive for development, but that we are committed. Of course, this is no guarantee, but it is much better than passively waiting for someone to offer us development. If we do, we might be waiting a long time.

5. Find your intrinsic motivation

Learning is best if it is something you are curious and passionate about. You may have a hobby or sport that you devote time and energy to. Nobody has to pay you to get involved. It triggers an intrinsic drive that is its own reward. If you need to reskill, why not choose a subject or discipline that lights your inner fire? What do you love doing? What are you passionate about?

At work, what triggers your curiosity? And why? What would you love to do more of?

What topic or subject would you like to explore in more depth?

6. Learn from others

Are there roles or responsibilities within your organisation that trigger your curiosity? If so, this might be an area to consider exploring.

If we choose to learn from someone then we need to be open to feedback and suggestions. And that means being able to handle criticism. Often, questions and suggestions from experienced eyes can reveal hidden insights. This in turn fuels the learning process.

7. Let Learning Marinate

As students, we have all come to that point where we have had enough learning for one day. It's important to pay heed to this feeling and to take a break. It gives time for the lesson to marinate and for our brain to incorporate the new knowledge. This layering strategy helps with retention and recall.

Another helpful tip to cement learning is to talk to someone about our progress. This helps on many levels. When explaining to others, it is clear where our comprehension flows and where it stops up.

8. Challenge yourself to teach others

The first level of learning is to study and understand a concept. The second, or deeper level of learning is the ability to teach others what you know. If others are able to learn from you that is a good indicator that you know your stuff.

I encourage you to set a date and time to teach what you've learned to your colleagues. This is a brilliant incentive to make your learning more focused and pragmatic.

9. Ask for and encourage feedback

Learning does not happen in a vacuum. For it to be effective, there needs to be a feedback loop that helps us gauge if we are climbing or if we are sliding.

When in learning mode, there is the risk of slipping into a subjective bubble and getting lost in the details. This can make it difficult to judge our own progress. Finding someone we trust and respect to give us feedback provides perspective and context to our development.

I find the following 5 questions helpful when gathering focused feedback from others:

What did I do well? What could I improve on? What do I need to do more of? What do I need to do less of? What is one thing I could either eliminate or change to improve things?

In Conclusion

An entire book could be dedicated to the concept of reskilling. This article is simply the opening sentences to a deeper and more substantial conversation that we may need to have.

We all know that the changes we have faced so far in 2020 will not be the last. It is a reminder that disruption will be the new normal and it can show up in many forms. Some of those upheavals we will see coming, but others will come out of the blue.

In all the uncertainty, the one certainty we can count on is that the future will belong to those who literally embody learnability, agility and adaptability.

Jason W Birkevold Liem helps people to think about their thinking so they are better at managing themselves, others and situations. He achieves this through an informative and engaging process that educates people about the brain, cognitive psychology and interpersonal communication. As a result, clients are better able to face their professional and private challenges with more confidence, certainty and clarity. Through his company, MINDtalk, he designs and delivers brain-based leadership and personal resilience programs to individuals and to teams. Learn more at www.MINDtalk.no. Subscribe to Jason's free podcast, "It's An Inside Job," here: http://www.mindtalk.no/its-an-inside-job.html.

Jason is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Jason training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau.

Embrace the Next Decade: Our Post-COVID World

Corinne Hoisington looks to the future and the skills needed in our role, the office and our post-COVID world

WRITER
CORINNE HOISINGTON

How do we ensure that new allies remain steadfast and focused on a change agenda post-COVID that will ultimately boost business growth? We must balance protecting our role and running the business today with retooling our business for tomorrow to outrun extinction and thrive after the pandemic.

Collective displacement

We are transitioning forward, slowly but surely. Our admin world collectively experienced displacement in the past two years. How (and where) we continue our role has changed, leaving more than a few of us feeling disconnected from familiar comforts, big and small. Many of us now work from home offices that are slowly but surely transforming into a space with new creature comforts, from truly ergonomic chairs to multiple screens. While efforts to eliminate COVID-19 continue, organizations are inventing new ways to communicate with people and deliver innovative and creative experiences at a distance, in a different spatial and social context. I love the quote from Hope Bear, Chief People Officer from AWeber, which defines this moment: "I've always said that the building doesn't define the relationships; the relationships define the culture."

Pre-COVID, most of us worked within our office spaces defined by a computer, great Internet, and the space to connect and work together. But now, almost every one of us can add to our resumes that we have served as a VA – Virtual Assistant. We have collectively realized that we can use computers outside the office, connecting our staff across our communities with virtual meeting apps such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Blue Jeans, WebEx, and so many others. Some of us are heading back into our offices because we prefer the environment and the physical rapport, but others will make the decision (and hopefully have that option) to permanently work

from wherever home may be. When the majority imagine the office of the future, they now picture a flexible workspace that can be physically located anywhere. And with the right technology combined with lessons learned over the past year, a remote workforce can share a great work experience and be just as productive as before.

The future and the flexibility of our collective office

Before 2020, our best workplaces leaned on their office space as a recruitment tool, offering elaborate exercise facilities, dining options, and other in-house perks to attract the most talented employees. But today, with remote work accelerating and companies adapting to social distancing, what's the role of the physical office in recruiting, retaining, and engaging the best talent? Many of us have one huge ask – FLEXIBILITY – in moving forward through this new decade and beyond.

We are seeing new settings involving hoteling and hot desking for companies looking to reduce their physical footprint – in other words, slashing costs by renting smaller buildings.

Hoteling

Hoteling involves employees pre-booking access to a workspace, much like at an actual hotel. Even in a room full of empty desks and unoccupied workstations, a person must reserve access to their spot, whether that be a dedicated quiet space or a conference room for collaboration. It may be a person, or it could be self-directed software. What matters is that the process is the same for everyone and there's a standardized record of the desk assignment.

Hot desking

On the other hand, hot desking is more freewheeling. A hot desk is also based on an unassigned desk concept, but the execution

is first-come, first-served. If any employee sees an open space, she or he is welcome to claim it and get to work – no reservation required. Also, in shared spaces, expect more touchless fixtures, such as door sensors, automatic sinks and soap dispensers and voice-activated elevator banks.

Now I just saw a few of you cringe, right?

The thought of not having a permanent office space to settle into as a home base is unsettling for many who see a correlation between stability and productivity. You can be reassured that many of us will still have that organized office to call our own. However, others are reading this who truly want the flexibility to decide where they can be most productive, including working from home on a full-time or flexible schedule. And the companies that provide flexibility as a "recruitment perk" will attract the best talent.

We are mothers, we are fathers, we are grandparents, we are pet parents, and we want to have a work-life balance. Not only is achieving a healthy work-life balance an attainable goal, but Assistants and our businesses alike see the rewards. When we are balanced and happy, we are more productive, take fewer sick days, and are more apt to remain in our jobs. And consider this – do not apply for jobs only within your "neck of the woods." Because you can now work from anywhere, view the entire world as your path to opportunity and employability. Be the chooser; do not wait to be chosen. Choose companies that honor their workforce. Google this: Glassdoor best places to work in your country.

With many workplaces now being forced to operate remotely, long-term flexibility could be here to stay, allowing more women to remain in the workforce while balancing home and work life, says Elise Gould, senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute. This change in workplace structure could have a huge impact on women, as they are more likely than men to adjust their careers

for family. In fact, roughly 31% of women who took a career break after having kids said they didn't want to, but had to because of a lack of employer flexibility, according to a FlexJobs survey.

Our collective shifting role

Many traditional organizations that once kept digital transformation at arm's length have now embraced it. Well, they had to move forward or be forgotten! Soon, even more advanced hardware and software that revolutionizes work-from-home experiences and team collaboration will become more commonplace. Companies that invest in them earlier will gain a competitive edge. But in our roles, we must also rise to the occasion, seeking new technical training opportunities at every turn. We cannot wait to be asked to get upskilling; instead, we need to forge forward ourselves, always learning and sharing new digital and productivity tools. Don't wait for the IT mandates, but rather, be ahead of the curve.

The fourth industrial revolution

We're currently in the midst of what is called the fourth industrial revolution. Developments in fields like artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and other technologies are happening faster and faster, hence changing the nature of the jobs that need to be done – and, by extension, the skills needed to do those jobs. We must harness AI in our own roles. For example, check out the new Ideas button in Excel – simply click a cell in a data range, and then click the Ideas button on the Home tab. Ideas in Excel will analyze your data and return interesting visuals about it in a task pane. Try something new every day. Watch a YouTube tech video! Read every article in this magazine every

month! Work together with your teams to expand, refine, and build new skills, teach one another, and solve problems in the workplace. We must be RELEVANT!

We are seeing that being MOS, PACE, CAP, and TEAMS certified is bringing more advancement in our positions. Go that extra mile every day and highlight and credential your achievements. Get business cards with these certifications printed on them and add your credentials to your closing signature. Remember, administrative leaders bring solutions to the table; everyone else brings problems hoping a leader will develop a solution. Your enthusiasm can be contagious, and your knowledge becomes a company asset.

In conclusion

Our roles are changing quickly – is your primary role booking travel? Customer-facing welcome agent? Conference planner? Changing consumer patterns of coming to an office and business preferences with greater interest in social distancing will limit large group events such as conferences and face-to-face meeting travel for the foreseeable future, and inevitably depress the volume of business travel. Time to reinvent your role! With new office footprint reduction, could a large space become a new place for in-house training and small conferences? Think out of the box; learn a new skill.

Time to ask these questions – What's the "big idea" that could shape your industry and your role for the next decade? What multiyear trends have been irrevocably pulled forward? What are the new trends we need to confront? Time to retool, reskill, and reinvent ourselves! Believe in yourself and everyone will follow.

Corinne Hoisington is a full-time professor of Administrative System Technology at Central Virginia Community College in Lynchburg, Virginia with more than 25 years of teaching experience. Corinne travels over 200,000 miles a year (well, until 2020) delivering keynote addresses in over 70 cities worldwide. Professor Hoisington is the recipient of the Microsoft Most Valuable Professional award in Technology. Corinne has authored over 30 textbooks with Cengage Learning on topics such as Outlook 2016, Office 2016, Microsoft Windows, Technology Now, and coding books. She would love to speak in your neck of the woods. Let her help you shape your future.

Corinne is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Corinne training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau

Ideation and Iteration

Ebony Belhumeur discusses ideation, iteration and the art of strategic problem solving

WRITER
EBONY BELHUMEUR

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution marches on, the disruption to jobs and skills is coupled with rapid innovation and improved productivity. Our work now centers on knowledge and our ability to strategically apply that knowledge across broad areas in order to make a real impact.

Band-Aid Thinking

While problem solving has long been a skill requirement for Assistants, the technical components for how to strategically problem solve aren't yet well articulated in our field. For many of us, problem solving is the goal unto itself: How do I get as many problems "fixed" as possible? To achieve high fix-it rates, many Assistants engage in what I refer to as "Band-Aid Thinking". This is the short-sighted, hasty problem solving that often produces the immediate hit of dopamine we get as a sign that something needs our attention.

Strategic Problem Solving

Strategic problem solving is concerned not just with fixing problems, but with ensuring that we are focused on solving the right problems. Its aim is to institute long term solutions rather than provide short term relief. Taken a step further, strategic problem solving helps us to circumvent future problems by identifying underlying structural issues and continuously iterating on solutions.

Observe and Understand

Solving problems is at the heart of what we do as Assistants, and it comprises a good portion of our day. All around us, we observe a whole host of unique problems, each requiring a unique solution. The harder ones always seem easier to ignore, to put off into some distant future when we have the time to tackle them. The issue with this endless cycle of procrastination is two-fold. First, we'll likely never have the time

because organizations are dynamic living things, ever in a state of flux. New problems always accompany this kind of perpetual change. Second, it's very likely the bigger problems we're avoiding are fueling the smaller everyday time-sucks we must endlessly tend.

Finding our way back to productivity is a journey that begins with strategic problem solving. Doing so effectively means learning how to observe and understand problems. The goal here is to uncover the internal thinking in the organization that might be contributing to problems, or even preventing them from being solved.

