

OPPORTUNITIES

in

Administrative Assistant Careers

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- ✓ Find the information you need to succeed

BLANCHE ETTINGER

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REVISED EDITION

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New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ettinger, Blanche.

Opportunities in administrative assistant careers / Blanche Ettinger. —Rev. ed.
p. cm.Rev. ed. of: Opportunities in secretarial careers / Blanche Ettinger. Lincolnwood
(Chicago), Ill. : VGM Career Horizons, c1999. VGM opportunities series.

ISBN 0-07-147609-1 (alk. paper)

1. Administrative assistants—Vocational guidance. 2. Office practice—
Vocational guidance. 3. Secretaries—Vocational guidance. I. Ettinger, Blanche.
Opportunities in secretarial careers. II. Title.

HF5547.5.E78 2007

651.3'7402373—dc22

2006031077

Pages 33, 34, 37–38, 40–41, 96, 138–39: Information provided by the International
Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), www.iaap-hq.org.

Page 55: Information provided by Robert Half International, Inc.

Page 57: Data provided by Salary.com™, Inc.

Page 74: NALS Code of Ethics is copyrighted by NALS . . . the association for legal
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 DOC/DOC 1 0 9 8 7

ISBN-13: 978-0-07-147609-6

ISBN-10: 0-07-147609-1

Interior design by Rattray Design

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write to the Director of Special Sales, Professional Publishing, McGraw-Hill, Two Penn
Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2298. Or contact your local bookstore.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

PREFACE

THIS FOURTH EDITION of *Opportunities in Administrative Assistant Careers* is designed to enlighten you about the changing office environment, employee demographics, impact of the technological revolution on secretarial or administrative assistant positions, and projections for the future. This is an exciting time for you to be a prospective candidate for a position as an office professional. You will become familiar with the many titles of administrative professionals currently in use that reflect the increased responsibilities and expertise contributed to the organization. Your functions not only will be broad in scope, but the procedures you use will be based on established and evolving technologies and their capabilities.

Searching for a job has always been a difficult task, one that today involves even more options through the Internet. The changing workplace has created new jobs, and the continuing advances in technology are sure to create even more. Where will these jobs be and what kind of training will you need? Not only have titles changed for office professionals, but while the traditional skills of

oral and written communications, organization, record keeping, time management, and interpersonal relations remain very important, expertise is also necessary in such areas as budgeting, project management, teamwork, negotiating, and advanced computer skills.

To plan for a satisfying and fulfilling career, you need to use an organized and systematic approach. Your first step in this process is self-examination: determine what you really want to be and then evaluate your interests, likes and dislikes, personality, abilities, and shortcomings. When you have a realistic image of yourself and understand the forces that motivate you, you are ready to begin your job search in the specialized field of your choice.

While you are still in school, gain as much knowledge and understanding about society and the business world as you can. Learn about computers and the Internet. Become even more familiar than you probably already are with all forms of office technology and equipment, everything from scanners to printers to videoconferencing equipment. Learn how to develop and transmit an electronic résumé. Also, read in this text about the various types of preliminary interviewing procedures: by telephone, on the Internet, and on-site.

This book reflects the latest developments and trends in the administrative professions and provides data on educational preparation, qualifications, promotional opportunities, salaries, trends, and strategies to use in the job search. The latest information available is also given on the administrative profession in Canada.

After you read this book, you should be able to make informed decisions about your future and plan strategies that will enable you to find a rewarding and challenging career.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A SPECIAL THANKS to the many individuals who shared their invaluable comments in the creation of this book to help students bridge the gap between the academic and business worlds.

Many thanks also to Josephine Scanlon for her assistance in preparing this edition.

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THE CHANGING WORKFORCE

AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE assistant, you need to be ready to embrace the challenge of change that has evolved during the last two decades and that affects every aspect of our society: demographic shifts, changing workplace, global economy, office environment, and modes of communication. Computerization and high-tech equipment have given the workplace a new image, altering job descriptions and responsibilities at a revolutionary pace.

What does this mean? It means that to have a successful career as an administrative assistant in the technologically advanced twenty-first century, you must become more skilled in using technology, software, hardware, network systems, multipurpose fax machines, Internet, and e-mail. You will also need to adopt the soft skills: good personal skills, flexibility, responsibility, and a lifelong learning attitude. Office professionals at every level must understand and accept the world in which they work and live and must plan their careers with all the available information about where future jobs will be.

