

# Administrative Assistant's

## UPDATE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CANADA'S OFFICE SUPPORT STAFF

MAY 2016

## Curbing scent: A workplace concern

Perfumes are delightful, except when they're not.

Today's fragrances are usually made from natural and synthetic materials, triggering allergic reactions from certain cleaning and personal care products or when an employee wears scent in the office.

Perfume issues need to be taken seriously to ensure good indoor air quality, urges the Canada Safety Council. Informally, employees could be asked to wear less – or no – perfume. But for a formal policy, the council suggests guidelines developed by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety [www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca).

For more information, see [www.canadasafetycouncil.org](http://www.canadasafetycouncil.org)

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## Toastmasters:

*A level playing field where execs and admins sharpen their skills*

By George Pearson

Administrative professionals are taking a chapter from their executives' how-to-get-ahead playbook, honing their communication and leadership skills through membership in Toastmasters International.

For years, Toastmasters has been a stopping-off point for upward-bound managers and executives to smooth out the rough spots in their presentation abilities and build their capacity for listening and organizing as well.

While admins are not generally fast-tracking their way up in management, they are building skills and organization perspectives that will serve them and their executives well, and could promote them to a higher and more demanding position.

### Strong interview nets promotion

Joan Binetti, an executive legal assistant with Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP in Toronto, is convinced her Toastmaster training contributed to a strong interview that netted her a position with the Blakes chairman, a job she held for eight years.

Binetti is a 22-year member of Toastmasters. Her affiliation began af-

ter she was asked to do a presentation at work. "I was so nervous my voice was shaking, my hands were shaking," she recalls.

Her office manager suggested she try Toastmasters.

She did, and she remembers vividly her first speech, an "icebreaker" in which the new member introduces herself to club members. "I basically clutched onto the lectern and kept my head down."

Before long, however, she had gained confidence, growth she attributes mainly to encouragement from her speech evaluator and club members after that first speech. They were supportive ("they told me I had a beautiful smile") as they made suggestions as to how she could improve.

"I'd say within three months it [her Toastmaster experience] had made a tremendous difference," she says.

*Continued on page 4*



Joan Binetti



# Looking for the high-potential employee

Who are the high-potential employees in your organization?

They're probably in the management stream, right? They have MBAs or are working on them. Or they have other specialized degrees and are being carefully mentored because they have been identified as future leaders in the organization.

But wait, aren't you high-potential too? Don't you, an administrative professional, have talents and skills waiting to be further tapped and developed, enhancing your value to the organization? Of course you do.

Has your organization recognized your potential value and set about helping you develop it? If so, you

## EDITOR'S NOTE

George Pearson



are in a good place. If not, perhaps a wake-up call is in order for company management.

In a recent blog, American leadership coach Tanveer Naseer described an experiment by Harvard psychologist Robert Rosenthal who used a cognitive ability test to evaluate the ability of students from kindergarten to grade 5 to learn and solve problems.

Findings were shared with teachers, who were then able to see which students had high potential for learning and growth. The teachers paid more attention to the high-potential students, and the students developed to become among the best in their school.

"Granted, these results seem pretty obvious," writes Naseer, "until we find out that the results identifying the high-potential students were actually randomized and not due to the results the students obtained on their test.

"What this study revealed is that it was the teachers' perception of these students' potential that influenced the kind of support and encouragement they received – conditions which no doubt allowed these students to truly shine in their academic pursuits.

"For leaders, it also demonstrates the power we have to not simply ensure that tasks get done by those we lead, but that we instill in our employees the notion that they are in fact capable of so much more."

Naseer's target audience is organization leaders, of course (remember, he is a leadership coach), but what or who is a leader? Do you only have the capacity to lead by title or assignment? What about by your influence?

When we set aside predispositions, based on what we've seen or heard, about the potential of others, we open the way to a new perspective fueled by support and encouragement. This approach can make a positive difference all the way up and down the organization.