Do Nothing Yet

Imagine your executive comes to you complaining about a "brittle culture", one where employees don't feel relaxed and awkward office conversations abound. Your boss is worried because employees keep hearing from other friends about the "great cultures" at other companies. She wants you to "do something about it" – to fix it.

Rather than rushing to action, you should "Do Nothing Yet". This seems counterintuitive, after all we're Assistants, we solve problems, and right away. "Doing nothing" seems to fly in the face of our very purpose.

Patience may not be fashionable in our line of work, but it's one of many important interconnected skills. Strategic coordination requires a good deal of patience. Expert decision-making skills

develop when there is a willingness to listen and learn with patience before jumping to conclusions.

Collect

Although you refrain from making decisions at this point, it's not quite fair to say that you'll be doing nothing. The observe and understand phase of strategic problem solving is about identifying the correct problem and diagnosing structural causes. To do this effectively you'll need to proactively observe cultural exchanges and document findings. As an Assistant people likely already broach this topic with you. It's highly unlikely you haven't seen or heard some rumblings about the problem, so start there.

In addition to internal observation, do some external fact-finding as well. "Culture-visits" are becoming more and more common. Friendly organizations often allow struggling organizations to visit their company during an arranged time period to share best practices and inspire others.

There are also resources on forums and groups on the web where you can pose strategically relevant and specific questions. Some examples:

- What are two things you like most about your company?
- What are two of the main reasons people want to work with your company?
- Can you define what it means to have a robust and healthy company culture?

As you collect these data points from a diverse array of sources, you'll likely notice themes emerge. Company culture isn't just what you say, it's what you do. And while mild grumblings seem to only be creating small problems now, as the war for talent continues it could do real damage to the organization's ability to succeed in the long term. Retaining top talent will be almost impossible as more esteemed companies come calling; luring promising newcomers to start their professional careers with

you will be a significant challenge. Without fresh perspectives and new energy, the problem can only get worse.

Ideation

You'll likely be hearing a lot about ideation over the next decade. It's a concise way of describing the process of identifying not just good ideas, but great ones, through sessions such as sketching, brainwriting, worst possible ideas, and brainstorming (amongst others).

This is the time to collaborate and embrace your inner inventor to find creative ways to disrupt current ways of thinking about your organization's culture (and this can apply to any way of thinking).

Small Working Groups

Form a small working group to collaborate on ideas. Small teams are a powerful tool that even large, global organizations are learning to leverage more (the Future of Work). Learning how to work on them effectively is a crucial skill for being able to distinguish yourself in the talent pool over the next decade. Developing your leadership skills in this kind of format is ideal for novice and intermediate leaders.

Whether you have the resources to leverage a small group or you go it alone, the ideation process will still look similar. The goal is to get ideas out in the open, all kinds of ideas. Ideation specifically encourages the use of weird, wild, and wacky ideas. In fact, the Worst Possible Ideas technique is all about inverting the search process by describing the properties of truly awful solutions and then searching for their opposite. For example:

- No vacation days
- Making everyone curtsey to their superiors
- Forcing everyone to join the 5AM Club

We can all agree these ideas are truly awful, and we might get a little chuckle at the thought. But this exercise reveals a lot about the things we do value, as much as the things we don't. People want balance in their professional lives and that often comes in the form of vacation days and reasonable or flexible working hours. As adults, we want to feel respected as peers rather than serfs under a tyrannical gaze.

Getting to these ideas can be energizing and the process itself is informative. Practicing this kind of unique perspective thinking will help turn you into the kind of problem-solving maverick that the new decade is calling for.

Take a Point of View

After generating some preposterous and awesome ideas, it's time to nail down what works. You're likely to have several good ideas, and it's critical that you narrow down the most valuable ones. Generating a set of criteria that will establish the framework for how you evaluate the worth of an idea is the first step in this process.

Criteria can vary, but the general principle is that valuable ideas will be viable, scalable and desirable. In the case of transforming culture, you might consider things like stickiness: is this idea likely to become a habit? Does it have emotional appeal? Integration will also be an important factor. How well does this idea integrate with our organization's overall strategy and/or company goals?

Working in this way will ensure you develop a well-articulated strategy for implementation which will, in turn, increase the likelihood of success over the long term.

Iteration

Once ideas have launched, it's important to remain open to change. Iteration is the active process of learning and adjusting and it's a valuable skill to have in the era where knowledge work reigns supreme. Doing this effectively requires us to be open to constructive feedback, willing to strategically experiment, and adaptive to changes in our environment. All ideas that survive over the long term do so because they're iterative.

We've watched companies engage in this process for years. They're constantly working to reinvent themselves or a core product. Microsoft and Intel come to mind, and so do Balmain and Chanel. Stagnant things don't last very long in the information age and the expiration window on ideas continues to narrow. To stay fresh, open a feedback loop and encourage people to provide regular input on how a given idea might be improved. When a new approach comes in, try a micro-experiment to evaluate its effectiveness.

Ultimately, the goal here is to make the process of learning and growing ongoing; to lean in to long-term strategic thinking by using tools already at your disposal.

When we reflect on successful days, it shouldn't be counting how many band-aids we put on. More than almost anyone else in our organization we have the potential to influence change and make an impact. To do so, we must develop our strategic problem-solving capabilities, so we're prepared for future challenges.

Ebony Belhumeur is a millennial mom, Silicon Valley-based Executive Assistant and Curator at TheAssistant'sList.com blog – A Guide for Assistants in the New Era. Her previous roles include supporting the President and CEO of Sephora, an LVMH Company, as well as the Founder and CEO of Twitch post-1B acquisition by Amazon. Currently, Ebony partners with the Founder and CEO of a global Fintech company based in Palo Alto working at the cutting edge of blockchain technology. In college, she studied Philosophy & Communications and was the recipient of the prestigious Bovero-Tabor Award for excellence in public speaking and debate.

Cracking the Code of Working Autonomously

Working autonomously will always be associated with a high level of competence, explains Julia Schmidt

Autonomy must be developed, embraced, nurtured, and assessed. Autonomous working consists of a set of skills and attitudes, which must always be kept up to date.

In this article, I will provide some hints and tips on how to improve your ability to work autonomously, and how to assess your performance as an autonomous worker.

What is autonomy?

Henri Boudreault, Ph.D., Professor at the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM), defines autonomy in a way that encourages us to think about working autonomously in a broader perspective, as something more than merely working independently. He defines autonomy as "life skills that show themselves through the ability to assume control of oneself, according to one's responsibilities, so as to take action at the right moment in a given context."

Autonomy here is associated with an idea of competence, being capable of having freedom and applying it to a specific context.

It means that being autonomous is related to acting within a given environment to accomplish desired results.

Our behavior demonstrates our autonomy

When we seek to develop and improve our autonomy, it is because we want to keep growing professionally and pushing our boundaries. Autonomy is also a requirement of our job as Executive Assistants – being able to act according to job requirements (speed, procedure, choice of methods, access to resources and tools). We must combine these in a way that suits the situation and helps us achieve a sense of control.

Autonomy is broader than independence, since it includes our relationships with other people – stakeholders, managers, team members and peers. It is practiced within a given framework that comprises the organization, an understanding of the rules of the game and shared standards, where each player must take account of and understand others' actions.

Technology has allowed us to use different collaborative platforms within the work context. These tools have encouraged remote working, have changed working conditions and methods of information sharing. In 2020 we saw the fast implementation of remote working around the world. Managers must guide their teams 100% remotely, so individual autonomy becomes a necessary condition of working, and teams develop participatory collaboration skills.

Job advertisements list autonomy as an important required skill, and it is without doubt a must-have skill for an administrative professional who wants to succeed in the workplace. Also, many Assistants are working virtually and therefore working outside the company premises, performing their work in a completely independent way.

Here are three ways of improving your ability to work autonomously

1. Keep strengthening the pillars of autonomy

According to Boudreault, developing autonomy requires four types of dynamics to enable the "pillars of autonomy" to be strengthened. These are the dynamic of experience, the dynamic of training and developing new skills, the dynamic of managing and optimizing resources, and the dynamic of attachment, which concerns effects and values.

Make time to improve autonomy

The more we master our profession and the work processes required to enable us to take risks, solve complex problems, take the initiative and apply our creativity skills to become innovative Assistants, the more we will be able to improve our autonomy.
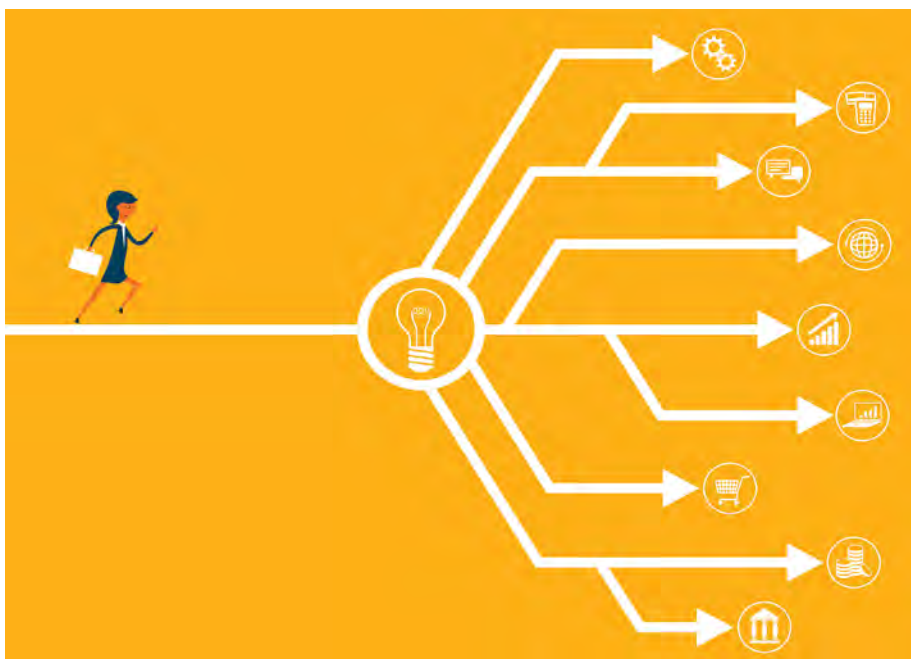
During our professional journey, we can experience different levels of autonomy at work. A new role can set us some steps back in our autonomy level, test our abilities, and expose us to new challenges and work we have never done before. Therefore, autonomy must be nurtured.

Create and seize all opportunities for training that will allow you to develop new skills

To acquire the necessary knowledge along our professional career path, we need to embrace life-long learning. Training opportunities such as completing courses, attending seminars, and reading books and professional magazines are ways for us to upskill and increase our skillset. The pandemic and the new ways of working that we are embracing now show us that there are many things we still do not know. We also see that many skills must be upgraded to allow us to keep performing at a higher level. For many of us, working from home requires skills that we may not yet have mastered.

In the article "How COVID-19 is defining the next-normal operating model," the McKinsey authors state that "the success, and in some cases the survival, of many companies during the pandemic has depended on the willingness and ability of leaders to quickly shift to and adopt behaviors and practices that best suit the new reality." People have been reallocated, reskilled, and reenergized because of the pandemic and how it has affected our workplaces.

To become more autonomous, you can:

- Sign up for training related to self-motivation, resilience, and stress management.
- Undertake a skills assessment, to understand what skills you might need to work on autonomously.
- Develop your understanding of technology and how you can apply it to improve autonomy. Technology is much more than tools and software; it is a key element in ensuring a company's success in these new times.
- Discuss your training needs with your manager, define what you need and design your development plan.

Improve your ability to manage and optimize the resources you have

Having access to the resources we need to perform our work tasks is indispensable. It allows us to have at our disposal data

and knowledgeable people – a network of colleagues and peers – that can be utilized when we need information and know-how. The new ways of working are forcing us to expand these resources to areas outside our organization, industry, profession, and network groups. The possibility we have now of participating in more online training sessions, as they become more diverse, affordable, and are based on helping people solve current issues, opens doors to knowledge that we previously could not easily access.

So, you can:

- Build professional networks to increase knowledge sharing.
- Be curious about the tools your organization puts at your disposal.
- Be ready to embrace different ways of working.
- Get to know the skillsets of your teammates to understand how you can help each other.