We are living in a very different world—a global economy where the competition is keen, business relationships vary, operational modes differ, and organizations are carefully designed to meet the competition in a timely, effective manner. The aim of this book is to give you a comprehensive overview of the administrative profession so that you will have a greater understanding of this career and the labor market.

Demographic Shifts

People are living longer, and the elderly population is growing. Baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are aging now, and more of them than ever are in the labor force. Ten years ago placement professionals projected that as the average age of the American worker continued to increase, older workers would be experienced and affordable, two qualities prized by employers. This has proven true, as older workers bring experience from past jobs to new positions. In addition, many are working part-time or supplementing pensions from past positions, which means that they may require a lower salary than full-time workers in the prime of their careers.

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that in 2000, 13 percent of the workforce was fifty-five and over, a figure that is expected to increase to 17 percent by 2010. By the year 2050, it is projected that 19 percent of workers will be fifty-five and over. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) reports that nearly seven out of ten workers age forty-five to seventy-four tell the AARP that they plan to work in some capacity in retirement.¹

1. American Association of Retired Persons. "The Aging American Workforce: Get Ready," <http://www.aarp.org/money/careers/employerresourcecenter/researchanddata/Articles/a2004-07-22-agingworkforce.html>, July 25, 2006.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports that the continuing rapid growth of minority groups, particularly Hispanics and Asians, will have a significant impact on the workforce. Immigration, primarily precipitated by the opportunities to find work in the United States, also affected the workforce population as the growth rate of individuals age twenty-five to thirty-four continued to rise.

By 2012, due to faster population growth resulting from a younger population, higher fertility rates, and increased immigration levels, the Hispanic labor force is expected to reach 23.8 million. Despite slower-than-average growth, white non-Hispanics will continue to make up about 66 percent of the labor force.²

Workplace

The technology revolution and the global market are two major factors in the transformation of the workplace. Some companies restructured to maintain a focus on what can be done most productively for growth, profit, and competitive advantage. Other organizations eliminated old jobs and developed new job opportunities. Still others have outsourced many positions in an attempt to utilize less-expensive foreign labor forces.

It is much less common today than in the past for workers to stay in the same job for many years. The introduction of new technologies creates new positions, and advancement is dependent on demonstrated skills and abilities. According to a 2005 survey by the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), almost nine out of ten administrative assistants said they

2. Toossi, Mitra. "Labor Force Projections to 2012: The Graying of the U.S. Workforce." *Monthly Labor Review*, February 2004, 127:2, p. 37.

are responding to new job demands by contributing more to their organizations than they were five years ago, and 78 percent said their level of authority and autonomy for decision making has increased as well.³

Office of the Future

The office of the future will be increasingly mobile, as technology continues to make it possible for workers to perform their jobs from virtually anywhere. As reported by the IAAP, OfficeTeam, a leading staffing service specializing in highly skilled administrative professionals, has released a report titled *Office of the Future: 2020*.

It should come as no surprise that technology will continue to play a major role in redefining the workplace. Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam, says, "Technology will continue to reshape the workplace, changing how and where we conduct business. As a result, flexibility and adaptability will be sought-after attributes in employees at all levels." She adds, "In the future office, there will be added pressure to adapt quickly to change, work smarter, increase productivity and perform duties outside of one's job description. The good news is that emerging technological tools and educational opportunities will better enable professionals to meet these challenges."⁴

3. International Association of Administrative Professionals. "Profile of Administrative Professionals," http://www.iaap-hq.org/researchtrends/2005_iaap_profile_of_administrative_professionals_survey_results-2.htm, July 14, 2006.

4. International Association of Administrative Professionals. "Office of the Future: 2020," http://www.iaap-hq.org/researchtrends/office_of_future_2020.htm, July 12, 2006.

According to the OfficeTeam study, technology tools should continue to provide even greater flexibility. The use of miniature wireless devices, WiFi, WiMax, and mobile technology will continue to allow employees to work outside the traditional office. Virtual environments and Web-based conferencing services will also provide off-site employees with real-time access to meetings, reducing the need for travel.