By focusing on the potential of employees – not just their position — says Naseer, "it becomes easier for them to accept the challenges they face as opportunities for learning and improvement as they will now have that hunger to accomplish more under our watch."

His advice applies to individuals who are looking for ways to tap their potential to fulfill themselves and contribute to the success of their organization. For example, AAU interviewed several executive assistants who joined Toastmasters to enhance their professional and personal competencies.

In his blog Naseer reminds us of the power of human potential, citing a quote by inventor Thomas Edison: "If we did all the things we were capable of, we would literally astound ourselves."

## OfficePro: Demand for admins growing

The demand for admins "is growing faster than normal," according to Kelly Workman, vice president of OfficeTeam in North America, who was interviewed for a story in the March/April edition of OfficePro, the magazine of the International Association of Administrative Professionals.

In the article, Workman projected that the demand will grow about 20 per cent in the next six or seven years. The article was written by Williesha Morris, a virtual assistant (VA) and freelance writer.

## Administrative Assistant's

UPDATE

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# Your LinkedIn profile

## *The EASIEST ways to get a testimonial*

By Leslie Hughes

One of the best ways you can position yourself as an expert is to include testimonials on your LinkedIn profile.

Here are two very easy ways to get someone to write you a recommendation.

**LinkedIn**  
STRATEGIES

Credit: Evan Lomay/Shutterstock

### APPROACH #1

#### Give a testimonial, GET a testimonial

If you write a testimonial for someone, they will feel compelled to write one in return.

**How to GIVE a recommendation on LinkedIn:**

- Simply visit the personal profile for one of your connections.
- Beside the "Send a message" button, click on the downward arrow and click on the third link marked "Recommend."

LinkedIn will prompt you to identify how you will be recommending them:

- as a colleague (you worked with them at the same company)
- as a service provider (you hired them as a client)
- as a business partner (you worked with them at different companies)
- student
- You will then identify your relationship, your title at the time, their title at the time and the testimonial.
- Be sure to customize a personal message to your connection.



### APPROACH #2

#### Ask for one

This approach is best when you're asking a former boss or client to provide you with a testimonial.

**How to ASK for a recommendation on LinkedIn:**

- Click "Profile" in the navigation bar.
- Directly beside the grey "EDIT" button, you will see a small arrow that points down.
- Hover over that button and the second prompt will allow you to "Ask to be recommended."

The next page that will appear will have a few fields you will need to customize.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Only send ONE request at a time and personalize/customize the requests. Not only will you be more likely to receive the testimonials you want, but you can specifically ask for them to highlight certain areas or jobs you worked on together.

You are much more likely to receive that testimonial if you write it for them or highlight the areas you want them to write about. For example: I.....→

Dear John,

I hope you're doing well. I just wanted to say how terrific it was working with you on XYZ Project and I'd love to include a recommendation from you on my LinkedIn profile.

I know writing a testimonial can be time consuming, so I've written something below to make the process easier.

*"I have had the pleasure to work with Jane Smith as she provided excellent results on our XYZ Project at ABC Company. Jane's attention to detail and quick turnaround time proved to be the perfect solution. I definitely recommend Jane, and look forward to working with her again in the future."*

John, I really appreciate your time and please feel free to edit the copy so that it fits your "voice" and truly outlines my contribution to the project.

Thank you,  
Jane Smith



Leslie Hughes

Leslie Hughes was called a "Social Media Guru" by CBC Radio and has been working in digital marketing since 1997. She is a LinkedIn optimization specialist, professor of social media, corporate trainer and principal of PUNCH!media. PUNCH!media clients include The Children's Wish Foundation of Canada, Guardian Life Insurance Company of America and TVO.  
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## Toastmasters: Where execs and admins sharpen skills

*Continued from page 1*

Since then she has become a Distinguished Toastmaster, the organization's highest rank, and has been a district governor for an area covering most of Ontario.

In her view, the confidence she has gained through her Toastmasters activities translates into being able to communicate effectively at different levels, both inside and outside Blakes. Especially at the executive level, she says, "you want to be concise and to the point ... [because] executives need to know the critical information and move forward quickly."

