



## Ten Qualities of a Great Administrative Assistant

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**W**hat makes a great administrative assistant? Is it outstanding organizational skills; judgment and strength as a gatekeeper; a knack for anticipating and solving problems? It's not all about making coffee, typing letters, answering phones, or ordering lunch and office supplies anymore.

Administrative assistants are responsible to serve as the lifeblood of the association in providing information and communication for the manager and the association members.

The assistant provides a wide range of support for the manager and plays a crucial role in handling the association's operations. The association

assistant must be highly self-motivated and be able to work in a high-energy, dynamic environment. Listed below are ten qualities of a great administrative assistant:

### Competence

The first quality to look for in an administrative assistant is competence. The assistant should demonstrate excellent spelling and grammar skills, computer literacy, and the ability to have a strong working knowledge of MS Word, Outlook, Excel, and database management. The administrative assistant must have knowledge and understanding of scheduling, payroll, collections, budgets, reports, and basic accounting principles.

### Excellent Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Communication is the backbone of any organization. An administrative assistant's communication skills need to be outstanding. Personality is a quality that is sometimes overlooked. The assistant is the first point of contact in the management office, and, in essence, will be putting the manager's "best foot forward" with the residents before the manager ever has interaction with them. The assistant should always answer the phone and greet visitors with a smile on his/her face. Most of the time a resident is calling or visiting the office to address a complaint or reach out for assistance with a problem. The ability to handle angry or upset people is critical. The assistant will need to think on his or her feet, have patience, and good listening and

communication skills. They must also have the ability to screen calls, handle conflict, and deal with negativity. The assistant must effectively find solutions, establish strong telephone etiquette, and communicate in an empathetic, courteous, positive and professional manner.

### Organization Skills and Detail Oriented

Another important quality that you as a manager should look for in your administrative assistant is organization and an attention to details. Multitasking is a must. Generally, most association offices are very busy, and the administrative assistant wears many hats. Organization is critical when juggling people, paper, and priorities. Following up and following through are critical to tracking and organizing events, projects, and objectives.



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The assistant needs to know how to organize files and handle incoming and outgoing mail, petty cash receipts, inventory of key fobs and clickers, general correspondence, reports, meeting notices, work orders, board correspondence, emails, board packages, agendas, insurance certificates, financial and unit owner records, preventative maintenance and operations, emergency procedures, policies and procedures, sale/lease transfers, invoices, etc.

### Handles Politics and Confidentiality

It is imperative that your assistant demonstrates the ability to maintain confidentiality and handle office politics. It is an unavoidable fact that in an association, residents file complaints about each other, management, the board, and employees. The assistant is privy to all sorts of information regarding sales/leases, violations, employee matters, legal matters, and board issues. Clearly communicate the need for confidentiality to your assistant and build on that trust. It is essential that the assistant stay “at arms length” and not discuss personal matters with the residents. It is crucial that the assistant understand that medical records, information pertaining to the sale or lease of a unit, and association litigation cannot be shared with the association members.

### Presents a Professional Appearance and Attitude

The assistant should have the ability to exude a positive image that reflects well on the association. Dress for success—establish a dress code and stick to it. The first thing that is needed to enhance one’s professional appearance is a professional attitude. Equally important is body language in the workplace, particularly in a board or staff meeting. If assistants are slouching, shuffling their papers, not paying attention,

and doodling instead of taking good notes, they do not look credible and give the manager and the association a bad impression. The assistant establishes the decorum and public relations with the community.

### Has an Understanding of the Industry and the Language

The concept of community living requires an assistant to have a basic understanding of this model. Learning these association terms can aid your assistant tremendously.

- *Maintenance Fees*—This is the monthly fee that the owners pay that covers the maintenance of the common areas and funds the reserves. The assistant’s role is to make sure they are collected.
- *Reserve Study*—This is a study the association performs to indicate for future capital expenditures and repairs. The assistant’s role is to assist the manager and be responsible for scheduling this study and updating records.
- *Common Areas*—This is the area outside of an individual unit that is owned and maintained by the association. The assistant will be responsible for monitoring the scheduling of all vendors that maintain these areas.
- *Board of Directors*—Members of the association that volunteer to serve and oversee management and the daily operations. It is essential that the assistant establish a good relationship with the board.

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- *Governing Documents*— These include the declaration, CC&R's, bylaws, and articles of incorporation and state statutes, which provide the basic rights and responsibilities of each owner, resident, guest, and the association.

**Team Player**

The assistant should institute a team environment in order to achieve the highest rate of success for both the manager and the association. The assistant needs to support the manager by informing him or her of any issues that have been brought to his or her attention. The assistant should consistently anticipate the manager's needs and identify fundamentals for supporting the staff, residents, and board. An assistant should never say, "That is not my job!" and he or she should always be willing to go the extra mile and do whatever it takes to get the job done.

**Time Management Skills**

The five deadliest words that rob an assistant's time are "Have you got a minute?" Everyone's the culprit—owners, vendors, staff, etc. Knowing how to deal with interruptions is one of the best skills an assistant can learn. Attend to each and every need and prioritize. The most effective people work well from clear desks. The assistant's long-term goals should impact his/her daily activities and be included on his or her "to do" list. Without a goal or objective, people tend to just drift personally and professionally. Working

with the manager and clarifying objectives demonstrates an assistant has good time-management skills.

**Peacemaker**

Dealing effectively with difficult personalities and complex situations from angry residents to yellors and screamers, administrative assistants should understand and implement ways in which to manage those whose actions make the process complicated, despite their position within the organization. Diplomacy and discretion are a requirement. The objective is to keep the peace. The assistant should be able to keep a difference of opinion from escalating into an argument or, at least, deal with the situation calmly.

**Has an Understanding of the Tools of the Trade—  
Voicemail, Email, Memos, and More**

It is not just about learning computer technology, filing, and data entry. From business writing skills, writing style and grammar, using the computer, to telephone etiquette and transferring a call, the knowledge of using office communication tools for maximum effectiveness is vital. Use of a scanner, copier, fax, security cameras, phone systems, security access systems, and radios are some of the tools of the trade that the assistant needs to know how to operate.

Administrative Professionals Day formerly known as Secretaries' Day is an unofficial holiday observed on the third or fourth Wednesday of April. If you have an administrative assistant that possesses these great qualities, then show your appreciation by giving flowers, a small gift, or lunch at a restaurant. This is a great way to recognize your wonderful administrative assistant! ■

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