Enhance collaborative environments and shared values

Our autonomy at work is dependent upon the work of others. Therefore, we cannot underestimate the importance of clearly stating our work expectations to our teams, sharing goals and values, and improving collaborative and flexible work environments. These are the foundations from which employees can experience the feeling of a well-performed job and the appreciation of the work they do. Working remotely requires consistent communication between teams and managers. New communication skills

are necessary. To be present in a virtual world, we need to "reach out and touch" – metaphorically speaking.

Some ways of achieving this:

- Let people know that you are available to listen.
- Familiarize yourself with the latest communication platforms for messaging, meetings, events, teamwork, brainstorming, and learning activities.
- Connect with colleagues via text, email, and video: "reach out and touch."
- Look for new ways to share your personal story, goals, ideas, doubts, and failures.
- Strengthen your ability to see your level of expertise and to position yourself clearly within a team.

2. Boost your self-confidence

Self-confidence is your driving force, the lever that can help you surpass yourself and develop autonomy. Without self-confidence, some work tasks, such as organizing a virtual event with a new tool, coordinating crisis management meetings, negotiating a rate, or setting up an annual corporate business calendar, can become energy-consuming trials.

Your ability to confront situations and resolve problems is crucial in helping you feel sure of yourself. Knowing your own capabilities, talents, and acquired skills is fundamental in building the self-confidence you need to work autonomously. Self-confidence improves the quality of your decision-making, increases your capacity to work with others and learn from them,

and encourages those around you to have confidence in you.

By improving your self-confidence skills, you will be willing to take more risks, dare to do new things, and encourage others to do the same. Working from home and feeling isolated from an office environment where colleagues surround us and where we are more exposed to positive feedback, face-to-face interactions, and collaborative spirit can negatively impact our self-confidence. We tend to think that we are the only people experiencing this disruption in our ability to work autonomously. Remember, autonomy must be nurtured.

To boost your self-confidence, you must:

- Value yourself
- Be proud of your abilities
- Put your mistakes into perspective
- Treat yourself with kindness and compassion
- Know you can learn new things
- Celebrate your victories
- Challenge your tendency to make assumptions about yourself, people, and situations

3. Strengthen your ability to assess your autonomy

Self-assessment is key to improvement and learning. Successfully working means deciding for yourself how to organize your work and time, mastering the ability to influence management strategy and development, and showing competence in performing a job, including the freedom to act within a given situation. We experience different work scenarios throughout life that can affect our level of working autonomously.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What is impeding me from working autonomously now?
- What don't I know yet?

- What do I know?
- How much do I still need to learn?
- Am I applying my skills at work?

Assess your autonomy

Imagine you are an Executive Assistant working for a software company. You have been promoted to a new position, to remotely assist a director and his team living in another country. You have an idea of what the company requires of you, and you feel motivated to make your mark.

After four weeks, you realize that this new way of working – interacting only virtually with your director and having to collaborate with a management team that you are not meeting face-to-face – has negatively affected your level of autonomy. You assess yourself and conclude that you have mastered most of the necessary skills to do your work, you know how to find information and who to turn to, and you are autonomous in performing some tasks. You are quite conscious of the progress you are making, and that motivates you. You know what you know and are aware that you still have a way to go to achieve the same level of autonomy that you had in your previous role. Although there are some new things to learn in a new position with new peers, meaning it takes more time to carry out your role, you do know what is expected of you and have resources available to you.

So, how would you identify your level of autonomy? It partly depends on your level of competence. By assessing your level of competence, you will be able to conclude from it the actions you need to take to make improvements.

Level 1: I don't know that I know

You start an activity in your career without knowing what you are getting into.

Level 2: I know that I don't know

You are aware of everything you need to learn to acquire a new competence. It can be a new project or new role (as in the scenario described above) where you will meet new teammates, be part of a new environment, and perform tasks that are new for you.

Level 3: I know what I know

At this level you have started to take action to learn and develop the skills you need. You know you need to invest time in the learning process to become as fast and competent as seasoned Executive Assistants.

Level 4: I don't know what I know

Your efforts and your investment have brought you to the required level of competence (or an even higher one). Your automatic reactions are in place, and you do your work without thinking about it. You can call yourself a Senior Executive Assistant and feel proud of being an autonomous professional.

In conclusion

Autonomy is not a state; it is a process that is challenged by each new work situation. In a world of changes and disruptions, new ideas become the foundation of new ways of doing business. New ways of working impact our ways of working autonomously as Assistants, and we are constantly being pushed towards new challenges. Working autonomously will always be associated with a high level of competence, enabling us to apply it in our work environment.

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Learn to Work Autonomously by Open Classrooms

Julia Schmidt is an award-winning Executive Assistant with over 20 years of experience working in different industries. She is known for being a passionate advocate for people development and for helping others succeed and embrace their leadership skills. Julia is an active networker and mentor and a proud graduate of the University of Norway with a Master's degree in Portuguese Language and Literature and has also studied Business Administration. Follow Julia on LinkedIn. Julia is the author of *The Executive Secretary Guide to Building a Successful Career Strategy*, available now on Amazon.

Julia is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Julia training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit
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Tapping into the Power of Influence

Call upon your persuasive powers to get the job done says Heather Wright

WRITER
HEATHER WRIGHT

As an Assistant, it may sometimes feel either uncomfortable or even impossible to influence others in the workplace, but it's not necessarily the case. We can call upon our persuasive powers in order for others to listen and take note.

A helpful CLUE

I like to use the acronym 'C.L.U.E.' which is a powerful way of remembering the elements that contribute to unlocking the power of influence:

C = Connect

So often in communication we are focused firmly on our message, but less so on the perspective of the listener. In order to resonate you have to find common ground and understand where others are coming from. Creating a connection enables us to empathise with someone else's situation and their view of life.

L = Listen

Quiet listening is an underrated skill. We often think that those who talk the most have the greatest potential to influence, but is that really true? When we genuinely tune into others we start to appreciate what is important to them.

Listening requires your ego to dissolve into the background, so it's not something that comes naturally to all people (particularly extroverts)! However, it is extremely valuable as it gives us information that can inform how to relate to that person.

U = Understand

Understanding happens in unison with listening and allows us to hear beyond the words and explore the intention behind them. The challenge comes when we let our opinions about them stand in the way of what is being said. It requires us to transcend this surface-level judgement and explore more deeply what is important to that person.

Most conversations have three components; facts, feelings and identity. Often someone will relay something that happened (the factual element) and they will weave in a translation of how it made them feel, so facts are then blurred by emotional interpretation. A critical component within the narrative is the emphasis on identity, which links the event and its interpretation to their sense of self.

E = Empower

Consideration of how you position what you're going to say is key. This is informed by what you know about the person, having listened and understood where they are coming from. The focus now is on making what you say relevant. It's also helpful to remember that people like to hear solutions not problems, particularly in the workplace, so you'll have more impact if you frame what you say in a way that removes, rather than adds to, pressure.

When you understand how a person perceives themselves, you can speak in a way that makes sense to them and shows your alignment with their thinking, which creates an affinity and relevance.

Honest reflection

I once read a book when I was about 16 which has always stayed with me. The author challenged the reader to consider three questions before speaking: Is what you are about to say truthful, is it kind and is it helpful?

When we get really honest with ourselves we recognise that we don't always meet these three requirements, but when we do we are far more likely to communicate meaningfully, to resonate with others and to be someone whose opinion other people will consistently value.

Heather Wright is an award-winning global speaker, trainer and writer whose wisdom is imbued with a natural humour that creates an instant connection with audiences. Heather trains organisations in effective communication, influencing skills, leadership, resilience and how to run effective meetings online. With a no-nonsense approach, a wealth of experience and a healthy dose of wit, Heather has the capacity to ignite transformational change with her high energy, compelling insights and magnetic personality.

Heather is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Heather training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit
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The Problem Solving Assistant

Use the IDEAL problem solving model to ensure you are solving the right problem, says Lindsay Taylor

At times, being an Assistant can be extremely challenging. If you're the 'go to' person when things go wrong then you can feel under immense pressure to deliver and "save the day".

So how do you go about keeping your cool and doing exactly that? How do you work your magic when your executive says "Don't come to me with problems, come to me with solutions"?

Here's how: You need to combine both logical and lateral (or creative) thinking and ensure your underlying mindset is one of constant learning. You need to ensure you're working on the right problem to start with and as an IDEAL you need to follow a "step by step" process.

The Problem with Problem Solving

Ironically there's an age-old problem with problem solving. And it's this - sometimes you may not be working on the right problem to start with. Very often we will work on finding a solution (and sometimes a "quick fix") to a problem without identifying the root cause – in essence we haven't identified the real problem. We are working on solving the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause of the problem.

Let me give you an example. One of my fondest memories of "work experience" during my secretarial training days was helping at a family legal firm based in a quaint listed building in the historic St Giles neighbourhood of Oxford. I remember vividly witnessing one of the Partner's assistants placing a bucket under the leaking roof on the stairwell as a solution to a leaky-roof problem. A quick fix. But the real problem was the roof needed a complete overhaul as the building's listed status threw up challenges in infrastructure. Every time it rained and the bucket made an appearance the root cause of the problem got more serious as water seeped into the rafters....

The IDEAL Problem Solving Process

One of the easiest, and most memorable processes to follow is this - the IDEAL model. Ironically (again) I had some problem finding the originator of this model so my apologies to him/her/them for not citing and attributing this fantastic strategy!

This model will keep you on track to ensure your problem solving is robust and effective – and that you don't miss any of the crucial stages of the process.

I = Identify the problem

Pay heed to "the problem with problem solving" so you ensure you are working on the cause of the problem, not the symptom(s). It is good practice to seek out problems to solve so you are truly embracing continuous improvement.

D = Describe the potential solutions and strategies

Use logical and lateral (creative) thinking.

E = Evaluate your identified strategies and solutions

What are the likely outcomes when applying these strategies? Imagine you have applied those strategies – which one(s) are the best in this situation? Think about the pros and cons of your identified strategies.

A = Act on your selected strategy or strategies

L = Look back and evaluate

Logical Problem Solving

Logical problem solving, as its name implies, follows a logical sequence – you clearly move from one related thought to another and base your analysis on factual data and information. Find out:

- What is fact here?
- What do I already know?
- How and where can I find out the data and information I need?
- Who would be able to help me?

Lateral (or Creative) Problem Solving

Lateral thinking is attributed to Dr Edward De Bono. It involves thinking "outside the box". Recently I saw a quote that extended this to "thinking as if there is no box" which amused me. Using imagination and considering problems from different perspectives will ensure you step away from the factual, logical mode of thinking.

Here are some examples of creative exercises that increase your lateral problem-solving capabilities:

Random ideation

Open a book or magazine, close your eyes and pinpoint a word. How does this word relate to your problem?

Comparative Sensory overload

Pick an object and consider how it looks, feels and sounds. How does this object compare to your problem?

"A problem shared is a problem halved" (or at least quartered in this case....)

Sit in a circle with at least 3 others. Each person writes their problem on a piece of paper and gives it to the person on their right to add a solution to. Carry on passing the problem sheets around until yours is returned containing different solutions.

Step into my shoes

Imagine being someone else. What would they be thinking about this problem?

Try thinking like:
- Ghandi
- Your mother/father
- Your son/daughter
- Your younger self
- A customer
- A colleague
- A team member
- The President/Leader of your country
- Someone you don't particularly get on with......

Create a Mind map

Mind Maps are a creative graphic technique. They originated in the 1960s by Tony Buzan. According to www.tonybuzan.com the following are the steps to making a Mind Map – give it a go and have a look at the visual on their website.

1. Start in the centre of a blank page turned sideways. Why? Because starting in the centre gives your brain freedom to spread out in all directions and to express itself more freely and naturally.
2. Use an image or picture for your central idea. Why? Because an image is worth a thousand words and helps you use your Imagination. A central image is more interesting, keeps you focussed, helps you concentrate, and gives your brain more of a buzz!
3. Use colour throughout. Why? Because colours are as exciting to your brain as are images. Colour adds extra vibrancy and life to your mind map, adds tremendous energy to your creative thinking, and is fun!
4. Connect your main branches to the central image and connect your second- and third-level branches to the first and second levels, etc. Why? Because your Brain works by association. It likes to link two (or three, or four) things together. If you connect the branches, you will understand and remember a lot more easily.
5. Make your branches curved rather than straight-lined. Why? Because having nothing but straight lines is boring to your brain.
6. Use one key word per line. Why? Because single key words give your mind map more power and flexibility.
7. Use images throughout. Why? Because each image, like the central image, is also worth a thousand words. So, if you have only 10 images in your mind map, it's already the equal of 10,000 words of notes!"

