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Top ten tips on getting the best from your Assistant

Your Assistant/PA has been at the etc.venues Conference thinking about how to do the best for you.

But how can you help to get the best out of them?

etc.venues, Pearl Group and Teamworks thought the following tips and reminders might be helpful so that together you can work smarter, not harder...

1 Is that clear?

You think you are being clear, but are you? Are you expecting your PA to guess what you want? It's tempting to say too little and expect your PA to guess what is required, or to over brief and waste time for both of you. If in doubt, ask them to summarise what they think you have asked for. And you can refine if something got lost in translation!

2 Filtering the fire-hose

Tasks are probably coming at you – and therefore your PA – like water from a fire-hose. Whatever the pressure, you can't do everything at once. Help them help you prioritise. Filter what is urgent (everything these days seems to be) from what is truly important. Have a coding system between you, which sorts the nice to dos from the must dos. Your PA may have a better sense of this than even you. Make sure to get their point of view.

3 De-clutter the clutter

Office life attracts 'stuff'. Files, books, paperwork soon line your shelves and fill your filing cabinets. Involve your PA in a regular clean out. This will de-clutter not just the office but also your working relationship. And help you both concentrate on what is important.

4 Full up, but fulfilled?

You may be making full use of your PA's time. But are you making good use of their capacities? Find out what other skills your PA can bring to bear, beyond the administrative and organisational ones. Are they holding back talents, which could be adding real value? They may not offer, so do ask.

5 Appreciation

We shouldn't need reminding about appreciating colleagues like our PA. But it is easy to forget in the hustle and bustle. Appreciation builds confidence and confidence powers organisations. With appreciation, little and often is often far more effective than a grand gesture once a year. And appreciation doesn't always mean thanks. It means appreciating your PA's situation and how hard they often have to work to make your life simpler.

6 The four BIG questions

Smarter working starts with answering four main questions. What are we doing? How does the work get done? Who is the work for and with? And, finally, Why are we doing this work? Are you having all four conversations you're your PA? Or are they getting stuck with What? And an endless list of unexplained "To Dos".

At the etc.venues Conference your PA heard about new ways to cure meeting-itis. Your PA may be spending a lot of time setting up and co-ordinating meetings. Unless these meetings are effective you are not just wasting your valuable time, but theirs too. We have included more information about our Meeting Hospital service on this memory stick or take a look at www.pearlgroup.net. It is a simple way to cut wastage and optimise your performance.

When you ask your PA to book a venue, choose a dedicated training venue rather than a hotel – you'll find that they can help you with lots of things like registration and badging, storing and returning materials, printing course materials etc. – for free! And they should have an AV technician on site – saving you the worry of making sure the presentation works on that particular laptop! We have included more information about etc.venues in London and Birmingham on this stick – or check our interactive website www.etcvenues.co.uk

Choose a centrally located venue – that means it's up to your delegates to find their way on public transport – which cuts out the hassle of booking travel and accommodation – and also makes it cheaper for you, and better for the environment too!

Book on line – choose a website that lets you book your meeting directly into the venues diary – that means you don't have to worry about calling several venues just to be told they are full, and several venues have cheaper last minute rates on line too!

We hope the above will help you and your PA live happily ever after...

If not please give us a call to see how we can help!

7 On whose wavelength?

We tend to communicate with others in a style that suits us. Not necessarily them. Like broadcasting in Me FM. If you are lucky your style meshes well with your PA's. But it can be a real mismatch – with disastrous consequences. A smart plan is to check with them by asking 'how do you like to be communicated with?' Include how often, how much and by what medium (phone, email, sms etc.). Yes, it is the PA's job to accommodate your preference. But communication works best as a two-way thing. It is important to give enough information that will help your PA to understand importance, relevance and urgency, enabling them to prioritise their work load accordingly.

8 Minefield: keep out!

We all have things, which, rationally or not, set our teeth on edge. Call them Hot Buttons, if you like. Areas of sensitivity where our reaction may sometimes be disproportionate or unexpectedly strong. It is well worth having a candid conversation with you PA about this so they are clear about yours, and vice versa. This minimises the walking on eggshells that sometimes happens when you sense something is wrong but are not sure what.

9 Your mood is your mood

Your mood communicates as soon as you enter the office, pick up a phone or even write an email. Your PA is likely to pick this up and even soak it up. What you give out, you quickly get back. Remember, if the office seems grumpy, they may have caught it from YOU. A great way to avoid this is to recognise your state of mind (I am being grumpy) and if you can't get rid of it with a brisk walk or few deep breaths, at least communicate it to your PA and others. ("I apologise in advance if I seem a bit grumpy today..."). We often think other people are the cause of our stress, however it is our own emotions and subsequent actions and reactions which cause our stress!

10 Tweaking your way through change!

You are more likely to achieve permanent changes if you look at tweaking your behaviours and actions rather than endeavouring to transform completely! For example: instead of setting yourself the target of wanting to leave the office at a reasonable time each day, start by focusing on achieving it once a week, when this has been comfortably achieved aim for twice and onwards.