



UNIT-1

The Job Functions of a PA / Secretary

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Unit 1

The Job Functions of a PA / Secretary

Why Are You Needed?

Role and Responsibilities

As an administrative assistant, you are hired to relieve your busy employer of a great deal of work, especially the details of office procedure and other matters that do not require your employer's personal involvement. You'll act as a liaison between your boss and the rest of the company. Sometimes you'll act as a buffer. Depending on the size of the company, you may also be called on to perform tasks normally outside the secretarial role in sales, banking, billing, payroll, accounting, advertising, public relations, purchasing, and more. Everything you do for your employer must duplicate as closely as possible what he or she would do if not absorbed in work that couldn't be delegated.

Every businessperson dreams of having the perfect administrative assistant, and every administrative assistant dreams of having the perfect boss. We hope you and your boss will become so well adjusted to each other that you'll work as a team, each trusting the other to carry part of the load in harmony.

What Do Employers Want?

It's helpful to know what an employer expects of a "perfect administrative assistant" so that you can present yourself at your best during both the job interview and those critical first weeks on the job. Here are a few of the most important qualities:

Punctuality:

An employer wants an administrative assistant who is consistently punctual and always on hand during office hours. An administrative assistant who continually arrives even a few minutes late or who is ill frequently can cause havoc in a busy office. The employer knows from experience that such an administrative assistant may not be truly interested in the work. This person will be passed over or terminated in favor of someone with greater respect for the job—an administrative assistant who is always punctual and always there when needed.

Therefore, the employer looks for an administrative assistant who will execute a decision no matter how many alternatives may seem obvious, or no matter what a former boss did in the same situation. In other words, the employer wants **some-one** whose personality will be an asset rather than a handicap.

Loyalty and confidentiality:

Although these qualities are impossible to discover during an interview alone, every boss wants his or her administrative assistant to possess them. In an office, there is nothing more unwelcome than the “human sieve” who constantly chatters about every conversation heard, spreads idle rumors like wildfire, and must constantly be screened from confidential projects and information. No matter how efficient, how educated, and how experienced that administrative assistant is, his or her employment will be short-lived.

And something else:

A keen employer wants more in a prospective administrative assistant than these general qualifications. During an extended interview, the employer will be looking for quick-wittedness, flexibility, commitment to work, a certain quality and level of conversation, and a sense of courtesy. This last attribute is essential in establishing cordial relations with clients and fellow employees.

Daily Routine

Your Office

Office conditions for administrative assistants vary. Your employer may be an entrepreneur working from a small office or even from home. You may find yourself in a law firm, a doctor’s office, a sales office, a warehouse front office, a retail business, or a service business. Your company may have branches in several states or even several countries. The general activity of the business—selling, servicing, or perhaps manufacturing—may be located in the same area where you’re expected to perform your job, or it may be far removed from where you work. All these conditions may change over time as the company does

Your Workstation

The location and conditions of where you do your day-to-day work can be critical to how effectively you perform. Look first at how your workstation is placed physically within the entire office setup. Is there a reason your desk is where it is? Analyze the traffic patterns around and through your workspace. Do coworkers have to pass through it to get from one operation to another? Study your own work patterns. How often do you go back and forth to the filing cabinets each day? How far away from your desk are they? Do other workers share these files? Is there a more efficient way to organize the office?

You may find it helpful to draw a sketch of your office and try out alternative arrangements on paper before you make suggestions to your employer. Each proposed change must consider two questions: (1) Will you work more effectively in a different office layout? (2) Will your proposed changes affect another worker’s effectiveness?

Whether or not you have input on the physical placement of your workstation, your desk and immediate workspace are yours to organize in a way that makes you comfortable and allows you to be as productive as possible. Your immediate **work-space** may include a desk, chairs, files, bookshelves, credenza, and portable tables. As you arrange these items, plan a layout that considers your work habits as well as the traffic patterns for yourself, other employees, and clients.

Here are just a few factors to consider:

Desk chair

Your chair should help promote good posture and back support, and it should be adjustable so you will not tire quickly. If possible, try to obtain an ergonomically designed chair.

Lighting.

Proper lighting is highly important in any office. Your work area should have sufficient lighting to avoid causing you eyestrain and headaches yet be positioned to minimize glare on your computer monitor.

Desk

Your desk should be large enough to hold the office supplies and equipment you work with most often and to provide a clear area on which to work. Keep your most often used supplies and equipment, (such as your telephone, memo pad, in-and-out box, and stapler), within easy reach when you are seated at your desk. Any reference books that you use frequently should also be easy to reach, as well as a desk reference organizer. A desk organizer with slots is useful to store various work-in-progress folders so they can be quickly found when needed.

