



# ***The Career Secretary***

**A guide to improving  
your professionalism**

**S A Schilly**

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# The Career Secretary

## A Guide to Improving Your Professionalism

by  
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Ashford Press Publishing  
Southampton  
1987

Published by Ashford Press Publishing 1987  
1 Church Road  
Shedfield  
Hampshire SO3 2HW

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Schilly, Shirley

The career secretary: a guide to improving your professionalism.

1. Secretaries — Vocational guidance

I. Title

651.3'741'023                      HF5547.5

ISBN 1-85253-029-4

Designed and typeset by Jordan and Jordan, Fareham, Hampshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

Dedicated to all secretaries, male and female, who desire to reach  
the goals of professionalism and to contribute to making the  
business world a better place in which to live.

# Acknowledgements

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I am indebted to Shirley S. Englund, Publications Manager/Editor, Professional Secretaries International, for permission to quote that organization's definition of a secretary and its Code of Ethics; to the innumerable seminar leaders, and especially to Bernard H. Petrina, President, Executive-Management Renewal, who have skilfully opened the doors of communication between managers and secretaries, discussing philosophies and ideas, and drowning the myth that 'never the twain shall meet'.

I am also grateful to those presidents, directors, managers, and colleagues with whom I have worked over the years, without whose sharing of problems and solutions this work would not have been started; to Managing Director, Jane F. Tatam, for her special guidance and encouragement; and to my family for all they have given and all that they are.

To each of you, my sincere thanks.

S.A.S.

# Preface

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It is not the intent here to cover all aspects of the secretarial profession; indeed, each phase has been a book subject in its own right. The purpose is to give the reader an insight into the philosophy behind the professionalism of the competent secretary and to suggest ways through which that professionalism may be accomplished.

Management is not only the prerogative of the upper echelon; there are management tools for the secretary. Learning to manage time, work and self is a huge step towards professionalism and gaining the ability to become an integral part of the office team. The key to open these doors is secretarial management.

Although in the past the position of the secretary has usually been considered a female role and that of the manager a male role, this is no longer true today, and sexism is neither intended nor implied here.

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# 1. Introduction

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Many years ago, when women began entering the secretarial field, the salary was a pittance and the prestige very low. Today, with our modern technology, education, and the allowance to exercise our own good judgment, the professional secretary is, above all, an administrative assistant – still a performer of a service but a far more sophisticated, technically trained and respected individual.

Learning to be proficient is one of the most important factors of being a secretary, whether the career – one's profession – is a short one, an interrupted one, or a long one. The earlier in your career you prove your proficiency, the greater your rewards (and the better your opportunities should re-entry be desirable or necessary). Proficiency opens the doors to earning higher salaries as well as earning respect for you as an effective company employee and member of the office team.

What makes a secretary really proficient at the job?

The Professional Secretaries International organization (PSI), formerly known as National Secretaries Association (International), defines a secretary as 'an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, exercises initiative and judgment, and makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.'

Their Code of Ethics: 'To establish, practice and promote professional standards... to promote the interest of the business in which we are employed; to exemplify loyalty and conscientiousness at all times; and to maintain dignity and poise under all circumstances.'

Secretaries throughout the world who enjoy their profession and perform their duties with efficiency and effectiveness are still seeking the prestige they deserve. The part they play in the

business world today is indispensable. But please note: It is the *function* which is indispensable – not the individual performing the function.

A *job* is something that is to be done; a *profession* is a field requiring knowledge and education. One doesn't require typing and shorthand skills to wash the dishes. But if you still believe that the secretarial field is not really a profession, just ask any manager, PhD, whatever, to take dictation, carry it through transcription and mailing, arrange a VIP luncheon (including the menu), and get himself or herself from London to New York for an 8.30 a.m. meeting the next day – with travel tickets in hand, cash in pocket, rental car reserved, guaranteed-late-arrival hotel reservations, and the relevant business material ready to go – all in order in less than an hour. Chances are that the response will be:

1. 'You take care of the luncheon; I'll cancel my trip.'
2. 'You're kidding!'
3. That's *your* job; not mine.'

Yes, that 'job' is something that needs to be done; but it cannot be accomplished without the necessary skills, knowledge and judgment.

To get a better idea of the professionalism of a secretary, let's take a closer look at the company, the manager, the secretary, and the office team.

## 2. The Company

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Two of the most important qualities of any successful business are the attitude and the performance of its employees. Minuses in these areas can mean financial losses for the company – even in the millions – which in turn mean less dividends for shareholders, cutbacks on employee benefits, and less take-home pay. Or, more drastically, the closing of the company.

So, when a position is offered, the company is looking for an individual who has the necessary skills, education, experience, friendliness, appearance, loyalty, and conscientiousness to fill that position efficiently and effectively. *You* beat the competition. *You* won.

You are now a bona fide representative of the company – every time you walk in or out of the office door, every time you greet a customer, every time you answer the telephone. Mr Jones, a prospective customer, may well judge whether or not to let your company handle his business by basing his judgment upon his initial reception. You may very well be the first person with whom he speaks. Therefore, you are a valuable employee because you represent the company.



## 3. The Manager

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