

THE ROLE OF TIME MANAGEMENT FOR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS IN IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

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Abstract

Administrative assistants are expected to get the job done well and on time and are often required to take responsibility for tasks not directly associated with their function. In addition, they are expected to assist their managers in managing their schedule and tasks as well as deal with a variety of questions and complaints from people within and outside of the organisation. As managers mostly rely their administrative work on their administrative assistant, it is essential to ensure that the administrative assistants are well equipped to deal with ever-changing workloads and deadlines. The only way for them to maintain control of their tasks and workload is to learn how to do more in less time and deal effectively with the constant interruptions in their working day.

Key words: administrative assistance, time management, office efficiency

Abstrak

Para asisten administrasi diharapkan untuk dapat menyelesaikan pekerjaan mereka dengan baik dan tepat waktu serta sering diminta untuk memikul tanggung jawab atas tugas-tugas yang tidak terkait langsung dengan fungsi mereka. Selain itu, mereka diharapkan dapat membantu para manajer mengelola jadwal dan tugas mereka serta menangani berbagai pertanyaan dan keluhan dari orang-orang dalam maupun orang-orang dari luar organisasi. Oleh karena kinerja para manajer sangat tergantung pada asisten administrasi, maka sangatlah penting untuk memastikan bahwa para asisten administrasi dapat menangani beban kerja mereka dengan baik dan maksimal dalam batas waktu yang lebih terbatas serta beban kerja yang terus berganti bahkan bertambah. Satu-satunya cara bagi mereka untuk mempertahankan kontrol atas tugas dan beban kerja mereka adalah dengan belajar bagaimana berbuat lebih banyak dalam waktu terbatas serta menangani interupsi yang terjadi secara konstan dalam hari kerja mereka.

Kata Kunci: asisten administrasi, manajemen waktu, efisiensi kantor

Time is one of the most valuable assets of an organization. The success of an organization mostly relies on how its employees use the time given each day efficiently and effectively. Hence, it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that the time spent on his or her job is used productively. The ability to prioritize tasks and manage time is a skill that must be present in an administrative assistant. The task of an administrative assistant includes a variety of job description that must take the issue of time management into serious account.

Most organizations these days rely on their administrative assistant to perform communication duties and data processing. These duties, if not handled appropriately, may hinder an organization from achieving their desired goals

and mission. Therefore, the issue of time management is an important thing that each employee must aim to improve. This paper wishes to discuss the importance of enhancing time management skills of an administrative assistant in order to improve organizational efficiency.

The Responsibility of an Administrative Assistant

In nearly every industry the general responsibilities of an administrative assistant is to perform clerical duties. For some administrative assistants, like those who work in the medical offices or legal offices, their responsibilities may be more specialized than those who work in business companies or corporations. In corporations, administrative assistants provide office support to

executives, managers, and other professionals (Bayliss, 2014).

Today, administrative assistants may work in a variety of settings from small companies, church, educational institutions, medical offices, law firms, as well as government offices. Whatever model of firms or offices they are in, it is stated that:

All administrative assistants always work from a desk and use a computer and the internet throughout the course of their day. Most administrative assistant duties revolve around managing and distributing information within an office. This generally includes answering phones, taking memos, and maintaining files. They may also be in charge of sending and receiving correspondence, as well as greeting clients and customers (Jaffer, 2014, p. 2).

For a small company, administrative assistants are also required to take the responsibility to keep the record of office expenditures. Duties may range from creating spreadsheets to reporting expenses to an office manager. As such, some administrative assistants may be required to be knowledgeable in office bookkeeping software, such as Microsoft Excel.

Planning events like board meetings and lunch may also be the responsibility of the administrative assistants. This may require searching vendor prices or inquiring about participants' availability. Other duties may include scheduling appointments and preparing presentation materials. Aside from storing, organizing, and managing files, the administrative assistants may need to type, edit, and proofread documents. Some assistants may need to take dictation or record the minutes of meetings.