Another projection is an increase in telecommuting, as improved wireless connectivity will allow for an increasingly flexible workforce. Nearly 90 percent of the executives surveyed believe that telecommuting will increase in the next ten to fifteen years. While telecommuting makes it possible for employees to work from home, it also challenges their interpersonal skills, as they must build relationships with coworkers while having limited personal interaction.

The advances in wireless technology will also make it possible for more employees to stay in touch with work while on vacation. Many executives think that employees will put in more working hours in the next several years. However, technological advances will make it possible for workers to exert more control over their schedules and establish a better balance between work and life.

New Administrative Roles

The role of administrative assistants will continue to evolve as the workplace continues to change. Careers will become increasingly complex and specialized, and many positions will require sophisticated skills and experience in specific areas such as technology, human resources, and business processes.

Successful administrative assistants will have knowledge of business management principles, technical aptitude, strong interper-

sonal skills, and a good understanding of the needs of the organization. Business-focused training that emphasizes negotiation, delegation, budgeting, supervision, and planning skills will be valuable. Other areas in which knowledge will be useful are desktop publishing for the creation of newsletters, presentation materials, and other corporate documents; library science for organizing and storing text and data used by groups; and electronic communications for ensuring the security and integrity of electronically transmitted information.

In the next ten to fifteen years, administrative assistants are expected to function more as specialists than generalists, with job descriptions focusing on the technical and managerial aspects of daily business operations.

As secretaries have evolved into administrative assistants, even that title is likely to change to better describe the greater specialization of administrative assistants in the future. Following are some examples of anticipated functions in the office of the future.

- **Resource coordinator.** As companies rely more on contract workers, the resource coordinator will have to bring together the right human resources for a project.
- **Workflow controller.** This professional will function as the control center of an organization, ensuring that the project teams assembled by the resource coordinator have the support and resources required to do their jobs. The workflow coordinator will also facilitate interaction among teams and coordinate the use and transfer of company resources.
- **Knowledge manager.** To ensure continuity and consistency, and to help new employees adapt to the organization's culture, the knowledge manager will function as a repository of institutional

information, history, and best practices. Functioning similarly to a librarian, this staff member will assist workers in locating documents or data.

- **Telecommuting liaison.** Companies will require this position to connect remote workers with each other and with management. Responsibilities will include managing telecommuting schedules and providing technical support and updates to telecommuters, as well as working with senior management to develop policies.

- **Virtual meetings organizer.** This employee will help workers schedule conferences and set up necessary equipment. The organizer will be technically proficient and trained in the use of cameras, projection systems, electronic whiteboards, meeting software, audio equipment, and related tools.

Based on their research, OfficeTeam and industry experts have identified six skills that office professionals will need to prepare for successful careers in this new environment. They form the acronym ACTION:

1. **Analysis.** Analyzing information and exercising good judgment
2. **Collaboration.** Establishing rapport and facilitating team building
3. **Technical aptitude.** Selecting the best technical tools and using them effectively
4. **Intuition.** Identifying and adapting to the needs and work styles of others
5. **Ongoing education.** Engaging in continual learning
6. **Negotiation.** Participating in business discussions that produce positive results

It is expected that careers in the secretarial field will continue to evolve, becoming increasingly complex and specialized. The office of the future will become increasingly mobile and flexible, with core teams managing employees working from such diverse locations as home offices and temporary business spaces. Successful employees will be those who have a combination of technical and interpersonal skills and who can adapt quickly to change.

U.S. Economy and Employment Data

According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the U.S. economy continued to expand at a healthy pace during 2005. According to CBO's projections, inflation (as measured by the consumer price index for urban consumers) was expected to be 2.5 percent in 2006, compared with 2.7 percent in 2004, and it is projected to average 2.2 percent annually in 2007 through 2015. The unemployment rate will remain at a steady, average 5.2 percent from 2005 through 2015, slightly lower than the 5.5 percent rate in 2004.

The foreign trade sector is still expected to remain the fastest-growing component of the gross domestic product. Private investment is also expected to remain a substantial part of the economy. The fundamental factor in the growth of foreign trade and private investment is the expanding business in high technology and in computer-related products. Therefore, as an office professional in a knowledge-based economy, it is important that you develop your competencies for growth and mobility in a global economy.

Employment Projections

The job market for the past decade has had uninterrupted growth. In mid-2006, the civilian labor force was 151.3 million strong, with