

The Effective Admin

Advice, tips & news for administrative professionals

Managing, Not Crossing, Confidential Boundaries *When Everyone Wants to Know What You Know*

As an administrative professional you often have information coworkers, clients and others want or think they need---even when they don't. They may ask you questions about your boss's private life, whereabouts or other details related to happenings in your office or company. How you answer these questions and whether or not you answer these questions entails a decision and responsibility you shouldn't take lightly.

Even if you feel that you're practically working in a glass house that doesn't mean you should give everyone who wants it a clear and full-time view into your boss's and department's comings and goings. You want to implement and maintain confidential boundaries while remaining an effective, responsible and loyal assistant who works well with others in the company and elsewhere. In other words, you want to maintain confidences but not become so secretive and rigid in appearance that you earn a reputation as the chilly, unapproachable assistant.

As the office liaison you need to think about the consequences before you answer any question or give information. And when you do answer, be assertive in your body language and clear and strong in your voice. Have an assertive posture that's erect but not rigid. Make eye contact and maintain a friendly expression. Never use demeaning language.

And don't go on the defensive. You shouldn't be too concerned about how others react to your responses. Someone may react poorly to your reply intended to maintain your boss's confidentiality. After all, they're not getting the information they want. But you are exercising integrity and an understanding of the trust placed in you by your executive or other bosses. You're maintaining respect for your position. Ultimately, doing all of this actually earns you the respect of others.

"As the office liaison you need to think about the consequences before you answer any question or give information."

By Lisa Olsen. Currently a speaker and corporate trainer, Olsen also is a veteran of the administrative profession. Learn more about her training programs at www.wingspanmotivation.com or email her at Lisa@WingspanMotivation.com
Read Ms. Olsen's 4 Specific Techniques to maintain confidences and NOT Answer "Tough" (or Just Plain Nosy) Questions On Page 3.

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How to Communicate Deadlines to Colleagues

If you find yourself in the predicament of always having to remind your manager or colleagues of deadlines that only you seem to be concerned about or aware of, there could be several things going on here. Perhaps you are setting artificial deadlines to make sure you have breathing space to finalize your part of the tasks. However, when you overuse this strategy, your colleagues will see it and believe all of your deadline requests lack credibility.

Or maybe you are asking for impossibly quick turnarounds that cannot be met. Are you taking the time to think about what it actually takes to complete the project, task or request? Try to see your request from another's point of view.

However, if you aren't guilty of any of the above, convey the sense of urgency you see (and others don't) by helping people understand **exactly** what you need them to do by when.

For example, put the lengthy contract you need your manager to sign in three places into a file folder marked "signature requests" in bold letters. On each page where the signature is required, put a colored sticky flag that

points to where he or she should sign. You can also put a "date needed by" sticky note on the file. Develop a consistent system for how and where you will deliver and retrieve this "urgent" folder to avoid miscommunication and disorganization issues, which could impact your deadlines.

Likewise, if it is your colleagues who are holding you up, again, try to be as clear about what you need and when you need it as you can possibly be.

If explaining **what** you need to be done and by **when** doesn't seem to make a difference, try explaining **why** you need it by a certain date. Sometimes a little extra explanation helps people put things into perspective. On the other hand, don't write a novel to explain why you need something urgently—after all, that would take time to read and digest and your colleagues will have less time to complete what you are asking them to do.

By Elizabeth Black. A former VP of human resources, Black offers in-person workshops and teleseminars for administrative professionals; www.adminforum.com

Two Tips for Better Email Communication

1. If you have three exchanges of email on a single topic, reach for the telephone to resolve the matter. Or visit in-person. This generally accepted business protocol is more time efficient for both parties.

2. When you're angry, you *can* write email. Just don't press the send key until

a 24-hour cooling off period. Even better, don't put the other party's name in the email "to" line while it's in draft form; instead put in your own name. You also may want to get a second opinion on your content from a rational, objective co-worker. This single email could have a big effect on your job and career—more than you realize at the moment. —KP

Deadline Ahead Sample Email Text

Below is the body text of a sample email conveying urgency with a "what" and "when" statement, and a "why" one. The third sentence is **optional** and conveys urgency by stating the consequences of missing the deadline:

"[What] Please deliver your timesheets to Tammy in the Payroll Department [When] by 5 p.m. Thursday, March 6. [Why] Due to the upcoming holiday leave, this early deadline is necessary to process the next payroll on schedule. [Consequences] Timesheets received by the Payroll Department after that deadline will be processed in the following pay period after the holiday leave."

Here's another one:

"[What] Please submit your requests to attend the Annual Management Conference to Faith [When] by Tuesday, March 25, [Why] so that we may obtain the "company early bird" discount rate.