Reverse brainstorming

According to www.mindtools.com this is an effective method which combines brainstorming techniques and reverse psychology. It is a step by step process defined by Mindtools as follows:

- Clearly identify the problem or challenge, and write it down.
- Reverse the problem or challenge by asking, "How could I possibly cause the problem?" or "How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?"
- Brainstorm the reverse problem to generate reverse solution ideas. Allow the brainstorm ideas to flow freely. Do not reject anything at this stage.
- Once you have brainstormed all the ideas to solve the reverse problem, now reverse these into solution ideas for the original problem or challenge.
- Evaluate these solution ideas. Can you see a potential solution? Can you see attributes of a potential solution?"

Check out Edward De Bono's 6 thinking hats!

Something to be learned from every situation

In my book "A-Z Pearls of Wisdom for Executive PAs" I share with you my belief that hindsight is a wonderful thing. We can learn from every and any situation as long as we take the time to consider and unlock our learning. By asking specific questions based on our experience, we can identify developmental feedback and useful advice that can be beneficially applied in the future. In essence, we are completing our IDEAL strategy by "looking back and evaluating".

We can ask:

- How can I use my experience of this situation to help me/my team/my organisation in the future?
- What do I know now that I didn't know before?
- When faced with a similar situation again,
- What will I do differently?
- What will I do more of?
- What will I do less of?
- What will I stop doing?
- What will I start doing?
- What will I continue doing?

Combine your logical and lateral (creative) thinking with a mindset of continuous improvement to ensure you are the IDEAL problem solving aficionado. No problem!

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Lindsay Taylor is Director of Your Excellency Limited. A former EA herself, she appreciates the challenges and diversities of the role. Lindsay is a preferred training provider with The Institute of Administrative Management (IAM), one of the oldest UK professional bodies for business and administrative managers, and a member of the Association for Coaching®. Lindsay is the multi award-winning author of *A-Z Pearls of Wisdom for Executive PAs* and holds a monthly podcast, EA/PA Chataway with Lindsay. Your Excellency's portfolio of learning opportunities includes accredited, professional qualifications and the industry-first Mini MBA for Senior and Executive Assistants.

Lindsay is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Lindsay training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau.

Emotional Intelligence: Learning to Prune and Refresh Your Professional Life

Let go of the old to make way for the new explains Sarah Richson

WRITER
SARAH RICHSON

The Executive Assistant plays one of the most critical roles in an organization. Often this includes accumulation and storage of contact databases, lists, and general information on the company or about their executive. This also means that their ability to discard unnecessary items becomes a great asset. However, have you ever felt laden down but cannot find a good reason to discard things?

Sometimes people go through life carrying baggage from the past without realizing that they cannot move at speed if they are heavy laden. As a mentor, whenever my mentees want to begin 'a new chapter' in their lives I advise them to first prune any wastage, barriers or irrelevant weight in order to make space for the new things or 'extras' in life.

Imagine you have been dreaming of getting yourself a new wardrobe. You wake up one day to find that you have won the lottery and can afford the new clothes, so you go into a spending spree buying a truck full of new items. However, upon reaching home you realize there is nowhere to put the new items because the old ones are still fully stuffed in your wardrobe! What will you have to do in order to give the new items a home? Of course you will have to create space or probably buy new storage.

You have to create space for many reasons but the main reasons would be:

- To ensure the new clothes do not suddenly smell like old clothes

- To ensure you have somewhere to keep your new items.

- To avoid clutter and a stuffed wardrobe where it is difficult to find your precious new items when needed.

So what do we mean by the act of pruning? According to vintagetreecare. com, "there are many reasons why pruning a tree is important. Pruning a tree can influence in what way the tree grows. With proper pruning, a tree can be made to grow into a certain configuration of limbs and branches that is more ideal for the structural integrity of the tree. Maintaining the tree's structure helps to mitigate the risk of broken limbs and falling branches. A properly pruned tree will not have compromising branch structures and improper weight distribution that could lead to disaster later on in the tree's life. Structural pruning can also greatly improve the general look of the tree. If aesthetics are important to you, proper pruning can make a tree grow in the desired fashion".

This approach also rings true in the professional life of an Assistant. But what kind of 'life items' should we prune? I have found that most people derive value in pruning the following things in their lives.

Prune your network

As the saying goes "your network is your net worth". However, as Marshall Goldsmith's best-selling book entitled 'What got you here won't get you there' states, we must realign our network for the future. Go through all the groups you belong to on Whatsapp, Facebook, LinkedIn etcetera and ask yourself if they are still relevant or whether you need to align yourself with other types of groups. Periodically check your phone contact list - you might find that several numbers are outdated! Observe your email inbox for a week and determine what is useful and what

is not. This also extends to the registrations you might still be paying for that have ceased to be of value in your life or your executive's life. Finally, check your regular invitations to networking events. Ask yourself whether your time could be better spent attending other forums that add value to your future aspirations or net worth. Remember that your personal brand is associated with that of your executive, hence your network is an extension of how you position yourself and your executive.

Prune your regular activities

Sometimes certain activities stop adding value to you as you step up into new chapters. Any Assistant on the road to personal and professional development will have to choose wisely when they decide to study higher education while working; time becomes limited and it is important to use this valuable resource diligently. For example, I decided to spend more time on health-enhancing activities in 2016, which meant I had to prune my life of all the stressful activities that affected my health and emotional balance negatively. For me it was the endless breakfast meetings that added little value and late evening events that took time away from my family. Saying "yes" to everyone was my default and that led me to many regular unnecessary activities. I began redefining how I spent my time and now enjoy a healthier more productive lifestyle by simply pruning a few activities in my life!

Prune your language

Some people do not realize how much language, choice of words and communication prowess can lift or limit a successful transition into a new chapter. I like sharing a story of how a professor

at university told our business class to go and learn 100 'high-level' words. At first I did not know what he meant and why this was so important. However, change begins with raising awareness. Whilst watching the news channel that evening I was intrigued by a highly-respected business leader who sounded so eloquent and smart. I realized that he was using some of the 100 'high-level' words on the list I had been given!

Once I became aware that these high-level words can position someone for a greater future I immediately set about finding these words and pruning my language to suit what my future needed. I committed to learning one word a day, and within 100 days I had learnt 100 new words. Using at least 20% of these words regularly made me sound more sophisticated and in tune with my future as a consultant. It is equally important to shed inappropriate language or habits on text or social media that position you in the past, and which barricade your wonderful future. Watch out and restrict people who post inappropriately on your social networks or reach out to them in real life to caution them about it.

It is important to ensure that the timing is right for any pruning otherwise it will not be a pleasant experience. You need to find a good balance even as you begin to prune; do not cut your tree too deep and hurt it. Explain yourself to others who love and care about you; unpack for them the reasons why the process is important in your life right now. Understand your WHY (What… Hurts… You), because this understanding that will sustain you through the ups and downs of the process. Take small steps and feel the benefit.

Happy pruning!

Sarah Richson (MBA, MCIPD, AOEC, MIHRM) is an expert in growth strategy, international business and human capital strategies with deep experience of talent architecture and management within the African terrain. Sarah has held highly complex roles with a global scope of leadership overseeing 20+ geographies across UK, USA, Asia and Africa. She demonstrates deep passion and expertise in fast-growth companies, successfully transforming unstructured environments into organised high-performing space through policy and governance. Sarah's expertise is multi-dimensional and includes years as a leadership development professional, culture specialist and HR consultant working on both European and local African assignments.

Sarah is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Sarah training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau.

WRITER
JOAN BURGE

Resilience: A Must-Have Skill

Joan Burge looks at what it means to be a resilient Assistant

Why you should care

Administrative professionals of all walks of life, levels of experience and titles need this valuable asset every day – the ability to be resilient. While this may sound simple and you feel you have done a good job of being resilient, it actually is quite complex. And the higher up the career ladder you go, the deeper levels of resiliency are needed because the game gets tougher for the executives you support.

If you can develop being resilient you will be able to:

- Bounce back faster after a setback
- Take daily workplace changes in your stride
- Use resources effectively especially when faced with a problem
- Move in tandem with your executive
- Learn the lessons you need to learn
- Exhibit nimbleness as you adapt to change
- Generate innovative solutions to problems
- Find ways to effectively share your ideas with others

What does resilience mean?

The word resilience or resiliency has many meanings and applications. Here are a few from *www.PsychologyFoundation.org.*

- When we fail, we have the strength to learn the lessons we need to learn, and we can move on to bigger and better things.
- Having a good attitude about growth following failure.
- To bounce back from adversity, disappointment, failure and learn from them.
- To operate on all cylinders (as much as possible, not just in a crisis.)
- Willingness and ability to change.

I'd like you to stop for a few moments and think about your typical work day. Now think about a typical week. Probably your "typical" day or week is filled with change – change of priorities; change of schedules; changing of goals and objectives; changing meetings and travel plans. Being resilient is more than just making necessary changes – it's harnessing the power of change.

Why do people resist change?

Speaking on change is one of my most requested topics. I love to talk about change, even though I have been dealt many changes I have not liked. In my presentation, I talk about the kinds of changes, sizes of change, why people resist change, and provide more than 10 tips for thriving on change. For the purposes of this article, I want to share some information that relates to change and being resilient.

Did you ever think about why you resist change – or maybe you just resist certain changes? If you are going to be more resilient in the workplace, you need to do a deep dive and figure out why you are more resistant to certain changes than others so you can work on developing that particular area.

Some people are just not "change skilled"

In general, people who have experienced much change growing up adapt more easily to change as adults. Coping with change is a skill you can develop, just as you learn other skills.

Loss of control

When going through a change that was created by outside forces, you may feel a loss of control which hinders your ability to adapt or accept the change.

Dislike for unforeseeable events

Some people don't like surprises! They don't like dealing with events or situations that aren't mapped out, predictable or included in their plan.

Three related aspects of change

Three things affect our reaction to change: our fears, our comfort zones and our belief system. When you are going through a change determine which of these aspects is affecting your ability to make a change or accept a change. Sometimes it will be all three. Once you determine what aspect or aspects are hindering your ability to be resilient or move forward, you can work on a plan for success.

1 Fear

The Unknown

Where am I going?

- What will the outcome be?
- I won't know anyone.
- Many people fear change because they are not guaranteed an outcome.

Failing

What will I do if I fail?

- My idea may not work, then what?
- Some people consider failure an embarrassment or a bad thing, but if you don't experience the hurt or

disappointment of failure, you don't get to experience the great joy of success! Be willing to fail and new doors will open for you.

Succeeding

What if I am successful?

- I may lose certain friends or co-workers.
- My family may view me differently.
- I may be given more challenges.
- Yes, you can even fear success. When we are successful at something new, sometimes our relationships change.

Losing

What will I lose?

- You may not want to lose what you already have in order to gain something else.
- Can you afford not to lose once in a while? You have to be willing to lose... friendships, situations, ideas, material possessions, in order to win greater friendships, better ideas, and more meaningful possessions.

It is extremely important to recognize your fear and face it. Fear can prevent you from progressing in your career and from growing as an individual. It can become a monster that grows. When dealing with fear, think "what is the worst possible outcome?" Then decide how you will handle that, should it happen. Haven't you ever been afraid to try something but you did it anyway? Afterward, you realized it wasn't as bad as you thought it would be.

2 Comfort zones

We all have comfort zones – certain places, things and people that make us feel safe and warm. Change puts you in situations or mental places that aren't necessarily comfortable. It forces you to stretch. Depending on the type and degree of change, you may feel very uncomfortable

and really stretched! Eventually, that new, uncomfortable place becomes your new comfort zone. As you go through change, if you can tell yourself that you are just stretching, you will be more optimistic about the change.

3 Belief systems

How you cope with change will depend on your belief system. If you believe the change is for the worse, that you won't make it through the change, that nothing good will come of it, then you will be right. But if you look for the opportunity in change, believing you can successfully get through it, you will!

