

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

December 2013

Merry
Christmas!

How to get the
most out of a
Seminar



Ask the PAnel:
your questions answered by
our team of experts

Say hello
to a PA...

Meet Kate
Simmons

Top 10
Tablets for
Christmas

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Stingy bosses lack festive spirit this Christmas



A survey of UK employees has lifted the lid on cash strapped businesses this Christmas.

2,000 UK working adults were asked by YouGov on behalf of not-for-profit health insurer Westfield Health, if they would be having a Christmas party this year and over a third revealed their employer would not be organising one.

Only 28% said they are having a party which will be paid for by their employer, 16% will jointly contribute and 12% will have to pay for it themselves.

Bosses in the capital are the most likely to put their hands in their pocket with 37% paying for their staff Christmas party. Scrooge employers in the Midlands are the least likely with just 20% paying.

And it is in the charitable/voluntary sector where staff will be rewarded the most this Christmas with 45% revealing they will be getting a paid for Christmas party compared to only 5% in the public sector.

Business jargon causes frustration

Office workers are becoming increasingly frustrated with the excessive use of business jargon in the workplace, a survey from Jurys Inn Hotels and CrossCountry trains has revealed.

It seems we are far from 'thinking outside the box' when it comes to communicating in the workplace, with over a third of office workers regarding the excessive use of business jargon as their number one pet hate in business.

And it appears junior workers aren't being kept 'in the loop' with regards to this unfamiliar language, with management being considered the most excessive users of business jargon, followed closely by the sales department.

'Close of play' is the most used term, followed by 'thinking outside the box'. 'Going forward' is the third most popular phrase, with 'singing from the same hymn sheet' taking fourth place. 'In the loop' is also frequently used.

25-34 year olds are most likely to use business jargon. Struggling to get their 'ducks in a row', the over 55s are the most frustrated by business jargon, with 55% choosing it as their biggest pet peeve in the workplace.

In an attempt to assist those who wish to avoid using business jargon 'moving forwards', Jurys Inn has created a Business Jargon Prompt Sheet, which is available to download at www.jurysinns.com.

THE COUNTDOWN'S BEGUN. BUT THERE'S STILL TIME TO GET THE PERFECT REWARD.

There's not a lot of time left before the holiday season gets in to full swing, but you've still got an opportunity to really put a smile on all your employee's faces. Accepted in eight top-name high street stores, the Arcadia Group Fashion Gift Card is the easy way to reward your staff this season.

So whether you want to say a special 'thank you' to a hardworking member of staff, or incorporate it as part of a loyalty or incentive scheme, you'll be able to offer a gift that lets them shop whenever and wherever they want in our participating stores.

This gift card isn't just about fashionable clothing, it also opens the door to a world of contemporary footwear, accessories, jewellery, workwear - whatever suits you and your style.

Available in Sterling and Euro currencies (Euros are redeemable in Eire and Northern Ireland stores only) Arcadia Gift Cards can be topped up over and over again. Of course, they also offer a huge range of options and in-store customer service that's second to none.

And the more you buy, the bigger the discount:

Value:	Discount:
£1,000-£9,999	4%
£10,000 -£19,999	6%
£20,000+	8%

So get ready to treat your staff to something really worthwhile and a reward that will really make them feel valued. Remember it can be topped up with any amount from £1 to £300 (or €1 to €450 in NI and Eire) and it's ready to use in Burton, Dorothy Perkins, Evans, Miss Selfridge, Outfit, Topman, Topshop or Wallis.

It's perfect for the holiday season.

Place your order now and start rewarding your staff.



How Social Media Can Help or Hinder Your Job Hunt



We've all heard horror stories of people getting fired because they've posted something inappropriate on social media. It's very easy to forget what we say on Facebook or Twitter is in the public sphere. Even when your security settings are high, nothing is ever completely hidden online.

When you're looking for a new role, how you portray yourself on the web becomes even more important. Potential employers do look at your profiles to find out more about you. Of course,

social media doesn't have to hinder your job search. When used the right way, it can help you find new opportunities and even give you an edge over other candidates.

Steve Thompson is the Operations Director at Touchpoint Resource, a recruitment agency specialising in the digital and ecommerce industry. Passionate about helping people move forward in their careers, he's compiled an essential list of dos and don'ts for social media-savvy job seekers...