In some fields they may be required to have extensive professional knowledge. Accordingly, duties for these assistants may be more specialized. For example, legal administrative assistants may need to have a thorough understanding of legal terminology and procedures, while medical assistants may need to be well versed in dealing with insurance companies and reading medical reports (Administrative assistant: Jobs and duties, 2014).

Time Management and Administrative Assistance

Time management is the ability to use one's time productively, especially at work. As stated by Harris (2008), time management is the process of skillfully applying time to finish and perfect a specific activity within time constraint. According to Business Dictionary (2014), time management is a systematic, priority-based structuring of time allocation and distribution among competing

demands. Since time cannot be stored and its availability can neither be increased beyond nor decreased from the 24 hours, the term 'time budgeting' is stated to be the more appropriate one (Time Management, 2014).

Time management also refers to the way things are organized and planned and how long it will be spent on specific activities. It may seem counter-intuitive to dedicate precious time to learning about time management, instead of using it to get on with the work, but the benefits are enormous:

1. Greater productivity and efficiency
2. A better professional reputation
3. Less stress
4. Increased opportunities for advancement
5. Greater opportunities to achieve important life and career goals

Failing to manage time effectively can have some very undesirable consequences:

1. Missed deadlines
2. Inefficient work flow
3. Poor work quality
4. A poor professional reputation and a stalled career
5. Higher stress levels

Time management and paperwork.

Administrative assistants normally has tremendous amount of paper work. Much time is spent in dealing with the flow of office documents and papers. This can only be saved if effective procedures are established for handing paperwork. The cluttered or stacked desk is a common sight in many offices. People have many reasons for letting their desks get piled high with papers. Some believe the cluttered desk gives people the impression that this person must really be busy. Some are convinced that they do not have time to clear their desk. Others believe that having papers readily accessible is the most efficient way of operating (Ezenwafor, 2013).

Although some people seem to function effectively with cluttered desks and take great pride in being able to locate a particular document instantly, most people realize that shuffling papers and hunting for things is a waste of time. Furthermore, most people find that entering the office in the morning and immediately facing a myriad of papers is not a particularly pleasant experience (Harris, 2008). On the other hand, some people spend an inordinate amount of time maintaining a clear desk by filing or placing everything out of sight even though some of the papers will be needed in a few minutes. They believe that the clear desk provides evidence that they are well-organized and efficient. Most people find that some things need to be left on the

desk throughout the day and that neither totally desk nor one with numerous stacks of papers may be practical.

When at all possible, administrative assistance should take action on a document rather than build up a backlog of pending items. They should develop and adhere to a procedure for organizing the desk and processing paperwork that is appropriate for their office situation. No one plan is necessarily appropriate for each person, for each office, or for each day.

The following are some tips to effectively manage paperwork as presented by Thompson (2014):

1. Avoid saving unnecessary documents: Administrative assistants should not make a habit of saving everything that finds its way to them. They should take a few seconds to glance through the content and save a file only if it is relevant to the work activity. Having too many unnecessary documents adds to clutter and makes it harder to find things in the future. They should be selective about what to keep.
2. Follow a consistent method for naming files and folders: For instance, the administrative assistants should divide a main folder into subfolders for customers, vendors, and co-workers. They will give shortened names to identify what or whom the folders relate to. They will put a different appearance or look to different categories of folders. This can make it easy to tell them apart at first glance.
3. Store related documents together, whatever their type: For example, they store reports, letters, presentation notes, spreadsheets, and graphics related to a particular project in a single folder rather than having one folder for presentations for all projects and another folder for spreadsheets for all projects. This way, it is much quicker to find documents for a particular project.
4. Separate ongoing work from completed work: Some people prefer to keep current or ongoing work on their desk until a job is completed. Then, once it is done, they move it to the appropriate location where files of the same category are stored. At periodic intervals (for example, every one or two weeks), they move files no longer working on to the folders where the completed work is stored.