Organizing one's thoughts into a cohesive, timed speech builds the discipline that helps an admin organize her own work as

well as keep the calendar of her boss, says Carmelita Dela Cruz, executive assistant to two executives, the vice president & managing director and the vice president & controller, Wholesale Finance, Royal Bank Capital Markets in Toronto.



Carmelita Dela Cruz

### Admins are the front line

"You're the front line. You answer the phone of your boss, you represent the company, so if you speak succinctly [and] to the point, you represent your company well," she says.

She says she has developed self-assurance through meeting and dealing with Toastmasters members from all levels of business and government. For example, when welcoming high-level executive visitors to Royal Bank, she uses a few minutes of conversation with them to learn about any personal anecdotes that could ease the introduction to her boss.

Dela Cruz, a 16-year Toastmasters member, Distinguished Toastmaster and, like Binetti, a past district governor, points out that the development of leadership qualities is as much a part of Toastmasters as are public speaking skills.

### Presentation ability sets you apart

Executive assistants are often asked to make presentations or participate in a meeting, says Dela Cruz, "and that presupposes that you ... can organize your thoughts in a timely and structured manner. [This] will set you apart from other staff in your company.

"I have seen over and over people who are brilliant ... who cannot put their ideas in a structure and present them in an inspiring or effective manner."

Becoming an effective listener is integral to becoming an effective communicator, says Shiona McCully, executive assistant to the CFO & VP Finance, Canada Credit Cards and Merchant Solutions, TD Canada Trust in Ottawa.

### "You really, really have to listen"

"I'm always thinking of that movie 'The Devil Wears Prada,'" she says with a laugh. "Meryl Streep comes out and fires off all these instructions to the assistant: 'Get me this and get me that, and don't forget this, and get me that.' You really, really have to listen, and that's part of Toastmasters."

Her listening skills were sharpened, she says, especially by her experiences as a speech evaluator, a required role for Toastmasters members as they progress.

"You might think that this [speaker] is just fantastic and you wouldn't catch that the tone of their voice changes. You might notice that their descrip-

tive language could be changed, [that] they might emphasize a point more. You really have to listen – and that's something we have to do to be effective in our role [as an admin]."

A simple expedient such as phrasing an out-of-office message or leaving a message on someone's voice mail can benefit from the precision and discipline required by a Toastmasters speech, McCully says, recalling her days as a mentor to new hires when she was a senior legal assistant at Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP in Toronto. "There's nothing worse than when somebody leaves a message and you're listening to that message and every second word is um or ah. That was a huge draw for me."

### Skills are valuable beyond work

Binetti, Dela Cruz and McCully all have applied their Toastmasters-inspired skills outside their jobs. Binetti and McCully each chaired the United Way campaign at Blakes, involving speeches to groups as large as 1200 employees.

Dela Cruz officiated at her daughter's wedding, to the delight of her daughter, who told Dela Cruz that people were "blowing their noses every five minutes."

McCully is not as active now in Toastmasters as she once was, but she still keeps in touch. Dela Cruz is a member of four Toastmaster clubs, several of them advanced, with a preponderance of Distinguished Toastmasters as members.

Binetti, whose enthusiasm for Toastmasters endures, says "I'll probably be a member for life."



Shiona McCully



# The answer is in the question

## *Honesty required for successful self-coaching*

**By Cindy Stradling**

As a coach I work with individuals in many careers, including administrative professionals. Often, the biggest task I face is to help them get out of their own way – so they don't trip up on personal inhibitions or other barriers to success. Clients often come to me feeling stuck in their current positions and unsure of the next steps needed to move forward in their careers.

After establishing the career goals and motivation of clients, I help them develop a plan. However, this is often the point where people get stuck, unable to implement their career game plan.

I have devised some self-coaching questions that a client needs to ask – and answer – to identify specific steps and to assess the viability of taking them. It is very important to be totally honest with yourself as this is the only way to uncover what might get in the way of moving forward.