DO write posts related to your industry

Potential employers love a candidate who has their finger on the pulse. Instead of tweeting about that amazing bagel you just ate, find and comment on some recent industry news.

DO make good use of your Twitter bio

It may not be very long but your Twitter bio is prime web real estate. Make sure you're utilising yours by mentioning your job title and adding a link to your personal website or LinkedIn page.

DON'T use an inappropriate profile picture

This sounds obvious but I still see pictures of drunken

night's out proudly displayed on Facebook profiles. You don't have to be in a suit and tie but use a picture you'd be happy to show your mother.

DO follow the right people

Lots of recruitment companies post information about jobs on Twitter. Stay up-to-date and organised by following a bunch then putting them into a list. It's also a great idea to follow and interact with companies you'd like to work for. A pre-existing relationship is an excellent ice-breaker in an interview.

DO Google yourself

Worried about what might come up if someone types your name into Google? Avoid any embarrassment

by doing it first. This is also the perfect opportunity to check your gleaming online portfolio can be easily found.

DON'T neglect LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social media platform made for professionals. I could write an entire book on how to use it to job hunt (indeed many do exist). However, the biggest sin is to neglect your profile. Make sure yours is up-to-date and clearly explains your skills and achievements.



ASK the PAnel

Back by popular demand! Many of you have asked for our 'Agony' section to be brought back, so here it is. This time we have a panel of experts to help you with any work related questions, queries or problems you may have.



Paul Pennant is Managing Director and lead trainer for Today's PA



Alison Boler has been the Executive Assistant to three Heads of Legal & Business Affairs at ITV since 2007



Lindsay Taylor is the Director of Your Excellency Limited, an executive training and coaching organisation in the UK.



Gregg Corbett We are thrilled to welcome Gregg Corbett, Marketing Director at Avery UK as our first Guest Boss.

Some of you are already familiar with Paul Pennant, our original Agony Uncle and we are also delighted to welcome on board PA Trainer Lindsay Taylor, who is currently wowing us all with her great A-Z Pearls of Wisdom series and also Alison Boler, an award winning legal Personal Assistant whose passions include writing, championing PAs (and you know how much we love to do that at DeskDemon) - and each month we will have a guest boss panel member. If your boss would like to take part - please email editor@deskdemo.com

So, everyone, what's niggling you? What keeps you awake at night? Don't sit and fret in isolation - the team is here to help. Please send your questions to us by emailing askthepanel@deskdemo.com and we shall pose them to our panel. If you prefer to remain anonymous, just let us know and we will omit your details.

Question:

I am finding my increasing workload harder and harder to manage and getting more and more stressed. We used to have six PAs but there are only three of us now and even then one of those is a part time position. We're all located in different parts of the UK and although we try to support each other by phone and email, physically we cannot be there to set up meeting rooms, greet visitors etc. It's not just me; we're all really struggling and working long hours too. And our bosses are working just as hard. I feel that I am continually fire-fighting and never get to finish my work, which then rolls on to the next day and it all starts again. Any advice on how to manage this situation would be very gratefully received. B, West Sussex.

Answers:



Alison Boler

I can wholly sympathise as I have been in the same situation for a number of years. I deal with the stress by making sure my mind is organised in the same way as my To-Do lists: I see my workload structured into 3 parts: Urgent Tasks / Today's Tasks / Non-Urgent Tasks. Seeing your workload in your mind as structured and manageable parts instantly makes you feel less overwhelmed and in control. Also ask your HR about the National Apprenticeship Schemes - these allow a young person to work in your team for one year giving you dedicated business admin support, without it affecting Headcount.



Paul Pennant

PAs amongst many others are working harder for less rewards. Recently a young man in London died after working over a hundred hours a week for months. I would strongly recommend a heart to heart with your manager. I also believe that technology can speed up your efficiency enormously. Many PAs I have trained use voting buttons in Microsoft Outlook. www.doodle.com is also a free website that can take the stress out of managing your meetings.

ASK the PAnel



Lindsay Taylor

Your stress with dealing with an increasing workload is a common thread amongst office staff nationwide. The very fact that you're 'not alone' can be a helpful reality check to start with - we are all one pair of hands at the end of the day!