clear

5. Avoid overfilling folders: If they have a large number of files in one folder or a large number of subfolders in a main folder, they can break them into smaller groups (subfolders or sub-subfolders). For instance, they divide a folder called Business Plan into subfolders called BP2008, BP2009, and BP2010. Likewise, they will divide a folder for a client named Delta Traders into subfolders named Delta Traders Sales Presentations and Delta Traders Contracts. The idea is to place every file into a logical folder or subfolder rather than have one huge list of files. Having stated this, there is usually little point in creating a folder for fewer than about five documents.
6. Make digital copies of paper documents with a scanner: This is useful if they do not have much space to store paper documents or if they want to archive documents without destroying them completely. This will not be appropriate for all types of documents, such as with legal contracts or documents with original signatures. Therefore, they must use their best judgment here.

Time management and telephone use. Even though the telephone is one of the greatest time-saving devices ever invented, frequently it does not serve that purpose. Administrative assistants make and receive telephone calls. It is common that at the conclusion of the conversation, they realize that nothing is accomplished. It will be better if prior thought has been given, and the call need not be made.

To avoid unnecessary phone call, the administrative assistants should plan the message just as they would if they were writing a memorandum or letter. To appear organized, to avoid discussing extraneous matters, and to obviate the need for a follow-up call they need to ask or answer, they must have on their desk: the files, correspondence, or background information that are likely to be needed for such a call.

They will also spend less time making telephone calls by looking up the numbers and making several calls at one time. When they know that the people they need to call are usually in their offices at only a certain time of the day, they should plan to make the calls at that time. For some people, the length of the phone calls is as much of a time waster as the number of calls. If the call involves a routine matter, they should immediately get to the point and then end the conversation. If the nature of the job and the

relationship with other people they talk to phone may require a certain amount of small talk, they should keep the discussion on the specific points

When they first realize that a telephone call is not going to result in the desired information, they should immediately suggest that either them or the other person call back or send the information. By acting business-like and using subtle techniques, the administrative assistants can let those with whom they must talk know that they do not have the time or the desire to carry on lengthy conversations over the telephone.

Administrative assistants should seldom need to make or receive a personal call while at the office. If the need arises, they should always keep the conversation short (Lovett, 2014).

Time management and office visitors. All office workers have the experience of being interrupted by people. Whether the visitors need to discuss important business related matters or want to engage in socializing, it always interrupts the task on which are being worked. As a result, the chain of thought is broken, and often much more valuable time is required as to resume the work after the visitor leaves.

The people with whom the administrative assistants must have frequent interaction include the supervisor and co-workers, customers, suppliers, or others outside the organization. In order to avoid the idea they are aloof or unfriendly, administrative assistants can minimize the number and the length of the interruptions by making changes in the physical environment, for instance by not making eye contact with the other person or keep the door closed. By closing the door, that is not necessarily making them unavailable, but they are limiting other accessibility to interrupt.

When they work in an area with several people and have no door to close, they may have frequent interruptions by co-workers who want to socialize. They may be able to turn the desk so that they will not be facing other workers or place some type of divider between their desk and the desks of others. By placing the desk so that they will not be facing passageway, they can also avoid making eye contact without offending the co-workers.

If the boss interrupts the work frequently, the administrative assistants may be able to suggest that time can be saved by establishing specific times for tasks such as dictating, placing telephone calls, giving instructions, and running errands. When someone outside the organization comes to the office and interrupts the work, the administrative assistants must be friendly and courteous, but no visitor should expect them to stop their work and engage in unproductive

but not spend much time discussing things not related to the specific purpose of the call.

socializing while they are waiting to meet with someone else.

When the administrative assistants must have a quiet time to concentrate or complete a project, their only recourse may be to locate an unused office or area where they may work without being interrupted.

Waiting for others. Often the administrative assistants must wait for their boss and spend a lot of time waiting. Rather than waste time waiting to get in to see the boss or to place or receive a telephone call, they may be able to complete several tasks that take only a few seconds or minutes. The administrative assistants must plan their work so that they will not waste time waiting for others.