### **For starters, ask yourself three questions:**

**1. Why do I want to make a change and what difference will it make in my life?** This is the most important question to ask yourself. Knowing why and, as importantly, understanding what could look different about your desired career will give you the energy to implement changes. Recently, I worked with a female administrative assistant who wanted to make a career change from administrative assistant to the vice-president of sales to the position of an outside sales representative. Once the admin identified her “why” (in her case to have more autonomy and make more money to send her kids to college), she achieved her goal in 16 months.



Credit: wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock

- 2. “Do I need additional training to move into this position? Who could I ask for recommendations on the best training? How much would it cost? Am I willing to invest in myself?”** These are all great next step questions as the answers generate much-needed information to help in creating a meaningful career plan. When my clients figure out what courses and training are required to fulfill their career goals, they are in a better position to capitalize on opportunities when they arise.
- 3. Is there anything in the way of making this change?** Here it is really important to be honest. Often it is fear of the unknown that stops us. Look at the way you have handled change successfully in the past and use this knowledge in carrying out the changes you now want to make. If you find yourself making excuses and procrastinating, then ask yourself: “What do I need to do/think differently to keep me going?” Another great question to ask is: “If I don't move forward now, what will have changed a year from now?” Once you answer these opening

questions and create a plan, you are ready to take action and visualize what success might look like. The power of focused action and visualization will keep you going, no matter what!

A final word of advice: your willingness to answer these questions honestly can put you on track to achieve your important career goals. I always encourage my clients to listen to their “inner voice” to determine if their self-talk (the doubts and inhibitions) is what needs to change first. It is what we tell ourselves about what is happening — or not happening — that often derails even the most committed person.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the answer is often found in the question.



**Cindy Stradling**

*Cindy Stradling is a career coach and founder of Athena Training and Consulting in Toronto*

# Establishing a VA business: Your essential guidelines

**By Pam Ivey and Elayne Whitfield**

If you're starting out as a virtual assistant, you have many questions about what to do and what to avoid.

For the most part, you'll learn from your own experiences and gain confidence in your business as time goes on, but in the very beginning, there are certainly a few things you need to keep in mind in order to get everything started off on the right foot.

There will always be the struggle of trial and error, but if you get the ball rolling with these basic rules guiding you from the get-go, your business will be on track for serious success.

## Here's what you'll definitely want to do:

### 1) Have the right mindset.

Being a VA means being an entrepreneur, and that requires a very different mindset from any conventional job. As an employee at a job it is common to outsource. Entrepreneurs do not wait to be tasked, nor do they look to others for direction and leadership. As a VA your mindset must be proactive, decisive and centred on ownership of the outcomes you produce.

### 2) Put systems in place right away.

The more prepared you are from the beginning, the easier things will be down the road when your

business really starts moving. Try to anticipate as much of your business' administrative needs ahead of time as you can. Systems for your taxes, invoices, bookkeeping, accounts receivable, etc. should all be set up beforehand. In a lot of cases, having an effective bookkeeping system in place from the beginning can mean the difference between substantial tax penalties and getting a nice refund.

### 3) Perfect your sales technique.

Especially in the beginning, you will serve in all roles of your business, and that includes selling your services. Your income will depend on it, so you have to learn quickly to be confident in your ability and in your services so that you can effortlessly explain to prospective clients why they should work with you rather than your competition.

## What you need to avoid:

### 1) Flying by the seat of your pants.

Starting your business without a plan is a sure way to fail. You've heard it, right... "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." No matter how much of a rush you are in to get your business running and get some income coming in, you cannot risk losing everything to a lack of preparedness. Take the time to do things properly from the beginning.

### 2) Not identifying your target market/niche.

What's going to make you stand out from the crowd is your expertise within a target market. A generic VA business that tries to do everything is going to attract no one. But a successful VA business that has a strong reputation within a niche community is going to attract substantial

business, both from within that market and from the outside.

### 3) Hiding behind your computer.

Just because you work from home doesn't mean that you can never leave. In fact, trying to run a business entirely from behind a computer at home will put a serious ceiling on your success. Always be marketing yourself, and try to expose yourself to face-to-face networking environments whenever possible.