The key to effectiveness and efficiency lies with being more productive with our time management. Based on the work of Stephen Covey (according to "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" 2004 Franklin Covey Co) we need to be able to differentiate our 'to do lists' according to

URGENCY (linked to deadlines i.e. when does it need to be done by?) and **IMPORTANCE** (linked to outcomes i.e. what needs to be achieved and how does this link to my job spec?)

We can create a matrix of those tasks. This matrix will be forever morphing and changing according to incoming tasks and requests of our time but will look something like this with the relevant 'actions' assigned per matrix:

We need to ensure we work through these quadrants according to urgency and importance.

High Importance	Start it or plan it	Do it
Low Importance	Bin it or do it in dead time	Access it, delegate or do it quickly
	Low Urgency	High Urgency

Make time to share this valuable information with the other two PAs in your team. Invite your bosses as well - they may be very appreciative of this information!

[Click here to read more questions and answers](#)



Gregg Corbett

Unfortunately your situation is becoming more common in a tough economic climate, many businesses are increasingly assigning more responsibilities to fewer people to try and keep costs down. However even with that mind, your situation does sound particularly stressful and it would be best to set aside some time to talk to your boss as soon as possible. It's important to talk to someone about the situation before it gets out of hand and your health suffers. If you don't feel that you can speak with your boss, see your HR team.

Before you do any of this though, be very clear about what you want to say and what you would realistically like to change. Don't complain as this won't go down well, instead you should focus on how you feel your work is suffering and give tangible examples of this. If you can clearly demonstrate that the current situation is preventing you from doing a good job then together with your HR contact or your boss you can then begin to work out a solution.

Discuss problems and potential solutions with the other PAs and try come up with some clear, concise suggestions on what's needed to ensure you're doing your jobs effectively and in line with company priorities.

In the meantime, make sure you organise your time well and plan your days to get the most out of them. Consider using a wall planner with all your tasks for the day on, number them according to strict priorities and allocate a time allowance for each job. This will help keep you on track and know that you are dealing with the biggest priorities on incredibly busy days. It will also help you to demonstrate to your boss or HR contact which tasks are suffering.

You should also make sure you make it as easy as possible for others around you to help you out as this may free up some additional time. You could consider making sure you have a clear filing system (so you're not always asked where something is!), or printing signage to greet visitors and remind colleagues to clear up after themselves in meeting rooms and communal areas. Create and regularly update a check list for any on-going projects too - this way if anyone has capacity to help you out they can jump straight in.

Each month we will have a guest boss panel member. If your boss would like to take part - please email editor@deskdemo.com

So, everyone, what's niggling you? What keeps you awake at night? Don't sit and fret in isolation – our panel of experts to help you with any work related questions, queries or problems you may have. [CLICK HERE](#) to send us your question.

Top 10 tablets for Christmas

With tablets topping the Christmas list this year, it's important that people shop around for the best prices and use voucher codes to cut the price

Nine out of 10 people plan on giving consumer electronics as gifts this year, with laptops and tablets leading the way for adults. With that in mind, My Favourite Voucher Codes has generated a top 10 list of the best tablets for this Christmas.

Choosing a tablet out of the wide range that's available can seem like a daunting task. Even if you aren't new to the world of electronics, it can still be difficult selecting the right tablet as a gift. This top 10 list will give you a helping hand.

1. Microsoft Surface Pro 2

Featuring Windows 8.1, the Microsoft Surface Pro 2 is half laptop and half tablet. It comes with a 10.6 inch screen and gives you the ability to watch HD movies. This tablet is available from the online Microsoft store, but shoppers might be able to save by with 5% off thanks to PC world voucher codes.



2. Samsung Galaxy 3 7.0

The Samsung Galaxy is the iPad's closest rival. It has a 7 inch screen and it comes in either an 8GB or 16GB option. It's not the most advanced tablet available, but it's definitely one of the best budget buys. You can find this tablet in many high street stores, including Comet, for around £159.

3. Samsung Galaxy Note 8

Another Samsung offering is the Note. Featuring an 8 inch screen, this version of the Note doesn't require the stylus pen. It's another good budget option and you can buy it at a great price from John Lewis – again it's worth shoppers seeing if they could save with John Lewis voucher codes.



4. ASUS Transformer Pad Infinity

The Asus Transformer Pad Infinity has the huge advantage of coming kitted out with a keyboard. It has a stylish design and is one of the more powerful tablets on offer. You can find it for around £700 on Amazon.

5. Blackberry Playbook 2

The Blackberry Playbook 2 uses the BB10 software that took the company over a year to create. It's much improved on its predecessor and at just £160, it's hard to grumble.



6. Tesco Hudl

This solidly built tablet is one of the best budget buys on offer and the first to be manufactured by a supermarket. Found only at Tesco, you can expect an Android operating system and a good 7 inch display for £119.

7. Google Nexus 10

Featuring an impressive 10.1 inch display, the Google Nexus 10 has an extremely high resolution. This makes it fantastic for those looking to play videos and movies on it. You can find this tablet on the Google Play Store.



8. iPad 4

Of course, no tablet countdown would be complete with the iPad. The fourth edition of this tablet features retina display and comes with thousands of apps. Shoppers can buy it online and with these Apple Store voucher codes, they'll save on accessories.

9. iPad Mini

The iPad Mini has been one of the most exciting developments to come from this popular company. It's ideal for kids as well as adults. It features a sleek operation and again has thousands of apps to choose from. You can find it almost everywhere, including many supermarkets and high street stores.



10. Sony Xperia Tablet Z

The Sony Xperia tablet has been described as sleek and powerful. It's an impressive device that would make a great Christmas gift. The stylish design and impressive graphics make it one of the leaders on the market. Available for £399, you can get it with 6 months interest free at Very.

DISCOVER THE SEASON'S MOST EXTRAORDINARY HAMPERS

It's time to lift the lid on the most impressive hampers and gourmet gifts of Christmas 2013 – perfect for clients, colleagues, family and friends.

Wine uncorked. Fingers sticky with currants and jams. Tastes to delight the whole table. From the finest Christmas pudding to celebratory bottles of champagne – Selfridges' hampers and gift sets are bursting with a delectable selection of treats chosen by a dedicated team of food and wine experts who understand that only the best will do.

"This Christmas our food offering is more impressive than ever." Says Selfridges Food Director Nicola Waller. "Working with British artisans and heritage producers from the continent has been key to finding the very best festive flavours around. We're proud to put our name to each and every product."

The hamper collection includes 12 different options, ranging from £65 to £1000. Each hamper is crafted from wicker and includes Selfridges' signature yellow leather buckles and luggage tags for a keepsake to enjoy long after each jar, bottle and box of delicious tastes is empty.

The range of Christmas gift boxes brings together food and home accessories for bountiful sets tailored to the things they most love. Choose from 10 sets such as The Coffee Lover (including a traditional Bialetti espresso maker, cups, coffee and sugar crystals) and The Cinema Lover (packed with a popcorn machine, kernels to pop and a notepad to jot down their favourite film quotes).



Make your selection in store at The Foodhall,
online at selfridges.com/hampers or call 0800 138 8141.

► **SHOP SELFRIDGES HAMPERS**



How to have a Green Christmas

nigelsecostore.com have come up with suggestions for the perfect 'green' Christmas presents! All items listed and more products are available online at www.nigelsecostore.com



Grow Your Own Oyster Mushrooms Book Kit

easy to grow, delicious to eat

This great starter kit has everything you need to produce a bumper crop of delicious oyster mushrooms. They can be grown at any time of year, and there's no need for a garden. Just place the spores in an old paperback book, moisten and watch them grow in just five weeks. A brilliantly quirky gift for either a book or food lover! See how we found it.

Price: £14.99



Retro Recycled Clock

vintage style for eco trend hunters

Make a bold style statement with this cool clock. A bright red trim and funky bold numerals in an old-style font make it a great focal point for any room. It looks great, and cuts down on waste – you might not believe it but it's actually made from 80 recycled vending machine cups, saved from landfill to become something wonderful. A great gift for anyone who loves vintage style.

Price: £26.54



Recycled Luxury Xmas Crackers

makes Christmas lunch go with an eco bang!

Handmade from recycled paper and card, these 13 inch handmade Christmas crackers are better for the planet, and good for the whole family.

Inside each cracker is a hat, snap, motto and eco gift, so you can have fun around the Xmas table.

Price: £34.99

Eco iPad Sleeve

protect your iPad with a soft sustainable cork sleeve

You carry your iPad around with you wherever you go – this soft sleeve, designed by TAPE, will make sure it is protected from dirt and scratches. Made from FSC-certified fabric-backed cork, this cover will keep your iPad safe from harm when packed in a bag, or in your hand.

The soft textures and colours of the cork look great with your iPad, and a simple button fastening holds it securely in place.

Price: £19.99

Herbal Man Gift Box

softer skin and easy shaving

During his lifetime, the average man spends a total of four months shaving off staggering 27 feet of hair. Help make this process as enjoyable as possible with this great gift set full of lovely treats, handmade to transform and tame even the wildest of manes. A great gift for a man who likes to take care of himself, or one who needs a bit of pampering (but doesn't realise it!).

Price: £20.41



Wonderbag

the power-free slow cooker, for energy saving cooks

The must-have for energy saving cooking! Wonderbag is an extremely well-insulated cooking bag that keeps anything - from meaty stews and vegetable curries to simple rice and soups - cooking for hours without using any power, saving time, money and reducing energy use.

Price: £64.99



A-Z Pearls of Wisdom

by Lindsay Taylor

I is for... Imagination

"Your imagination is your preview to life's coming attractions"

Albert Einstein

About the Author:

Lindsay Taylor grew up in Hong Kong and has worked as an Executive Assistant in both the UK and the US. She now runs Your Excellency Limited, delivering training and coaching to administrative professionals around the world. Lindsay is renowned for developing and delivering the workshop "Be a PA with PA – Perfect Awareness" which carries the endorsement of The Institute of Administrative Management (IAM).

As many of you know, I'm a Practitioner of NLP - Neuro Linguistic Programming and share learning with an emphasis on our ability to think differently and act differently to make a difference to our lives.

Our company name, Your Excellency, really sums up what we are about – the training, coaching and personal development programmes that we provide are about you being excellent at whatever you need or want to do or be. It's all about Your Excellency.

The quote on our logo "my mind is my kingdom" comes from a 16th Century Poet Francis Quarles – you are ultimately "queen" or "king" of your own thinking. Understanding the power of your own thinking and "tapping" into your own mind can be highly beneficial, indeed a necessity, in being excellent in your life and achieving all the things you want or need to achieve.

"Memory and imagination have the same neurological circuits, they potentially have the same impact"

When you imagine something, you are, in effect, creating "a future memory". This is something that you can work towards – a reference point. A great colleague once introduced to me that "energy flows where the attention goes".

Very simply, you are more likely to achieve the very thing you are imagining. Imagine that!



Getting the most out of a Seminar

by Marie Herman CAP-OM, ACS

Have you ever attended what you thought was going to be an educational seminar, but what instead ended up being an all-day sales pitch for products and longer/future classes? How frustrating to waste your time and money that way. Wouldn't it be wonderful to go to a seminar, benefit from an engaging educational speaker, learn a fantastic amount of new information and then use that information to further your professional career? You can! Just do your homework in advance and put these suggestions to good use.

About Marie Herman


Marie Herman CAP-OM, ACS operates a successful business, MRH Enterprises (www.mrhenterprises.com), whose services include online tutoring and Microsoft Office certification study groups, writing articles, and conducting workshops and other speaking engagements. She can be reached at advertising@mrhenterprises.com

Before the seminar

There are a number of steps you can take to figure out if a seminar is going to be valuable education. Start by polling your network. Ask for recommendations and referrals and specifically ask if a significant portion of the instructor's time was spent selling products. Take into account your learning style and what delivery method of training is most effective for you to learn new concepts. If you are relying on someone else to refer you to good programmes, make sure that your referrer has a similar learning style to you.

For many companies, the instructors are actually paid a very low wage and make up the bulk of the income from the sales of the products. Search online for reviews of the seminar hosts. Contact the company to review the agenda and understand better if the content is beginner, intermediate or advanced. Find out what materials, if any, are used for reference during this seminar. A close review of the proposed





Review the seminar handouts as soon as you can. Write on them or at least write separate notes for yourself as to key points you want to remember. Studies have shown that we remember better what we put into our own words, especially when we handwrite the words out. Use highlighters, underline, add stars, etc. for emphasis as needed.

topics may help you decide if you'll actually learn anything new.

Check around for multiple sources for similar seminar topics, such as local colleges or online webinars. If you found a seminar that involved travel, you might actually be able to save the company (or yourself) money by finding a similar seminar closer to home. Some topics would lend themselves to enhanced learning if they were hands on or at least demonstration mode.

During the seminar

How can you maximise the value of the time spent at the seminar? Is there an attendance list published in advance that will give you a head start on learning the names of other students and finding out where they work? You'll want to show up early to network with other attendees. Set a goal of meeting "x" number of people and think ahead about

what kind of people you want to meet, for instance people who have a certain skill or people who work in a certain industry, etc. You might want to specifically try to network to find others in the same industry as your company to discuss best practices and brainstorm ideas and new methods of doing your job. Bring plenty of your business cards.

Observe other attendees. Who seems to know their stuff? Who seems to have a personality you would like to know better? Work your way around the room to meet them. Introduce yourself and ask some relevant interesting questions. Get a better sense of who they are and what their skills are. When you have identified people that would be good to add to your network, arrange to go to lunch with them if an all-day seminar. Use every moment of networking time! Don't escape to be with your own thoughts. Exchange business cards. But don't just tuck their business cards away in your wallet and forget about it. Take a few

minutes to write down notes on the back of the card to remind you of why you have their card.

Ask questions to clarify or have the instructor expand on concepts. Make sure you have a good understanding of what is being covered. Do you understand it well enough to explain to others later?

Be sure while you are at the seminar to also get the instructor's contact information so you can follow up if you have questions. Ask if it would be allowed to share the handouts from the program with your office mates when you return to work.

After the seminar

When you get back to work, take the time to write a follow up note to the individuals you met. Thank them for their time in chatting with you. Tell them how nice it was to meet them. Include something in the note to refresh their memory about you and then think of a few follow up questions in response to your earlier conversations. Start laying the ground work of building a relationship with

the individual. Add them to your LinkedIn or other professional social media accounts, if appropriate.

There are a number of ways you can expand on what you learned in that seminar after returning to your office. Identify areas that were not covered in sufficient depth for you and create a strategy to enhance those areas with additional training or research.



Look for areas to apply your newfound knowledge. Perhaps you were shown a new method of organising your files or a new software feature. Where can you apply this knowledge in your workplace? If you don't have time to implement the idea now, write it down and add a reminder to your calendar to implement it in the future.

Look for areas to apply your newfound knowledge. Perhaps you were shown a new method of organising your files or a new software feature. Where can you apply this knowledge in your workplace? If you don't have time to implement the idea now, write it down and add a reminder to your calendar to implement it in the future. Writing down your notes without a plan to go back to that document in the future will likely result in no action occurring whatsoever. If at all possible, implement new ideas immediately while they are fresh in your mind and before you get back into the status quo of the workplace. There's an old Japanese prophecy that states, "Vision without action is a dream; Action without a vision is a nightmare."

Did you receive an attendance certificate? Make a copy for your HR file and make a note to bring this training up during your next performance review as an example of how you have taken initiative during the year. You might even consider framing the certificate and putting it up near your desk or in your office, if appropriate.

Put together a **Return on Investment (ROI)** report for your workplace. Include information about the seminar, the cost, the value received, a summary of what was covered, some of the new ideas you received and some suggestions for how and why to implement some of those suggestions in your office. Be sure to include information on those individuals you networked with that would be valuable to the firm, such as clients, for instance.

Share your knowledge with your colleagues. Consider holding a follow up meeting or a lunch and learn session with your colleagues

to share what you learned. Share your summary report and follow up suggestions with your colleagues.

Update your resume or CV to reflect your attendance at this training. Especially highlight any new skills you acquired or any certifications you earned as a result of this training.

Start laying the groundwork for future training. Make a request for money in the professional development budget for future seminars during the budget planning process. If multiple people want to attend, investigate the cost of bringing the seminar on site to your company. It's not uncommon for the breakeven point to be as few as 5-10 people, depending on the seminar.

As you can see, there are a number of steps that you can take to help maximise the value of any training you receive, to the benefit of your career and your company. Don't let your seminar education be in one ear and out the other. Make it count!



Say Hello to a PA...

Meet Kate Simmons



Kate is a PA a Talbot Underwriting in London and has the task of working for three bosses.

Here we learn how Kate got the job, what she likes most about her role - and find out what superpower Kate would love to have to help her do her job better.

Tell us about the company you work for – company: size, sector, location.

I am employed by Talbot Underwriting, part of the Validus Group and one of the industry leading reinsurance specialists. Operating in the Lloyd's Insurance Market, Talbot writes a broad range of reinsurance classes of business. Examples include hull, cargo, energy, war, terrorism, political risk and aviation. There are approximately 300 staff based in the London office and a further several hundred in our related offices in Bermuda, Europe, Asia and Latin America.

What is your job title, your role and who do you work for?

I am employed as Personal Assistant to our Group Chief Information Officer, Group Chief Technical Officer and



What do you think makes a good boss?

One of the strongest attributes of a good boss is one who is inclusive. A boss who recognises his or her PA's unique attributes by getting to know them. If a person feels their efforts are recognised and appreciated they're likely to want to give more. I also appreciate a boss who works fearlessly and has the trust in you to make your own mistakes.

Director of Group Operations. I also assist our overseas Executives during visits to London. My primary role is support all three key Executives in achieving their strategic goals and objectives. This involves the use of extensive diary and workload management. I'm also the communication channel between these Executives and ninety employees within the IT function worldwide.

How did you get this position?

I was on holiday in Australia when I received an email from an old colleague advising that he had moved to London and was looking for a Personal Assistant. I was ready for a change and wanted to move away from Manchester so the timing was ideal.

Has the recession had an impact on your role/your company?

The fortunes of reinsurance companies tend to be influenced by how much capital is in the business. When there's too much capital competition gets intense, prices get driven down and results begin to falter. When enough reinsurance companies get in

enough trouble, some cut back, some go out of business and the reinsurance climate (at least from the reinsurance company point of view) improves. I'm grateful to be able to say I don't feel the recession has had an impact on my role or the company I work for at present.

What do you like most about your job?

Being a PA constantly presents new challenges and I have been provided with some amazing opportunities, such as with previous roles being flown to India and even Marbella! My next mission is to make it on to the company's private jet in the US, I can dream! My job is full of weird and wonderful surprises and no two days are ever the same. I'm lucky I have a great relationship with my bosses, I'm supported, valued, trusted and encouraged to develop my skills continually through training.

What are the most important skills you use at work

The possibility of a last minute problem can fall on your shoulders and it is important

that you are prepared for all eventualities. As a PA you are required to think on your feet and use your initiative on a regular basis. Keep copies of all important correspondence received and sent to prevent any issues which may arise. Attention to detail is also vital - never assume anything. Essentially, to succeed within this role you need to be organised, efficient, diplomatic and calm under pressure. In most cases you are also the first point of contact. I am the face of Group IT internally and externally and therefore I need to be an excellent communicator, have good interpersonal skills and be discreet with confidential information. If a task seems impossible be assertive and accept help when necessary.

What was the biggest challenge you have faced and how did you tackle it?

My biggest challenge lies outside of the work arena however I deal with challenges rationally and logically. I take out my little book, write notes in my iPhone or make a mental note on what I need to do to overcome what I'm faced with. My action

plan is my comfort blanket in most scenarios. As soon as I see a challenge I look at it as something I can learn something from, or at least learn something about myself from.

How have you got to where you are in your career?

Knowing myself, knowing what I'm good at, what I enjoy and knowing what I want. This has come from years of experience, hard work, developing the confidence to try new things and putting 100% into everything I do. Despite the mistakes I've made I have no regrets. I would also base a lot of where I am today on the effort I have put in to building strong and trusting relationships inside and outside work.

Do you have any career plans for the future, what are they and do you need to learn new skills?

I thoroughly enjoy my role as a PA and don't have any immediate plans to change. I'm always open to the possibility of working abroad, and the great thing about my job is the flexibility of being able to take it anywhere



If there is one, what does a 'typical' day look like for you?

At the beginning of a typical day I check the diary to refresh myself on what my bosses have on for the day/ week ahead. They are often managing and co-ordinating several projects at the same time so it is critical that I manage my time well and prioritise my workload so I am in a good position to manage theirs. I have morning one to ones with each of my bosses to discuss outstanding or pressing work and to identify what I can take away from them or help with so they can focus on their specific tasks at hand. From then on no two days are the same.



What one piece of advice would you give to someone beginning their PA career?

Think carefully about the type of industry you'd like to work in. If you want a successful and fulfilling long term career you're more likely to want to step out of the box and throw yourself into new challenges if you enjoy the type of work surrounding you.

in the world and into any type of industry. Following a recent PA Office event and listening to the likes of Hamish Jenkinson who used to PA to Guy Richie and Madonna, and now Kevin Spacey and to Laura Schwartz, the former PA to Bill Clinton I can't say I wouldn't love to PA for a high profile celebrity.

If you were giving career advice to students, how would you sell being a PA?

Being a PA can be exactly what you want it to be. If you think you'd like a varied day and want a responsible role working alongside senior and influential members of staff in your company that you can learn a lot from then this could be the role for you. Being a successful PA also puts you in a great position for branching out into other roles. I've met various trainers, influential speakers, business owners and even film Directors who started out their career as a Personal Assistant.

What would you look for in a PA?

I'd look for someone who has a fun, enthusiastic, confident character; someone who brings a bit of life in to the office

with them is always a bonus. I would look for someone who can demonstrate organisational skills, intuition and work well under pressure. You need a Personal Assistant who is compatible with your lifestyle and professional vigour so finding someone you gel with is the key.

Do you have any tips that you could share with your peers?

Remember the smaller things – remember birthdays, anniversaries (showing my age), children's birthdays etc. Be personable. Be trustworthy and loyal, support them and acknowledge when they go out of their way for you. Try to mentor anyone who may be new to their role and help them to become amazing at what they do.

What superpower would you love to have to help you do your job better

A colleague once said to me 'he who writes the minutes holds the power'. I'd love to have a body double that actually writes the minutes for me and I get the praise for doing such a wonderful job.

If you were offered a 30% salary increase, but you would never again be thanked during your time at that company, would not receive another rise for at least 10 years – would you take it?

Absolutely not! Feeling valued is worth so much more than a 30% increase in salary spread over 10 years. I have found that if I work hard I'm valued and in turn receive yearly salary increases anyway.

One PA was asked to clean out her boss's fish tank when he was on holiday! Tell us about a humorous event/moment at work – maybe you've been asked to do a strange task?

Once an old boss walked out of my office and I noticed the back of his trousers has ripped (in a big way) leaving a gaping white under layer of material hanging out, along with a tiny bit of flesh. I eventually plucked up the courage to email him to tell him I 'think' he may have ripped his trousers. His reply was to help him stitch them back up as he had no spare trousers and he was rushing to leave for an external meeting. Lucky he responded to

say he was only joking before I had worded an 'I'm not sure that's appropriate' email.

If you could spend a year on a remote island with four people (living or not) who would they be and why?

1. My best friend; Impossible to live without.
2. Victoria Beckham; I know after this one I'll rank low in many peoples estimations but she is my ultimate glamour style icon. I'm intrigued by her fashion and entrepreneurial career.
3. Gordon Ramsey; he could teach me how to cook, kick some a** in people not pulling their weight and I reckon he's a good company too. You never know after a year on a remote island he may even hire me as his PA.
4. Bear Grylls, British adventurer, writer and television presenter. I'd want Bear for his extreme outdoor pursuits and survival skills J

If you were invisible for the day – where would you go and what would you do?

I'd get right over to Beverly Hills and take a



What would be your dream job?

If I were to consider something slightly different and money was no option it would be to freelance as a Wedding Planner. I feel I already have the required skills and I would thrive off being responsible for the most important day of a person's life. Being able to demonstrate your creative flair and be paid for it would be nice.



Who is the person who has influenced you most in your life and why?

In every sense of the word 'influence' I am in awe of my Mum. Right from the days the school bell used to ring and I couldn't run quickly enough to get to her and give her a hug. Her warmth, hard work ethic, 100% commitment to her marriage, children and everything she does. Her sense of humour and infectious laugh. The list is endless.

good nosy around celebrity's homes.
I would just LOVE that!

What is your proudest moment?

Being at the birth of my Nephew and holding him seconds after his birth was by far my proudest big Sister moment. I'm not sure my Sister could say the same; I passed out for half of it.

What would you still like to achieve?

I still burn toast and forget how many sugars my best friend has in her tea after 27 years of friendship! I'd love to learn how to cook and have dinner parties with endless dishes of amazingly cooked Kate food!



Editor's Comment: Big 'thank you' to Kate for sharing her thoughts with us.

Would you like to take part in 'Say Hello to A PA...Meet'? Simply email editor@deskdemo.com - and we will send you the details and form. We'd love to hear from you. We are always looking for EAs, PAs, Office Managers, VAs and Administrators, so please get in touch.



*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
from everyone at PA Enterprise*