Elements of resiliency

I have been focusing on the topic of resiliency for several months. I was excited and surprised to see all the good information provided on the topic of resiliency. You may want to explore this further yourself.

There are more than 15 elements or skill sets that fall under being resilient and each one is multi-dimensional. Here is a recap from a piece I read by Casey Mulqueen, PhD. explaining the elements of resiliency. As you read this list, evaluate your ability in each one. Where do you need to improve? What are you already good at? Which ones do you need to embrace?

Honing resiliency will also help you in your personal life. In working with thousands of people for over 25 years in my training and consulting business, I have learned that no one is immune to challenges and setbacks.

Element	Description
Personal responsibility	The belief that successes or failures are determined by our own talents and motivations as opposed to external forces.
Realistic optimism	Tendency to see the world in a positive way but remain grounded in reality.
Personal beliefs	The sense that life has deep meaning and purpose.
Self-assurance	Confidence in oneself to successfully perform at work; confidence in ones skills.
Problem solving	The ability to plan and resolve problems.
Courageous communication	The tendency to communicate with others in a candid and courageous way in the face of difficulty.
Social support	The perception that you are part of a supportive social network.
Emotional intelligence	Your ability to identify, assess and control emotions of yourself, of others and of groups.
Agility	Your willingness and ability to change
Resourceful	Ability to act effectively or imaginatively, especially in difficult situations.

Joan Burge is known as the pioneer of the administrative training industry. Joan is an accomplished author, professional speaker, corporate trainer, and coach. After working in the administrative profession for 20 years, Joan founded Office Dynamics International in 1990, inspiring excellence in the administrative profession. Since then, ODI has grown into a global industry leader, offering a broad range of training and coaching solutions for administrative assistants. Joan has been passionate about the administrative profession for 50 years. She eats, breathes, and lives to improve the quality of life and education for assistants at every level worldwide.

The Case for Critical Thinking

Sandy Geroux details her top five tips for critical thinking and effective communication

WRITER
SANDY GEROUX

As a former Systems Analyst/Business Systems Consultant, the ability to think critically was crucial to my success. Not only did it help in allowing the company to design systems that lasted without constant re-design, but it also allowed us to avoid the embarrassment of installing a new system only to subsequently remove it because we'd missed something. (Think of all the software updates that cause unintended consequences on our devices!)

The same applies when suggesting new processes and procedures, training team members or implementing new tasks. And if we want leaders to entertain our ideas and suggestions, applying a few principles of critical thinking and analysis before presenting the business case goes a long way.

Below are 5 tips to help you think critically and communicate effectively:

Think several steps ahead

All of us routinely look at the next step in any process. Many may even look one or two steps further, but that's the extent of it. The problem is that if we don't explore all reasonable possibilities, we could be blind-sided by anticipatable problems.

How to overcome this issue

Proactively think several steps ahead of the first one or two in the process:

1. Think of what the process or experience should look like when correct.
2. Design a process to handle all known actions, as well as unexpected ones.
3. Do a "what if" analysis to outline several options and courses of action for each step.

Case in point

When I was a systems analyst for a women's clothing company, we designed their order entry system for taking customers' phone orders. I was tasked with designing the screens, what would happen if an item was in (or out of) stock. I also had to consider the scenario where part of the order was in stock, but part was backordered, as well as what to display on the screen if an order entry clerk entered something wrong; thus, in my testing I had to intentionally enter wrong information into every field to see how the system would handle keystroke errors. At every step of a "mock" order, I had to play it all the way through, in my mind, to envision what the experience would be for the user and what would happen at each step.

Applying the same principles to any scenario and envisioning all possibilities at every step will help you deliver the experience you wish to create.

2. Don't assume... analyze

Sometimes leaders (and team members) assume they know the cause of a particular challenge, taking action without investigating further, often without asking the players involved.

How to overcome this issue

As one of the involved players, do some critical analysis to outline the following:

1. What was the symptom that brought the issue to light?
2. What was the apparent cause of the symptom?
3. Was that the actual cause?
4. Is there a viable solution – or at least the beginnings of one?

5. What is our next step?

Case in point

I worked with a client whose leaders developed a standard proposal form for field personnel to use. They became frustrated by the fact that no-one used the form, instead using their own jerry-rigged forms, with each branch using a different format. Leadership assumed they just needed to keep "reminding" everyone to use the new form. But this wasn't the case; it was actually a much deeper problem.

Looking at the entire issue in the context of the analysis above:

1. The symptom that brought the issue to light was the submission of proposals on differing forms.
2. The apparent cause of the symptom was that field personnel were not yet used to using the new form and simply needed to be reminded to use it.
3. The actual cause (which leaders learned when they finally asked branch administrators about the problem) was that the new form was too confusing, so field teams devised their own "form."
4. The solution was for someone to inform leadership that the new form needed to be re-designed.
5. By getting field personnel and administrative staff involved, a more effective form was designed and presented to leaders.

3. "Just the facts, Ma'am."

This phrase has been misattributed to Sgt. Joe Friday, a police detective in an old TV show called Dragnet. Nevertheless, information overload is real and too much irrelevant detail muddles the issue and clouds the pertinent facts. In an effort to give as much background and detail as possible, we often offer far too much information that has no bearing on the actual problem or its resolution, making it

difficult for decision-makers to arrive at a workable solution. In addition, it masks which option we believe is best.

How to overcome this issue

Analyze each potential solution for the following factors:

1. What is your recommendation for the best solution to try?
2. What are the potential benefits?
3. Who will benefit?
4. What is the impact of the benefits (cost savings, productivity increases, morale improvement)? If you can't put a hard dollar figure on the benefits, try multiplying the average salary of the team members involved by the number of hours saved by instituting a new process. Make the calculations available for review, IF requested.
5. What are the possible risks?
6. How quickly could the solution be implemented?
7. Who needs to be involved (for authorization, manpower, budgeting)?
8. Are there other options? (Have this information ready, if asked.)

4. Speak up courageously – Part 1

Don't be afraid to offer ideas and suggestions

Another common challenge is the fear of speaking up, even to offer helpful ideas or suggestions. However, my recent discussions with leaders indicate that they want their administrative staff to speak up more often with relevant observations, suggestions and ideas.

How to overcome this issue

Hold discussions with your leader(s) to inquire about how much they would like you to speak up, and to whom. Assure them that you are not trying to "overstep" your position but want to be the most valuable business partner possible, which means having frank conversations about your role and how you and your leader can better support each other.

Some suggestions include:

1. Asking for a meeting with your leader to discuss how you can support them at a higher level. Do not go into the meeting expecting them to come up with suggestions. They will usually say, "Everything's fine. You're doing great. I can't think of anything." You must have suggestions ready to offer, such as, "I noticed that it takes you several hours to do [this task]. Is there something I can do to help make it shorter for you? Or may I take it over and run it by you when finished, to be sure it's as you want it?"

2. Think through possible objections ahead of time, so if one arises, you are prepared for it.

One suggestion to get them to allow you to try taking on something they're accustomed to handling is to ask if you can do it "in tandem" with them.

Case in point

One leader was complaining of the time it took to consolidate several individual weekly reports from his staff into one summary report for his superiors. I asked if his assistant could create the summary for him... to which he instantly replied, "Oh, no! She couldn't do that!"

When pressed, he had no good answer as to why she couldn't do it. So, I asked, "What if you both created the report one week? You could compare the two, coach her if she missed something, then try again the following week, comparing and coaching

again, as needed. When she had it right, she could do it on her own and submit it to you. Would you be open to that?" He agreed he would! He had just never thought of it.

5. Speak up courageously – Part 2

Ask clarifying questions

The only way to successfully accomplish a task is if you truly understand it. Too often, we try to guess at what our leader really means by their statements or directives. Or we waste our time (and that of others) asking everyone else what they think he/she meant. One challenge is that we are afraid to give the impression that we are not "service-oriented", another is that we are convinced we can't "question" our leaders. Neither is true. In fact, failure to clarify instructions could lead to accomplishing the wrong goal – or no goal at all.

How to overcome this issue

Be clear on what you're asking during the initial discussions.

1. Do not question the need for what they're requesting, just the timing, scope, budget, manpower, etc.

2. Ask what the end product/goal looks like. You can't hit the mark if you don't know what it is.

3. If you can't think of good questions when the task is assigned, leave the door open for coming back with questions later. ("This sounds good; I'm going to outline what's needed and will come back to you if I have any further questions.")

Sandy Geroux, M.S., international speaker, trainer and author, is a former administrative professional who helps organizations achieve breakthrough performance through her interactive, engaging and educational keynotes and training programs. If your teams want to develop better strategic partnerships between leaders and team members, Sandy can help you do so... and Turn Your Workplace into a WOWplace® (www.thewowplace.com). Sandy is the author of *The Invaluable Assistant: 30+ Ways to Demonstrate Your Full Value at Work*, available now on Amazon.

Sandy is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Sandy training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau

Understanding AI: What Artificial Intelligence Can and Cannot Do

Rhonda Scharf discusses the impact on our profession of what artificial intelligence can and cannot do
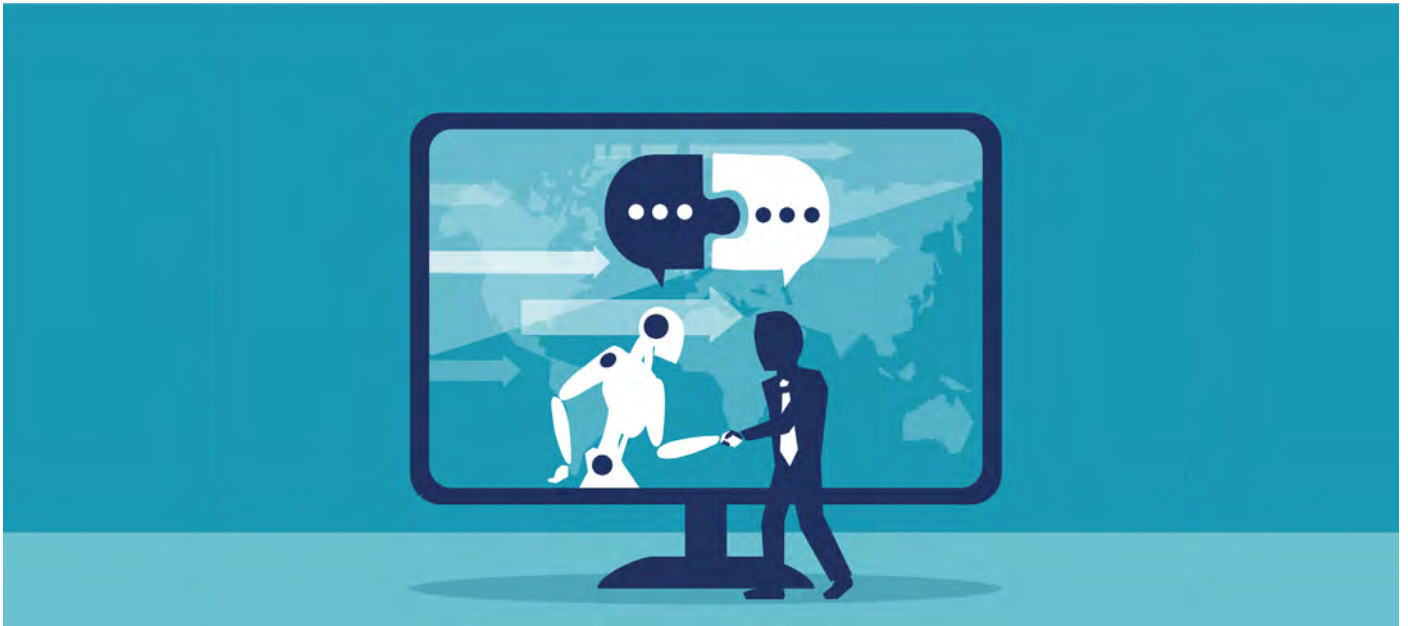
WRITER
RHONDA SCHARF

In the title of my latest book, I quip that "Alexa is stealing your job." That's just the title – I'm actually a big fan of artificial intelligence (AI) and what it can do for all of us.

