

How has Administrative Support changed in the Last 25 years?

By Mary Judge, Virtually Working for You

Back in the early '80's I started work as a Secretary. I worked for 2 managers who kept me pretty busy all day long doing tasks... typing letters (with carbon copies), typing reports, making travel arrangements, getting coffee (yes, getting coffee!) and sending Telex's & Telecopies (*what's that you may ask? – see below**). As time went on my job evolved into an Administrative Assistant role and then Executive Assistant where I not only worked for more managers, I worked with a Word Processor and then a computer (or PC). Of course we didn't all have our own PC on our desk; we had to go down the hall to the Word Processing room and share the computer with all the other secretaries in the office. This was back in the day when floppy disks were really FLOPPY (7½ square to be exact). Wow, am I dating myself or what?

But as time evolved and with the advent of the Internet, the job of a Secretary or Administrative Assistant (AA) changed into what most people think of today; someone who does a multitude of administrative tasks usually supporting a number of managers in an office situation. How could it possibly change any more than it already has?

Jump ahead a number of years and my employer gave me the opportunity to pursue other interests. What was I to do? I had been a Secretary/Administrative Assistant/ Executive Assistant for 25 years with various companies, each time being given increasingly more responsibility and now was priced out of the job market as an AA due to the number of years experience. No employer was about to hire me at the salary I was making nor was I about to accept anything less than I was worth.

Then I discovered that there is a Virtual world of Administrative Assistants. Virtual... it all sounds so, so... virtual, or not really there... That which is *not real* but may display the full qualities of being real. Hence, a Virtual Assistant; someone who isn't really "there" (ie in the office) but is real and does real work.

Gone are the days when one assistant supported one manager and you'd hear "*Miss Smith, can you come in here please, and bring your steno pad*" from the big, corner office down the hall. If companies are going to cut anywhere, they would cut the administrative staff and more and more managers are now computer literate themselves not needing in-house administrative assistants. More and more businesses have staff who are working off-site or at home offices so they don't have someone "sitting outside their office" ready to administer to their needs, thus the need for a Virtual Assistant (VA).

So what is a VA? A VA is an independent business owner who generally works outside of the corporate office environment, usually from their home. Communication with a VA is usually through telephone, fax, e-mail, or courier. Most entrepreneurs or small business owners don't need or want a full-time administrative assistant, nor can they afford one, but they still need on-going administrative support. This is where a VA would be valuable.

So how do you work with a Virtual Assistant? This may be the most difficult concept for the "real" world to grasp. VA's are generally very experienced individuals and are not employees. They have their own offices, bring a variety of skills to the table and manage how their client's work is carried out. They set their own rates, as well as operating standards and policies, and pay their own taxes.

While a VA can't get your coffee she can certainly make your life easier by letting you get on with what you do best, **managing your business**, while she handles the administrative tasks for you.

If you are looking to work with a VA, do your homework and make sure their skills fit with your needs.

**FYI - The Telex was a system that used telephone-like rotary dialing to send typed messages over the phone lines – kind of like the precursor to an email but much more archaic. The Telecopier was the forerunner to what we know today as the FAX machine.*

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