Follow these guidelines and nothing will stop your business from succeeding.

*Pam Ivey is a trainer, speaker and coach, founder of Pam Ivey International, and creator of popular programs like the Virtual Assistant Business Success Blueprint, the Professional Real Estate Assistant Certification program, and the Online Marketing Manager Certification program. Learn more at [www.pamivey.com](http://www.pamivey.com)*



**Pam Ivey**

*Elayne Whitfield is the president of Executive Assistance Business Solutions Inc., the CEO of OMM Solutions, the creator of Online Marketing Made Simple, the Director of both the Global Alliance of Virtual Assistants and the Canadian Association of Virtual Assistants as well as the co-author of How to Build a Successful Virtual Assistant Business.*



**Elayne Whitfield**



Credit: intararit/Shutterstock

# VA tips for retaining clients

**By Jennifer Lewington**

Unlike administrative professionals assigned to a boss or a team in an office, virtual assistants provide remote support to clients on a contract basis.

The ability to turn a first-time client into a monthly retainer is an essential skill for virtual assistants, according to Tawnya Sutherland, founder of VANet-working.com.

"We love our monthly retainer clients," says Sutherland, since the fees are paid up-front and guarantee a reliable flow of monthly income. "They put a smile on our face."

She became a virtual assistant in 1997 after a 19-year career as a secretary with various public sector agencies in British Columbia.

In 2003, she founded VANet-working.com as a forum that offers free and fee-based training to a more than 25,000 registered members.



Tawnya Sutherland

From her experience and that of others, Sutherland identifies the ingredients necessary to develop a long-term relationship with a client. She says the successful VA learns to:

## 1. Under promise and over deliver:

The contract may call for a project to be done in a week. But if the task can be completed efficiently in three days, especially when the client is under time pressure, why not deliver a pleasant surprise?

"You can't do that all the time because they [clients] will expect it of you," cautions Sutherland. "But once in a while it is nice [to do]."

**2. Be an "opinionated expert":** Do you have expertise in PowerPoint, webinars, email marketing or other

supports of value to a client? Be ready to offer suggestions that, based on your expertise, could boost the client's business. For example, if the client offered free webinars as a profile-raising exercise, could you repackage them (for a fee) so they become a revenue generator for the client?

"The worst thing you can do is not give your client your opinion," says Sutherland. "And you want to work with people who value your opinion."

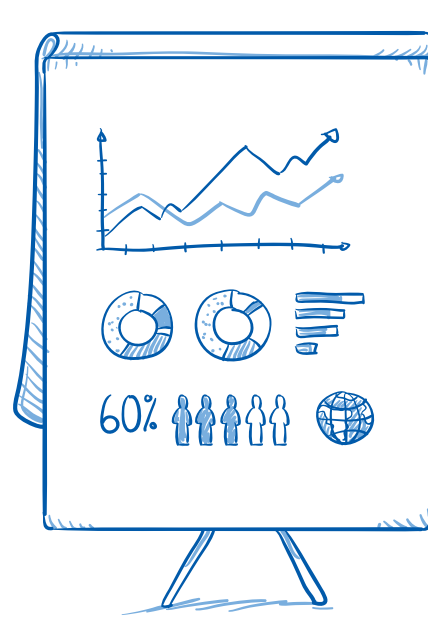
**3. Follow up with the client:** Send a short survey to get feedback on the client's satisfaction with the work. Don't be afraid to ask for a testimonial. Ask how you can assist in providing additional marketing or other business materials. Use friendly reminders, such as the anniversary of a successful job, to find out what the client needs now.

"Anticipate how you can help them [clients] make more money in their business," she says.

## 4. Communicate well...and listen:

Look for ways to understand the client's business so that you can offer relevant support, such as social network marketing. During a big project, provide progress reports. Sutherland says some VAs use project management systems that keep email communication in one place and, as well, keep the client up to date.