I like technology. I try out all the new gadgets and embrace what comes my way, usually a little before most people do. However, I know that I'm in the minority and that many people are fearful of artificial intelligence. They're genuinely afraid that it will take away their job.

Will artificial intelligence take away some jobs? Yes. However, according to the World Economic Forum's The Future of Jobs Report 2020, artificial intelligence will create at least 60 million more jobs than it eliminates.

That sounds good, unless it's your job that's being eliminated, and you find yourself unqualified for one of the new jobs AI creates, right?

Instead of worrying, let's look at what artificial intelligence can and cannot do and see how it impacts our profession. With a little knowledge and forward thinking, we can ensure that even if artificial intelligence takes away parts of our job, we can put ourselves in a position to pivot so we're working with it rather than against it.

Before we start, I should note that, although they are a form of artificial intelligence, Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant represent just a tiny fraction of the artificial intelligence world. Artificial intelligence (also known as machine learning) refers to a range of technology that learns and adapts like a human.

There are many things AI can do, and it is (literally) learning more every day.

Artificial intelligence can:

Speak

It is good at doing tasks like answering phone calls, taking orders, handling customer service queries, and doing other front-line speaking roles. Imagine not having to answer the phone, route calls or answer routine questions. Imagine the only time you need to be on the phone is to have a conversation that pertains to things you know, that aren't in the company FAQs. Having AI take care of our job's routine telephone component gives us more time for strategic functions instead of filling our day with others' priorities and busywork.

Translate

Imagine your executive is traveling internationally with a client who doesn't speak English well, and your Executive doesn't speak the other language. We have simultaneous translation that is machine-based, which not only understands and translates the words, it also translates the context. Translation software used to be very poor but it's getting better every day and soon it may become almost as good as translation done by humans. Instant translation is terrible if you work as a translator, but great if it is your role to make your executive's travel easier.

Drive

Back in 2016, Uber used its first self-driving truck to deliver 50,000 cans of Budweiser beer to its destination – without a human driver. Can you foresee the massive implications this has for the transportation

industry? No more having to track down the limo driver who was at the wrong terminal. No more delays because the flight crew exceeded their allowable flying time in the middle of a snowstorm. No more worrying about driving and getting lost – we can just jump into a car that can take us to our destination. No more getting directions or worrying about transportation will make our (and our executive's) lives easier.

See

Artificial intelligence can recognize faces. This has massive implications for police work, payment portals, and even shopping centres, where AI can recognize you when you come in and know what you're likely to want to buy. This will be helpful in law enforcement, security, and travel (although there are obviously privacy and ethical, as well as legal, limitations to this kind of usage of AI). AI can act as a receptionist (we already know it can speak independently), a gatekeeper, or office security. When your executive is waiting for someone to arrive for an appointment, AI can manage the task. It will know who to let into the office and who to turn away. The former role of the receptionist can be assigned to other, more critical, office functions.

Write

Artificial intelligence is already writing movies (such as Disney's "Up") that connect with us emotionally (remember the scenes where we saw Carl and Ellie's life together). Automated journalism regularly appears in the Associated Press, Forbes, Washington Post, and the New York Times, mostly for stories that are based on statistics, like weather reports and sports scores. Back in 2014, an algorithm called Quakebot published a story about an earthquake on the Los Angeles Times website that appeared three minutes after the shaking stopped. Can you imagine how much time we could save by having AI respond to our emails automatically? It would free you

from routine tasks and allow you to work on more complicated tasks that AI cannot do well.

Learn

Learning is the most significant thing AI does – in fact, it's what defines it. We can teach artificial intelligence the same way we teach a student. Repeatedly show it a photo of a ball, and it will learn what a ball looks like. For travel, AI will know that your executive likes the aisle seat in economy when the flight is less than two hours long and likes the window seat in business class when the flight is longer than two hours. It will learn that the preferred airline is only selected if the price isn't more than 20% above the lower-priced alternative and isn't the last flight of the night. It will make hotel reservations knowing you want the third floor away from the elevator, and feather pillows. It learns the same way we do, only much faster and with a higher degree of reliability.

But there are things it cannot do well either, so you shouldn't be too worried about your job. As you can see, it takes away some of the time-consuming task-based activities that we do, leaving us more time to do tasks that require our critical thinking, creativity, and empathy.

What AI cannot do well or at all:

Create

While artificial intelligence can write articles, emails, and even movie scripts, it can only follow a formula. AI lacks imaginative powers and cannot come up with new ideas. It cannot change a pattern to create something different. AI cannot suggest that we approach our customers with a marketing campaign focused on delivery or add a 100% money-back guarantee to our product. It can't create

what isn't already a recognizable pattern. Your executive can bounce ideas off you (and vice versa), and together you can brainstorm. You can be a priceless resource to the company in a way that AI cannot.

Care

Consider current chatbots such as Nadia, a life-like chatbot used by the Australian government to help people access the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Nadia is voiced by actress Cate Blanchett, and can interpret, with 85% accuracy, the visual expressions of the people it chats with online. However, it doesn't understand (the way a human does) what the chats mean and can't feel emotions that the human who is chatting may be conveying through their words. Nadia has zero emotional intelligence. It has learned that you are sad when you have water running out of your eyes but doesn't truly understand what sad means. It can adjust its responses to suit the emotion but doesn't feel or understand the emotion.

This is the most significant opportunity for us as office professionals. American poet Maya Angelou famously said, "People will never forget how you made them feel." We can care. We can sincerely express emotion. We can help people feel good about their decisions, get excited when they get excited, and help others' self-esteem and confidence. A chatbot cannot do those things. And that's the good news. Our emotional intelligence is worth far more than our IQ.

Maximize the capabilities of artificial intelligence so your company and your executives benefit from it. Use AI to free up your valuable time for critical thinking, creativity, and the emotional intelligence that only you can provide.

Alexa isn't stealing your job. Alexa is helping you do it better.

Rhonda Scharf, CSP, HoF, GSF is a Certified Speaking Professional, Hall of Fame, trainer and author based in Ottawa. She helps organizations feel motivated and educated through her interactive, realistic and fun training programs and keynote speeches. If your team needs a boost by increasing their effectiveness and efficiency, then Rhonda will get you On the Right Track. Rhonda is the author of Alexa is Stealing Your Job, available now on Amazon.

Rhonda is also part of our Speaker Bureau. If you are interested in Rhonda training your Assistants or speaking at your event, either virtually or in person, please visit executivesupportmagazine.com/speaker-bureau.

The Coding Evolution: The Bigger Picture

Is coding truly the next skill and technology to learn as an administrative professional? asks Vonetta Watson
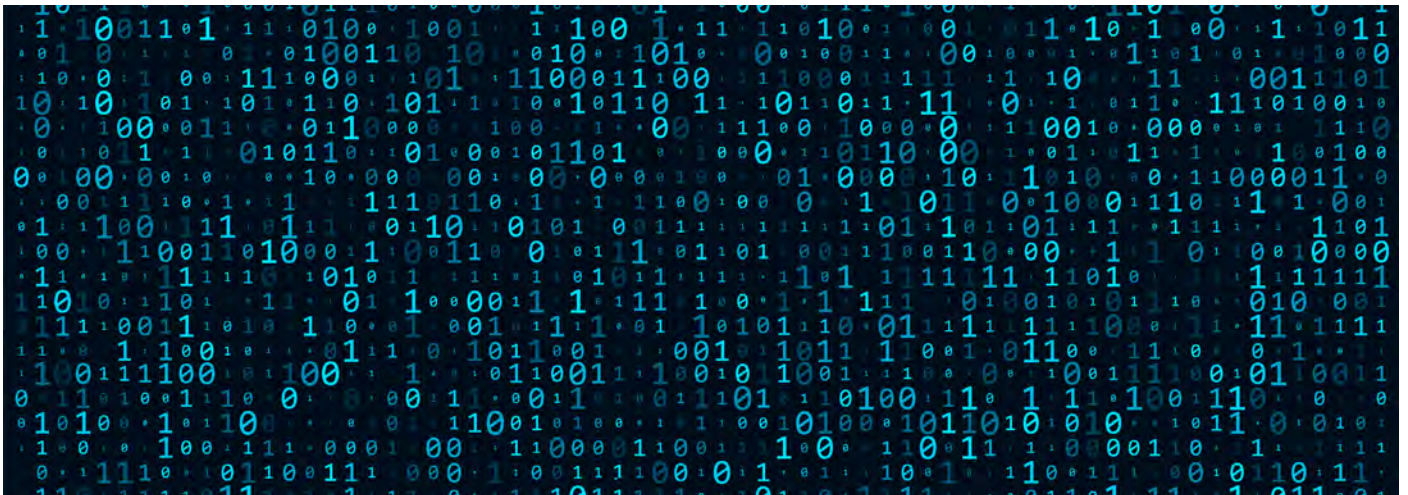
WRITER
VONETTA WATSON

To fairly answer this question, we should first examine the 'Modern Workplace and Worker,' the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and coding as a transferable skill.

Setting the Stage

In 2016, I made one of the boldest moves in my career: I decided to step away from my role as Director of Technology and Education for a non-profit outreach. Why? I wanted to extend my reach beyond one community and help springboard training, tool up, and reskill the next generation of the workforce. Simply put, I wanted to be an intricate part of the next industrial and technological revolution. I believe that we live in a world that is technology-inspired and people-driven.

Let's fast forward to September 2018, in my 11th year at the Microsoft Ignite Conference (for IT pros, developers, and software architects). The driving theme over the week-long conference was edge computing, AI (artificial intelligence), IoT (internet of things), and how companies worldwide were implementing innovative technologies to drive efficiencies: the modern workplace and worker.

Upon my return, I wrote an article, Shift Happens. The article addresses adopting the 'Modern Workplace and Worker,' ongoing technology shifts, and mindset. I heard countless claims of organizational complacency and a disregard for digital transformation; however, some understood and were appreciative of the training gained. It was time to reevaluate our adaptability. If you were not ready, it was time to get ready regardless of where your organization stood in the technological evolution. And BOOM – on March 11, 2020, our world and the way we interact and work shifted to the modern workplace and worker.

The Modern Workplace and Worker

The modern workplace is a term that identifies organizations that recognize the technological evolution and are willing to provide workers with the necessary technology and tools that drive collaboration and efficiency. However, merely utilizing the term to refer to one's company does not make it a modern workplace; it is rooted in two methodological principles.

Becoming a modern workplace can be challenging. It is a collaborative endeavor! We must understand that shifting is not easy nor just about technology; it is about the positive change that technology can bring through the people, projects, and processes it touches. However, this requires forward-thinking organizations that deeply desire a collaborative workforce and recognize that digital tools and technology can drive positive change.

Second, there are endless possibilities with the adoption of the modern workplace, which leads to the modern worker. Modern workers must be flexible, adaptable, and clearly understand that digital tools and technologies springboard productivity and efficiency; thus, how you work as an individual, with a team, and within your organization all play a significant role in your adaptability. The ability to seamlessly automate the collection of customer information and to track and schedule jobs and tasks at various data points can help you say goodbye to disconnected systems and processes – and create efficient workflow.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

Did you know that we are currently in the Fourth Industrial Revolution? This concept was first introduced in 2015 by an article and book written by Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum:

"...together shape a future that works for all by putting people first, empowering them, and constantly reminding ourselves that all of these new technologies are first and foremost tools made by people for people."
~ Professor Klaus Schwab

Professor Schwab's words speak volumes. We create, use, and maintain technology, no matter the type. This also means that we must learn how to use technologies and evolve as the technologies evolve – become a modern worker. Previous revolutions took time to gain momentum and were prolongations of one another; however, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is unique and accelerated by 2020's paradigm shift. Workforce expectations are rapidly shifting. To keep pace, we must close the skills gap, be open to shifts, and develop transferable skills. Where will your skills land you in the UniWorkVerse?

The Coding Evolution

Is coding truly the next in-demand job skill to learn as an administrative professional? This is not a simple yes or no answer, nor does it answer what coding language you should learn. The demand for coders and coding skills has been afoot since 2016, with predictions of being one of the most in-demand jobs over the following years. Why? Because coding is the language of our world and vital to businesses.