—KP

4 Expert Techniques for Admins to Maintain Confidences and NOT Answer "Tough" Questions

(Story Continued From Page 1)

1. Change the subject. For instance, a client on the telephone just asked you, "I heard your company is considering a merger?" You might respond by saying "I'm glad you called. I wanted to compliment your sales rep. We've received positive feedback from our staff regarding his excellent service." This approach leads the client in a different direction. If he or she returns to the question, you might respond, "Did you receive our latest newsletter? It provides the current company information. In fact, there's an interesting article about our upcoming charity event you may be interested in. We are looking for sponsors." You may have to get creative - but it will start to come naturally as you practice the skill.

2. Use humor to dissuade others from stepping over the line and preventing you from "accidental leakage." For instance, if someone in the break room says, "Hey, here's Susie. She can tell us if we are getting raises or not," you can respond using a pleasant or lighthearted tone. Say "To raise or not to raise, that is the question." Leave it at that and make your exit gracefully.

3. Use the "endless tape" technique. Simply state your specific, reasonable response repeatedly to overcome the other person's demands or comments. Perhaps a pushy department manager expects an immediate audience with your boss. Your boss has important clients in the office. Your reply could be, "I appreciate the urgency and will advise Mr. White you stopped by." Repeat this statement again if needed: "I understand you need to speak with Mr. White at the earliest opportunity. I will advise him you stopped by." Do not elaborate or make excuses. The pushy manager will get the message.

4. Prepare by having regular discussions with your boss. Ask him or her specific "what if " questions so you know how to best respond. It may be, for instance, that your boss doesn't care if the entire company knows where he is at any given time. So ask him: "What if others in the company ask me where you are when you're not around? Do you have preferences about how I answer this question and to whom I answer it from?" —By Lisa Olsen, president, www.WingSpanMotivation.com

Telephone Skills: When You're the Caller

Business protocol experts say when you place a call you control its agenda. Mentally prepare how you will introduce yourself, any small talk you will open with and your points to cover. You are both accomplishing the purpose of your call and presenting yourself. Do so well by preparing. Also, it's your responsibility to bring the call to a conclusion. Respect the other person by doing so in a timely and reasonable manner.—KP

Choosing Colors to Wear to Work

Confused about the best clothing colors to wear to the office, an off-site meeting, a new job, a business networking event or a job interview? Anything related to work or your workplace usually calls for business professional attire. Even standard company holiday parties after hours are a business environment.

As for colors, business etiquette experts say you can't go wrong with classic, conservative ones: navy blue, black, dark gray, or charcoal gray. A pinstripe design also is acceptable. This color scheme is especially relevant to suits (including skirts and dresses) and pantsuits. The colors apply to both men and women.

For shirts, women wear neutral colors. White or light blue still works for men. Will you look fashionable or trendy in these colors? Not necessarily—but you will look like a professional business person in a business environment (versus a social one). Add colors later as and if you sense it's appropriate at your workplace.—KP

Peer Interview: Bulah McCain, BSc. of Jamaica, West Indies

Bulah McCain, BSc. has been an administrative professional for 18+ years. She is currently a project assistant at a telecommunications company. Bulah was gracious enough to accommodate The Effective Admin by answering a few questions about herself and her role as an administrative professional. Here's the scoop...

Q: What is your favorite task in your role as an administrative support professional?

A: Expense reporting. I keep all the project financials in order and ensure that there is no overspend.

Also, using all types of computer programs to keep the department on track.

Q: What is the number one issue you struggle with as an administrative support professional?

A: Getting people to do what they are should or promise to do. If after constant follow up and the task is not completed, I will just do it myself. This sometimes gives me more to do and deadlines may not be met.

Q: What advice do you have for newcomers to the profession?

A: Further education. Do not say yes, I have CPS or CAP and leave it there. This is a very dynamic world and changes occur everyday. We need to be able to go with the flow and continue to be the best admin possible.

Q: What's your passion in your off hours?

A: Playing badminton, solving crosswords and reading any and everything. I feel relaxed when doing them.

Are you an admin professional who wants to be featured above? Complete the interview any time at: <http://www.admin-ezine.com/peer-interview.htm>

“Do not say yes, I have CPS or CAP and leave it there. This is a very dynamic world and changes occur everyday. We need to be able to go with the flow and continue to be the best admin possible.”

Wow! Proper Usage of Exclamation Marks

Using exclamation marks at the end of sentences is apparently quite trendy when writing emails or other correspondence these days. It's also quite often incorrect usage of the exclamation mark. Do NOT end every other sentence in your emails, articles, etc., with exclamation marks.

Use the exclamation mark to express a strong emotion or surprise. EXAMPLE: We won first place! Yea!

Use it in a direct quote. EXAMPLE: “You can't make me go back there!” the girl shouted.

Read your work aloud. Shout or emphasize every sentence you end in an exclamation mark. If that's not the effect you intend, lose the mark. —KP

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