

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANTS

Professional Assistants: They are the first impression of their office that people will see, therefore they must be professional and cordial at all times. Assistants set the tone for the office and its reputation. There are six basic soft skills that Assistants should master to ensure they are representing their office well.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You are an extension of your boss and therefore will work closely on projects and with information that is confidential. Confidentiality is an attribute that you **MUST** possess and must guard with all that you have – it is your most important asset. Confidentiality can be broken in many ways, not only using words, but facial expressions and gestures can indicate information to others. Knowing confidential information can make you feel empowered. Be careful not to let your pride guide your actions. Others may sense you know something and ask or hint regarding the information. It can make you feel important, but it is imperative that you put your integrity first and not divulge what you know. Holding confidences builds the relationship of trust between you and your boss. That trust is vital to maintaining your position with him/her and representing your office with integrity. Once a confidence is broken, it is rarely restored.

GOSSIP

Nothing destroys a reputation quicker than being considered a gossip. An Assistant should never engage in gossip, particularly on campus. If people often come to you to gossip, you should ask yourself, why. It is not because you are a terrific listener, but likely because you join in or initiate it yourself. Do not associate with gossipers. It is imperative for an Assistant to master the art of stopping gossip when others come to them. Others will look to you for what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. It is imperative that gossip not be an attribute associated with you or your office. You can reduce the likelihood that any gossip will be about you or your work by remaining professional at all times.

PROTECT THE REPUTATION OF THEIR BOSS

An Assistant will need to have a deep respect and protection for their boss and the office they represent. While you might not always agree with the decisions your boss makes, it is important that you support them. Your job is to protect the reputation of the office and your boss in the community. The number one rule of being an Assistant is that you **NEVER, EVER** speak badly of your boss or his/her projects, especially to anyone on staff. Their reputation on campus, and in the community, is important to their leadership. Be sure the

words you use regarding your boss are positive and uplifting. Being mindful again that your facial expressions and gestures can communicate just as loud as words. *Ex: Your boss is late again for a meeting. The parents he is meeting with are getting frustrated. You text him again and he replies that he forgot and he is hurrying. You look at the text and roll your eyes and shake your head in disgust. Everyone in the room now knows that you disrespect him and you have set the tone for how they may respond to him as well.* Disrespecting your boss is a clear indicator that you need to re-evaluate whether this is the right position or work relationship for you. As with confidentiality, once this type of trust is broken, it is rarely restored.

HAVING YOUR BOSS' EAR

From time to time, Assistants will have information that is important to their boss and can help them from making a mistake. It is important that you have your boss' ear to share that information with them. An Assistant has to learn the fine art of gleaning information that is important and sharing that information in a professional way. The key to having your boss' ear is to not bend it consistently. If you share every piece of information that comes your way, then your boss will tune you out and it will devalue your voice. If you do not share consistently, when the opportunity arises where you can protect them, you will have their ear and you can go to them with confidence. When you approach your boss, be sure to start by alerting them that you are concerned about them or their reputation in regards to an issue. Next, it is important to be open, transparent and honest. They may choose not to adhere to your concern, but it is your duty to alert them and protect them. Being open about protecting them and sharing your concerns will assist in building a stronger trust between the two of you and promote a healthy professional relationship.

USE THE RIGHT TONE

Your tone of voice can let others know exactly how you are feeling. It is very important to speak with the right tone of voice and exhibit a positive attitude in the office and the community. Your positive energy should energize others and form warm relationships with fellow co-workers. Speaking on the telephone with the right tone of voice can help towards diffusing an angry parent or calm a concerned student. If your tone suggests a condescending attitude, frustration or boredom, you will lose respect and undermine your own efforts. Smiling when you speak can also put others at ease. Make sure your office and attitude are welcoming and comfortable to others.

RESPECT FOR CO-WORKERS

Assistants always project an attitude of respect for everyone on staff, whether they clean the floors or lead the board. Everyone should feel that you respect them. When an issue arises with a fellow co-worker and they are being addressed or disciplined by the leader of

the office, often they are embarrassed that you are likely aware of the situation. It is the job of the Assistant to ensure that person continues to feel respected in your office. Smiling and acknowledging them in the halls is an easy start. Having small conversations regarding other subjects will put them at ease with you again and they will begin to feel comfortable moving forward. Your continued acceptance opens the door for others in the community to follow.

These six basic soft skills are effective tools for an Assistant to set the right tone and lead an office effectively. They will help to develop a healthy reputation for the office you represent within the community.