As administrative professionals, learning and adapting to software with minimal code is crucial. Coding is also transferable to tech-adjacent jobs, roles, and functions. It enhances creativity and writing skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and a clear understanding of the proper technologies to use and when. Coding may seem like a new buzzword; I assure you it is not. The concept of coding has been around since the 1800s – yes, the 1800s.

Tech Fun Fact

The world's first recorded coder was an English female mathematician and writer, Ada Lovelace (Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace). Lovelace is noted for writing the world's first machine algorithm for Charles Babbage's proposed mechanical general-purpose computer, or the Analytical Engine, which was considered the first-ever computer.

(Ada Lovelace watercolor portrait by Alfred Edward Chalon – Science Museum Group, public domain)

We all use code every day in the form of no-code or low-code. I started coding in my twenties. It was a social media platform similar to Facebook, but there was no app; it was all online. I was excited to create my page. I adorned it with media, animation, the works. I did not realize that a little knowledge of HyperText Markup Language code (HTML 2) would stay with me forever and would not only move me into other technologies but also inspire me to learn HTML 3, 4, 5, and CSS as well as a little Java, Swift, and Python.

Bill Gates says that coding is not complex; it's just "a little mathematics" and "If" statements (sound familiar?). Where are my Excel users? How many of you write your formulas or piggyback on functions? Excel is comprised of syntax codes. When you write a formula, you are essentially coding. When you master Excel, this opens the door to applications such as SQL or Power BI, for example. The office applications you use every day utilize coding regardless of the industry or software. Once you understand the backbone of that code, it makes it easier for you to adapt. A great example is SQL, which is used in Oracle and Ingres; of course, the code's derivatives make it proprietary.

No-Code and Low-Code

Software such as BettyBlocks, KissFlow, Microsoft PowerApps, and Google App Maker are considered low-code applications. They offer quick, easy, drag-and-drop interfaces for fast, seamless software development with minimal code and in specific situations. No-code is precisely what it says: no code is required. Apps that come to mind are Mailchimp, Bubble App Builder, AirTable, Zapier, and Survey Monkey, allowing for a quick build and integration into almost any platform with the click of a button.

Begin Your Coding Journey

So, where do you go from here? Forward! Be creative and drive innovation. Begin your journey with what you know; you can upskill more quickly. If you are a Microsoft Word user, then step into Visual Basic. Google Suite user, AppSheet. Just for fun, try building a no-code app with your family or a group. Want to challenge yourself outside of work? Take an online course for Python, R, Ruby, or Go. The possibilities are endless! Learn, grow, and go!

Vonetta Watson MA Ed., CPC, MCT, is the owner of TechGem Educational Technologies and is a 20-year veteran, SME, facilitator, instructor, mentor, trainer, speaker, author, coach, consultant, and software migration and implementation specialist. As an Instructional Technology and Software Education Specialist, she is an enthusiastic, dedicated, and committed educator with an innate ability to understand and motivate learners into the twenty-first century using unique combinations of educational technology.

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Creativity: A Competency whose Time has Come

Creative practice helps get us in the habit of finding new, resourceful ways to solve problems says Tara Browne

WRITER
TARA E. BROWNE

Creativity is one of the hottest commodities in the business world today. Harvard Business Review started 2019 with an issue entirely dedicated to the subject of innovation. A February 2019 keyword search on Forbes.com revealed three articles on creativity in that month alone. The creative personalities and output of thought leaders such as Liz Ryan of The Human Workplace and Shiloh Sophia, founder of the Intentional Creativity Movement, are integral to their very successful brands. And in January 2019, CNBC reported that LinkedIn now shows creativity as the number one skillset sought by employers today.

I see this as great news for administrative professionals.

As admins, we start with a FITFO – "Figure-It-the-F*%#-Out" – approach to problem solving that helps us to consistently deliver everything from last minute schedule changes to unicorns on demand. Add to that the broad spectrum of skills that we routinely add to our arsenals as needed –graphic design, copywriting, and event planning, to name a few – and administrative professionals are some of the most creative people I know.

Too many, however, have bought into the idea that if they are not traditionally talented or credentialed in some way, they must not be creative. As an intentional creativity teacher, one of the most common objections I hear when inviting people to a class or workshop is, "I'm not creative. I can't even draw a straight line."

Creative Disinheritance

In her preface to Mona Brookes' Drawing for Older Children and Teens, Geraldine Schwartz explains how children, influenced by adult role models, "learn to value language in its oral and written form and to undervalue drawing as child's play, thus losing a method of communication potentially rich in expression of both thought and emotion. In this way, we set aside the natural human ability to draw." She continues:

"By the time children are ten, drawing – even for pleasure – is often relegated to the last hour of Friday afternoon, when students and teachers are too tired to do anything else. By high school it is an elective subject, and the only students who get real lessons are those whose pleasure and talent are so outstanding that they have nurtured this ability in themselves by learning to value a skill others have not dared to value. The rest of us, with the voice of judgment shouting in our heart, compare a skill cut off in childhood with those who have spent a lifetime learning to draw and say with childhood innocence, as if it did not matter, "Oh, me –draw?....I can't even draw a straight line."

So, let me ask you which of the following images would you say is more creative?
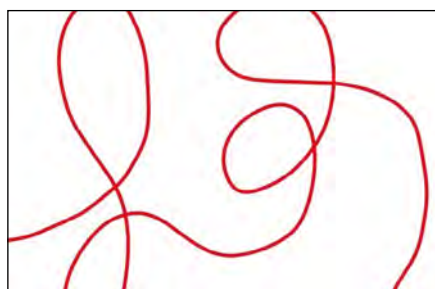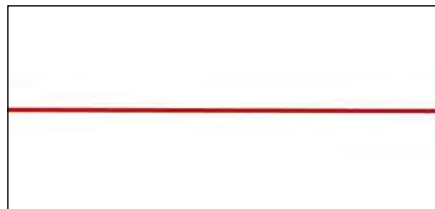
I'm betting that most readers will say it's the image with the wavy line. Creativity does not particularly live in straight lines, and the inability to draw a straight line does not indicate a lack of creativity. For an admin, it probably just means that someone borrowed your ruler...and hasn't returned it yet. All of this isn't to say straight lines can't be creative, but how much more expressive is the line that goes all over, and even off the edges, of the page?

Yes, You are Creative

The next time you're tempted to say, "I'm not creative," cut yourself some slack. The truth is, creativity is like a muscle that has atrophied through lack of use. More and more, creativity is being recognized as a valuable commodity, and you can claim it for yourself. What's more, you can cultivate it. It absolutely gets stronger with regular use, and as with any exercise, the process makes you stronger whether it's a gold medal performance or not.

With all the other demands on your time and attention, though, does developing your creativity really make the cut?

Benefits of Increased Creativity

Do a Google search on "benefits of creativity" and you will find a host of predictive search options, such as "in the workplace", "in the classroom", and "at work", followed by endless results of listicles promising five, ten, twelve (or more!) benefits of creativity. Several of my favorites, paraphrased from Nicola Vanlint's "The Positive Benefits of Creativity", are:

Freedom

There is no right or wrong way to be creative.

Self-awareness and self-expression

Creativity deepens access to our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

Self-confidence

We learn to trust our instincts and gain confidence from expressing them, which carries over into other areas of our life.

Stress Relief

Being creative is meditative and fun, reduces stress levels and improves our quality of life.

Problem-solving

There isn't a manual for art or for life, we must figure it out as we go; creative practice helps get us in the habit of finding new, resourceful ways to solve problems.

Resilience

For me, the biggest benefit of creative practice has been increased resilience. Throughout the challenges of my life – from single motherhood, unemployment, and professional stagnation, to dealing with the impacts of illness and addiction in my family – creativity has proven to be a safe outlet for emotions that I could not release elsewhere. Moreover, the act of putting emotions into form creates both physical and mental space so I can look at the problems behind the emotions with greater objectivity. Where I may feel stymied when a logical, left-brained analysis offers no answers, mixing in a right brain perspective can offer new insights, and lead to creative new ways of resolving the problem at hand.

In addition to the personal benefits of my practice, creativity has allowed me to tackle many projects at work that have boosted my professional reputation and led to new opportunities. For example, I have used SharePoint to redesign many reporting tools, saving hundreds of hours in analysis over the course of various projects. At my last job, this led to my being invited to join a high-level administrative improvement team and creating their first-ever training event dedicated to administrative professionals.

Can Creativity AI-rmageddon-Proof Your Career?

Perhaps the biggest career benefit of creativity, though, is increased adaptability in a rapidly changing workplace.

There's a lot of doom-and-gloom reporting these days about "robots coming for our jobs" and predictions that AI will put vast sections of the labor force out of work, and administrative roles are often listed among the jobs at risk. However, as the Aspen Institute noted in its April 2019 whitepaper Automation and a Changing Economy, innovation has historically led, not to job loss, but to job displacement and growth. The pain point comes because the new jobs rarely if ever align in terms of geography and required skills with the jobs that are lost.

We may not have much control over the geography, but in a rapidly changing workplace the ability to adapt to the new is not just a nice-to-have; creativity and imagination can be the difference-maker between obsolescence and leading the charge.

Perhaps one of the most empowering things we can recognize in this scenario is that we've seen much of this before. Most administrative professionals already use processes and checklists to improve accuracy and reduce the time we spend on repetitive tasks, freeing us up for more interesting and challenging work. Cast in this light, the automation of repetitive tasks – one of the main ways that AI is already impacting administrative roles – is just the next evolution of tools that enable us as high-value contributors to our organizations.

The million-dollar question is not "how do I keep my job?", but "how do I master these tools so I can reach my full potential at work?"

The answer, in part, is creativity.

Think back over your own life. What activities light you up and make time just fly? Whatever it is, do more of it. Consider not just visual arts, dance or music, but also hobbies and skills such as gardening, cooking and inventing: it all counts. Also, consider how creativity might apply at work. Love programming games? Maybe you can help gamify some training. Is storytelling your thing? Learn to turn data into compelling stories for more powerful presentations.

Once you've broken the creative ice, look for ways to go deeper. Social media abounds with free resources to help with just about any creative pursuit. Just type your keyword into YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest; any one of these platforms will contain enough content to keep you busy for a lifetime. As you find the ones that resonate with you, you will be led to even more robust offerings that allow you to really invest, dive deep, and reap the rewards of cultivating your creative potential.

Whatever your kind of creativity, though, don't wait to claim it. Creativity is a competency whose time has come.

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Tara E. Browne, DTM is a creativity coach, public speaker and certified member of the Intentional Creativity Guild. Through her private teaching studio, Studio Tara Erin, she offers classes, coaching, and facilitation services that awaken imagination and unlock creative potential.

Her blog, "Tara Erin: Artist in a Cubicle", can be found at www.taraerin.com.

Tara also supports the President and CEO of Ascentria Care Alliance, one of New England's largest human services nonprofit organizations.

Embrace Artificial Intelligence and All That It Can Offer You!