If they have to go to another office to pick up some material, they can call and ask that the material be ready when they arrive. They can often plan to use the copying machine during other than peak periods and avoid wasting time by waiting in line. When they know that they will have to wait, they should take along some work so that they may productively use the time while they wait. Perhaps they can proofread a report or read through the shorthand notes of the minutes of a meeting they attended. They might be able to sketch the outline for a graphic aid or plan they schedule for the next day (Vahid, 2014).

Crises and time management. Most of the crises evolve around unfinished task and deadline. Murphy's Law stated that if anything can go wrong, it will (Thompson, 2014). If the administrative assistants find themselves in this situation, they need to take measures to control this major time waster. Not only must other work cease while the crisis is solved, frequently much time is wasted in becoming reoriented to the task that is interrupted.

Crises cannot be eliminated entirely, but they can be controlled by proper planning. When the administrative assistants know that most of the crises revolve around a particular person, task, or deadline, they can anticipate the crises and take preventive action.

If they know that they are usually not given some information they need for a report until the last minute, they can often plan their schedule so that when the information is available, they can devote all of their time to the report. They need to anticipate that some pages of a lengthy report will need to be revised because their boss wants to make changes or because some errors are detected. Ample time should be scheduled to do

the work. They should anticipate that equipment will sometimes fail. When their boss is planning a lengthy trip, they should anticipate that some pressure may be involved in getting material ready for him or her to take along. Changes in flight schedules may have to be accommodated.

With experience, the administrative assistants should be able to plan their work schedule to minimize or eliminate most crisis situations.

Factors affecting office time management

Understanding how time are processed and used during office hour are very crucial for the administrative assistants in relation to their roles in managing time to improve the organization effectively (Jaffer, 2014):

Thinking. Some people mistakenly believe that thinking time is wasted time. The few minutes spend in thinking of the most efficient way to perform a task often considerably reduces the amount of time needed to complete the task. Many companies encourage employees to think by financially rewarding those who recommend better and more efficient ways of doing things.

The most productive employees in a company are often those who spend a considerable amount of time thinking constructively. The administrative assistants should develop the habit of thinking before acting. Before starting to type a table, they should think about what arrangement is best. Before going to an office in another section of the building, they should think of things they may need to do along the way to avoid making another trip.

In addition to thinking before acting, the administrative assistants should develop the practice of always asking themselves "Could the task have been done more efficiently?"

Planning. Daily, weekly, and long range planning is essential to accomplish the maximum amount of work in the most efficient way possible. The first step in developing plans is to identify and list the tasks that must be completed. Most of the time, management experts suggest that an ABC system be used to assign priorities to the various tasks.

Prioritizing. Setting priority can be formulated base on the importance and the urgency of the jobs or events.

The "A" priority. Tasks are those of primary concern and those that must be undertaken at a particular time. Examples of "A" priority work include typing letters that must be included in a particular mail pickup, completing material for the supervisor's 10 o'clock meeting, or making a plane

reservation for the supervisor's urgent trip to a branch office later in the day. Taking minutes at a staff meeting is an example of an "A" priority task that does not involve urgency, but it is one that must be performed at a particular time of the day.

The "B" priority. Tasks are of secondary importance, but they should be completed as soon as the "A" tasks have been accomplished. Most of the daily tasks the administrative assistants must perform are of the "B" type and include routine tasks, such as opening and processing the mail and transcribing dictation.

The "C" priority. Tasks are of low importance. They should be completed during slack periods. Updating the files is an example of "C" priority task (Jaffer, 2010).

Conclusion

Time management is a skill that can be learnt and enhanced. Effective time management enables the administrative assistants to get everything done correctly and on time, avoiding the stress of not meeting deadlines and having to explain to their superiors why a specific task is incomplete. In this way, more time and effort can be spent working effectively and productively, and less is spent worrying.

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