"It is all about relationship-building," she says.



Credit: Daniela Barreto/Shutterstock



## 5. Be an asset, not a liability:

Mistakes happen. When you are responsible, own it, offering a free month of service, for example, to remind the client of your commitment to doing professional work.

Ultimately, says Sutherland, the successful VA understands that relationship-building is the way to develop a loyal client base.

"Become more of a business partner so the client can't run the business without you," she says.

## VA networking opportunity

Tawnya Sutherland, host of VA Virtuosos Seminars (#VAVS), will hold an online event May 23-25, 2016, an opportunity for virtual assistants to network with colleagues and industry leaders. For more information: [www.vavirtuosos.com](http://www.vavirtuosos.com)





## Seminars and webinars

### Canadian Management Centre | [www.cmcoutperform.com](http://www.cmcoutperform.com) | (877) 262-2519

- *Communicating Up, Down and Across the Organization* (\$1,995) – Mississauga, May 26-27
- *Moving Ahead: Breaking Behaviour Patterns That Hold You Back* (\$1,995) – Toronto, June 9-10
- *Getting Results Without Authority* (\$2,395) – Ottawa, July 6-8
- *Conflict Management Workshop* (\$1,195) – Toronto, July 20
- *Time Management* (\$1,995) – Mississauga, Aug. 17-18
- *Assertiveness Skills for Women in Business* (\$2,295) – Toronto, Aug. 29-31

### Job Design Concepts Inc. | [www.jobdesignconcepts.com](http://www.jobdesignconcepts.com) | (416) 447-8832

- *Meeting Minutes Made Easy* (\$399) – Toronto, May 12
- *Project Management* (\$399) – Toronto, May 19
- *Getting & Staying Organized* (\$399) – Toronto, June 2
- *Business Writing* (\$399) – Toronto, June 9
- *Developing Emotional Intelligence* (\$399) – Toronto, June 12
- *Customer Service Skills* (\$399) – Toronto, July 14

### On-The-Right-Track Training and Consulting | [www.on-the-right-track.com](http://www.on-the-right-track.com) | (877) 213-8608

- *Filter, Frame and Choose: How to Communicate with Emotional Intelligence* (\$124) – webinar, May 26

## AAA annual meeting

The Association of Administrative Assistants (AAA) will hold its 64th annual general meeting and its 2016 professional development workshop at the Metropolitan Hotel in Vancouver June 2-4.

The AAA is a Canadian non-profit organization offering professional development opportunities to office assistants and professionals from a wide range of roles and titles.

It offers the Qualified Administrative Assistant designation earned through completing courses at selected universities and colleges.

At the AGM, members will elect national directors to the AAA board. The board consists of five nationally elected officers, six branch presidents and the nominations chair and parliamentarian.

The branches are in Alberta (Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray) and Ontario (Barrie/Simcoe County, Hamilton and Toronto). There is also a member-at-large category.

Workshop speakers will be Dawn Carson, an author and expert on creating a positive mindset, and Alan Mallory, an international speaker, author and professional development trainer. He will illustrate how admins can establish and reinforce the professional development skills and mindsets essential for success. Alan and his family are Canadians who set a world record as the first family of four to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

For more information, visit [www.aaa.ca/conference](http://www.aaa.ca/conference).

## MEETING NOTICE

### *Navigating the Waters of Change*

Exploring four critical competencies: behavioural interviewing, engagement, influential leadership, core creativity

The annual professional development workshop of the Edmonton Chapter of the Association of Administrative Assistants

Thursday, May 5, 2016

Chateau Louis Hotel & Conference Centre

11727 Kingsway Ave. NW  
Edmonton, Alberta  
8:00 a.m – 4:00 p.m.

Register online: [www.eventbrite.ca/e/aaa-2016-annual-professional-development-workshop-tickets-22425337789](http://www.eventbrite.ca/e/aaa-2016-annual-professional-development-workshop-tickets-22425337789)

For more information: [edmonton-branch@aaa.ca](mailto:edmonton-branch@aaa.ca)