AI can help us be better assistants if we leverage it proactively says Julie Perrine
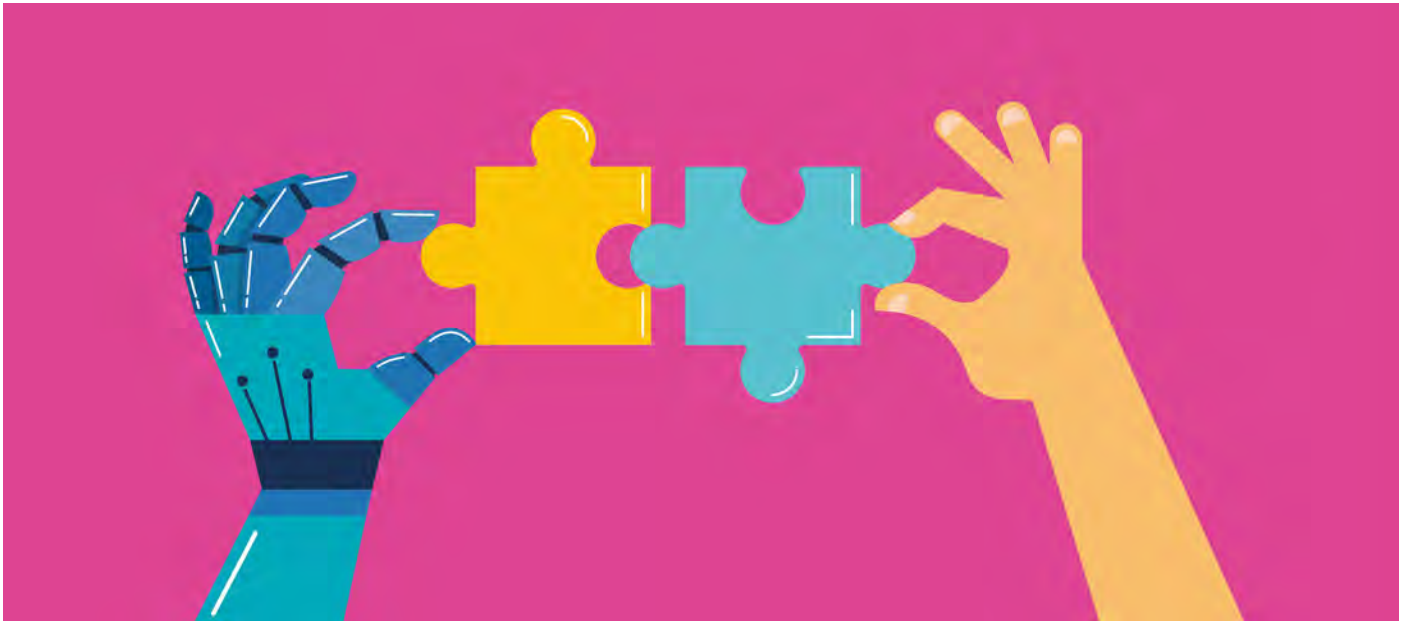
WRITER
JULIE PERRINE

Assistants have nothing to fear when it comes to AI. Instead, we have a tremendous amount to gain from engaging with this new technology – from increasing efficiency to reducing errors and improving productivity.

Take a look around and it's not hard to find the latest innovations in software, electronic devices, and even office furniture. But as innovative as those things may be when they were first purchased, they quickly become obsolete because another idea or new and improved version inevitably follows, resulting in the next latest and greatest thing everyone has to have. Our smart phones are out of date within weeks (and sometimes days) of purchasing them.

Yet, we don't stop purchasing the latest phones, upgrading our computers and software, or pursuing higher degrees. We learn to adapt to the new technology and integrate it into our work world to a point where we can't do without it.

The same holds true for the introduction of artificial intelligence in our work places.

Many view AI as a potential threat to their job. And in some cases, it may eliminate certain repetitive or lower cognitive tasks you do. But that's not all you do. In fact, it's probably a pretty low percentage of what you do if you tracked your time and tasks over the course of a week or month.

I believe AI is going to be a tremendous boost for any administrative professional who is actively engaged in taking their skills to the next level and expanding their business acumen in the 21st century office. We've been trying to clone ourselves for years. Now there's technology to help us do that in part, and we're suddenly scared to death of it? We asked for this.

So, now that it's here, how can admins use it? Where does it make sense? How can we be on the cutting edge of learning about it? How do we integrate it into our work? And how do we show our executives and teams that we are proactive, innovative administrative professionals who can leverage these technologies in our daily work?

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

One of the best definitions for AI is on the SAS software site (www.sas.com).

"AI makes it possible for machines to learn from experience, adjust to new inputs, and perform human-like tasks. Most AI examples that you hear about today – from chess-playing computers to self-driving cars – rely heavily on deep learning and natural language processing. Using these technologies, computers can be trained to accomplish specific tasks by processing large amounts of data and recognizing patterns in the data.

The term artificial intelligence was coined in 1956, but AI has become more popular today thanks to increased data volumes, advanced algorithms, and improvements in computing power and storage," the SAS website says.

Another article I read said it's more accurate to refer to AI as machine intelligence.

And I think that is helpful in framing this technology appropriately.

If you've ever used Siri or Alexa or Cortana to do searches or to ask questions, I think you're probably familiar with the limitations of these AI technologies. While they continue to improve, they are still computers programed by a human. And they still have a long way to go.

How does Artificial Intelligence Work?

AI works by combining large amounts of data with fast processing and smart algorithms, which allows the software to learn automatically from patterns or features in the data.

In fact, one of the things I find compelling about AI is its ability to analyze patterns, data, and information in ways my brain could never figure out.

So, if a system of computers can pull the data, find patterns, integrate image and speech recognition, and help me do what I'm doing more accurately with better data, I am all ears!

Who is Using AI?

Almost every industry is looking at ways they can leverage AI in their fields.

The SAS website highlights a few industries where AI is being used already.

It says, "Every industry has a high demand for AI capabilities – especially question answering systems that can be used for legal assistance, patent searches, risk notification and medical research." And that certainly makes a lot of sense.

Banking

AI in banking is helping serve the customer better and provide offers that are more relevant to them at the right time through the right channel.

Health Care

AI applications can provide personalized medicine and X-ray readings. Personal health care assistants can act as life coaches, reminding you to take your pills, exercise, or eat healthier.

Retail

AI provides virtual shopping capabilities that offer personalized recommendations and discuss purchase options with the consumer. Stock management and site layout technologies will also improve with AI.

Manufacturing

AI can analyze factory data as it streams from connected equipment to forecast expected load and demand.

Sports

AI is used to capture images of game play and provide coaches with reports on how to better organize the game, including optimizing field positions and strategy.

Education

AI is being used to create specific learning models for the students – whether they're children or adults. It tailors the experience to their specific needs.

And AI is already being used administratively in many companies for editing documents, monitoring and forecasting sales, calendar coordination and reminders, transcription of meetings, customer service situations, and more.

Meet Olivia – My AI Assistant!

One of my first true AI experiences was when I enlisted the help of my AI assistant, Olivia.

Thanks to the team at Albertai.com, I've been able to create and program my own assistant to help with customer support on the All Things Admin website.

Olivia joined our team about 10 months ago, and she has already been a big help in providing improved customer support to our website visitors.

Before you say, "See, there you go, replacing someone on your team with an AI assistant," let me explain how this works from a business owner's perspective.

1. I did not replace anyone on my team by implementing Olivia.

2. I was paying a member of my team to answer customer support emails that we'd receive almost daily. The email responses were the same repetitive, brain-numbing email replies day in and day out. This was not a good use of my team member's time. She's a smart person. And this was a very poor use of her time and skills, nor did she enjoy doing it. But it was very important that we answer our customers questions accurately and in a timely manner.

3. Because I was paying this team member to answer the same email questions over and over, I was unable to have this person do more of the fun and engaging tasks and team projects. I couldn't afford to add another team member, so I was not getting things done because of a limitation of my resources.

Then I discovered Albert AI and the ability to create Olivia.
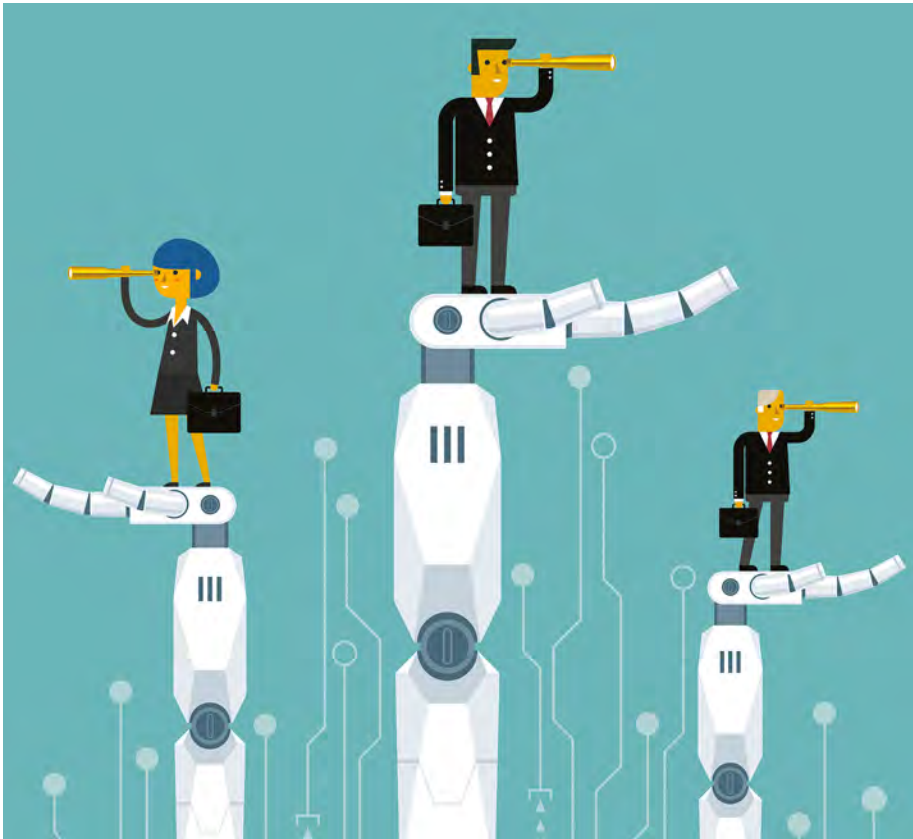
Now, we are able to answer most customer questions instantaneously while they are on our website. They don't have to open an email and send it and wait for a reply. They can get their answer instantly which helps them make a decision on the spot. This also helps our customer satisfaction, and potentially helps us make a sale more quickly as a result.

We can also help Olivia learn how to answer the questions better. On a weekly basis, we can pull up the data to see who asked which questions. If we don't have a good answer programmed, we can update our Word document and reload it to the site, and Olivia is updated within a couple of minutes.

There are Fortune 100 and 500 companies using this same technology to integrate their office procedures into an AI tool that helps their teams work more efficiently and productively.

Imagine not having to answer the same questions over and over again. Imagine your colleagues being able to type the question into your AI assistant and get what they need without bothering you. Then you would be able to focus on your bigger tasks and important project work.

How much time do you waste today on repetitive tasks that could be automated

WRITER
JULIE PERRINE

perfect specific tasks are becoming quite common.

The Innovative Admin™ Has the Advantage

The Innovative Admin is an administrative professional who introduces, creates, or applies new or renewed ideas or methods of doing things to the office environment. This is someone who is actively doing, seeking, and implementing, not someone who is simply coming up with ideas or maintaining the status quo.

If you are actively engaged in cultivating creativity, collaborating with others, and taking action to implement your ideas at the office, you have nothing to fear and so much to gain when it comes to integrating AI into the workplace. The more I research AI and the more I learn about it, the more excited I get about the potential it holds for admins to improve our ability to do our jobs. AI can help us be better assistants if we leverage it proactively.

We all know that nothing in our careers can remain static if we want to remain on the cutting edge of our profession. We must consistently engage in strategic activities to develop and advance how we think, how we work, and how we approach planning for our careers as a whole. Otherwise, we will become obsolete and risk being replaced by AI...but it won't be the technology's fault.

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with the right tools? The possibilities of implementing these tools in your workplace is incredible to think about.

Challenges and Limits of AI

Artificial intelligence is going to change every industry, but we have to understand its limits. There are still a lot of things it can't do – things that make admins indispensable to their executives, teams, and companies.

The principle limitation of AI is that it learns from the data. There is no other way in which knowledge can be incorporated.

That means any inaccuracies in the data will be reflected in the results. And any

additional layers of prediction or analysis must be added separately.

SAS experts also point out that today's AI systems are trained to do a clearly defined task. The system that plays poker cannot play solitaire or chess. The system that detects fraud cannot drive a car or give you legal advice. In fact, an AI system that detects health care fraud cannot accurately detect tax fraud or warranty claims fraud.

In other words, these systems are very, very specialized. They are focused on a single task and are far from behaving like humans. Likewise, self-learning systems are not autonomous systems. The imagined AI technologies that you see in movies and TV are still science fiction. But computers that can probe complex data to learn and

Julie Perrine is an administrative expert, author, speaker, and all-round procedures pro. She is the founder and CEO of All Things Admin, a company dedicated to developing innovative products, training, and resources for administrative professionals worldwide. Learn more about Julie's latest book, *Become A Procedures Pro: The Admin's Guide to Developing Effective Systems and Procedures* and download free templates at ProceduresPro.com and AllThingsAdmin.com.

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