Supplies

In your own desk, keep enough frequently used supplies to last for a week. At the beginning of each week, restock your supply. Neatly arrange these materials in drawer organizers, small boxes, or other containers. Store ink pads upside down.

Computer

Your computer should be on a surface apart from your desk, preferably its own desk or table. In any case, you should be able to fit your legs under this surface comfortably as you work. Power cords should be kept out of the way, so you will not inadvertently disconnect them with your feet. Multiple power cables can be connected together with twist-ties.

Besides a computer, keyboard, monitor, and printer, your computer workstation will most likely also be equipped with a mouse, a good-quality mouse pad for extra traction, a modem or network card for communications and file sharing, a hard disk drive, an external storage drive, DVD-ROM storage system, printer, and software reference manuals. Other useful accessories to help organize and protect this

equipment include plastic dust covers for both the computer and keyboard when they are not in use, a computer fan to prevent overheating, an antiglare monitor cover to reduce eye-strain, and acoustical hoods for printers. All expensive office equipment such as computers, monitors, and printers should be equipped with a surge protector.

If you work for a small company, you may have to arrange all these elements so they can also be used by fellow employees without interfering with your other work.

Office Supplies

Depending on the size of the company and your own responsibilities, you may have to order office supplies for yourself, your department, or the entire business. You can purchase supplies at an office supply store, in person or by ordering over the phone, by fax, or by mail from an office supply catalog. You can also use office supply **web-sites** such as Staples.com, Officemax.com, or OfficeDepot.com to order online. Purchases can be shipped or delivered.

When determining an order, do not overestimate your need. A multiple-item **dis-count** is not always useful because certain items (such as beverages and snacks) **can-not** be stored too long. Keep an inventory of your supplies and when you use them. A logbook is a useful way to keep a record of supply use.

In addition to everyday supplies like pens, pencils, staples, paper clips, and file folders, some items may need special consideration. For example, fax paper, computer printer toner or ink cartridges, computer diskettes, copier replacement cartridges or toner, and copier paper must be ordered with your exact office equipment in mind.

Office supplies should be kept in a supply cabinet, shelf, or file cabinet. If coworkers have access to these supplies, consider labeling the shelves to help stay organized. Keep the supply storage area orderly and clean. Items that you use most often should be stored at eye level, where they will be easy to see and reach. Those that might spill should be kept on the bottom shelf. Try to keep the label from the original packaging attached to the supplies; the information will be helpful when reordering the item. For the same reason, keep opened reams of copier and office paper inside the wrapper, leaving the label on one end. There are many different types and weights of office paper, and some are better suited for certain applications than others. For example, most copiers work best with 20-pound uncoated paper stock. Saving the label will help ensure that you have the right product for the job.

Work Planning

The first thing to do when you arrive at the office every day should be to air the rooms and regulate the heat or air conditioning (unless it's set on a permanent basis by building maintenance). Then arrange your desk for maximum efficiency, and replenish your supplies. Prepare your notebook and pencils for taking phone messages or to be ready if your employer gives you a task that requires taking notes.

Consult your desk calendar or your computer's calendar to be sure you're aware of all you must do during the day. Check your list of recurring matters: appointments, meetings, payroll dates, bill payments, and tax or insurance deadlines. Give your employer a reminder list of appointments and other activities, and prepare any material from the files he or she will need.

As part of your normal daily routine, try to order your activities in the most productive way. When you have to leave your desk to run an errand, for example, do other errands at the same time. Whenever possible, use the telephone instead of delivering a message in person (unless, of course, your employer asks you to do so). You may also use email.

If you have tasks that involve mailing or shipping, plan them with pickup and delivery times in mind. Maintain a daily To-Do list on paper or in your computer, and check off each item as it is accomplished. When new projects come in, try to complete them as quickly as possible. Prioritize your work. If you have several ongoing projects, and a new one comes in, ask your employer which one has the highest priority.

Each evening before you leave the office, make a list of what you need to do the following workday. Then put away all of your work and work-in-progress files, either in your desk drawers or in a filing cabinet. Work that is especially sensitive, such as client lists or accounting records, should be put away in a locked file cabinet.

Your regular routine includes keeping your work area clean. Clean out your desk drawers periodically. Your computer and other office equipment should be cleaned using a slightly damp towel. Compressed air in a can is useful for blowing dust off your computer keyboard and monitor screen. Disk-drive cleaning kits use a special diskette to clean the internal working parts.

In addition to maintaining your immediate area, schedule regular servicing for all office equipment as part of a preventive maintenance program. You do not want to wait for equipment to break down in the middle of a big project with a firm deadline. Here, the old adage is so important: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Finally, always be thinking of ways you can improve your own performance and the efficiency of the office. Look for problems, and try to find ways to solve them. An orderly, smoothly running business has a greater chance for success, and your company's success will help ensure your own.

Further Reading: