

8 business-critical administrative assistant skills



Want your office to run like a well-oiled machine? A top-notch administrative assistant is the way to do it. These professionals provide managers and other team members with the administrative support they need to do their jobs and maximize productivity. Their contributions to office management are numerous, diverse, and never to be overlooked.

But what does a good administrative assistant resume and cover letter look like? These documents likely highlight a solid history of work experience with a track record of excellence. They also should contain a skills section with evidence of these eight essential hard skills and soft skills. Whether you're looking to hire an administrative assistant, or whether you're already in the role and looking to expand your skills — these are the top 8 skills to focus on.

1. Communication skills

“Apart from the CEO or senior HR personnel, admin assistants are one of the only people in an organization who deal with representatives at all levels,” says Danny Trichter, founder of [Accessibility Checker](#).

Interacting with such an array of people both inside and outside of the company demands excellent communication skills. Administrative assistants must compose memos, emails, meeting minutes, letters, and other forms of written correspondence in ways that get pertinent information across and reflect well on the company by being grammatically correct and typo-free.

Outstanding administrative assistants also possess strong verbal communication skills, they articulate thoughts clearly, and can converse effectively with everyone from a top exec to an irate client. As part of their overall

communication skill set, administrative assistants should be good listeners. Attentiveness enables better comprehension of what the boss, other members of the staff, or vendors are trying to convey. After listening carefully, following up with questions and repeating back what was said in one's own words ensures understanding before taking action. The best administrative assistants even take the interaction a step further.

"A superstar admin listens not only to words but also to tone and non-verbal cues to uncover hidden meaning," Trichter says.

2. Trustworthiness

Administrative assistants often possess the keys to rooms filled with valuable equipment and the passwords to databases containing sensitive information. They may run the department's petty cash system and have access to a corporate credit card. They likely know how much each person in the office earns, the reason behind someone's extended absence, and why the boss only called John into a private conference on Thursday.

From security breaches to financial losses, a dishonest administrative or executive assistant can cause an organization a multitude of problems. Likewise, a loose-lipped admin assistant contributes to a toxic work environment of rumors and discord.

Great administrative assistants practice discretion. They realize the amount of access provided by their position and do not abuse it for personal gain or to get attention from others.

3. Professionalism

The first contact outsiders have with a company is oftentimes with an administrative assistant. As the person who answers the phone, escorts a client to the appropriate room, or offers a reassuring smile to a nervous job candidate, an administrative assistant's actions contribute to forming that you-only-get-one-shot initial impression.

Successful administrative assistants know they represent their employer, so they look and act accordingly. They dress appropriately and practice good hygiene. They are polite, positive, and helpful. They recognize the importance of being on time, remaining civil in the midst of confrontation, and extending basic courtesies.

4. Technical skills

"Administrative assistants with the technical ability to handle data entry, maintain team calendars, and prepare company reports are in high demand," says Edward Mellett, co-founder of [Wikijob](#). "Microsoft Office products, such as Excel, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, and others are essential. It's also not uncommon for administrative assistants to assist with data entry into a CRM system, customer care platform, or virtual help desk. To perform the work, you must have a deep understanding of computer software, browsers, and operating systems."

Administrative assistant job descriptions also may call for comfort with faxing, answering and transferring phone calls, and navigating the Internet. Just as important as current hard skills, though, is a willingness to keep learning. Technology changes rapidly. Good administrative assistants realize they must evolve with the times rather than shy away from new ways of doing things.

5. Organizational and time management skills

As an executive's right-hand person or as the go-to Jack of All Trades for the department, administrative assistants receive a constant flow of requests. They need prioritizing ability when handling various demands to ensure deadlines and critical administrative tasks get done on time. However, multitasking administrative

assistants still need to remember and manage other less time-sensitive responsibilities so that these do not slip through the cracks.

“The most critical skill for administrative assistants is organization,” says Armin Tanovic, a content writer and virtual assistant for [Remote Bob](#). “Most companies tend to have lots of smaller administrative tasks that are very detail orientated. It’s easy to get lost in so many smaller tasks such as making databases, content writing, sending emails, etc... Being organized and creating a schedule is key to fulfilling your obligations on time to ensure that everything runs smoothly.”

To-do lists and master planners are an effective administrative assistant’s best friend. Purposeful scheduling ensures each activity has blocked-off time for completion. Good administrative assistants also look for ways to save time, such as setting up automatic monthly deliveries of essential office supplies or using templates to make composing meeting notes quicker.

Staying organized also often involves developing routines and filing systems. For instance, placing the stapler back in the same place after each use prevents wasting time searching for it later. Likewise, sorting incoming emails into appropriate folders makes messages easier to retrieve down the line.

6. Flexibility

Because the nature of an administrative assistant's job involves service to others in the company, an admin assistant needs the ability to go with the flow. When your boss suddenly requires travel arrangements to get to the corporate office by Tuesday, booking a flight jumps to the top of the priority list. An administrative assistant who can gracefully shift gears is a valuable commodity!

“All things considered, one of the most important talents for office work is flexibility — the ability to come to a complete stop and pivot to other tasks,” says Steve Scott, CTO at [Spreadsheet Planet](#). “Things change quickly, and the finest administrative assistants are able to respond and adjust with ease. It's not only about switching assignments quickly, though; it's also about being able to get back on track once you've switched back.”

Perhaps no event demonstrated this need for adaptability as greatly as the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced with unprecedented demands and challenges, administrative assistants took office management to a new level. Their flexibility enabled many a business to survive and thrive in a remote environment.

7. Problem-solving skills

Administrative assistants who can think on their feet are worth their weight in gold. Instead of panicking in the face of adversity and challenges, they stay calm and focus on solutions. This could, perhaps, mean figuring out how to entertain a job candidate when the hiring manager is running late. Or, it might entail finding ways to get everyone to cut back on office supplies when that budget gets reduced. With a mixture of creativity and intelligence, they rise to the occasion.

“One of the most important qualities an administrative assistant can have is the ability to think and respond swiftly, as well as devise plans,” says Brian Dean, co-founder of [Exploding Topics](#). “Whatever the problem, a superstar administrative assistant should always find a solution.”

8. Attention to detail

Finally, the seemingly smallest of things oftentimes can pack the greatest punch if done wrong. A missed signature on an important document, a bookkeeping typo, botched travel arrangements, or the wrong time given to meeting attendees can spell disaster.

“If big picture thinking matters, the opposite is also significant,” says Tanner Arnold, president and CEO of [Revelation Machinery](#). “Admin work requires a keen eye for unobtrusive elements. Consider that much of what an admin does is high-stakes. No flight for that official means no opportunity to close the next round of sponsorship that your association needs to keep the lights on.”

Successful administrative assistants proofread, double-check, and verify in order to ensure correctness. For the best in the profession, such action becomes second nature!