

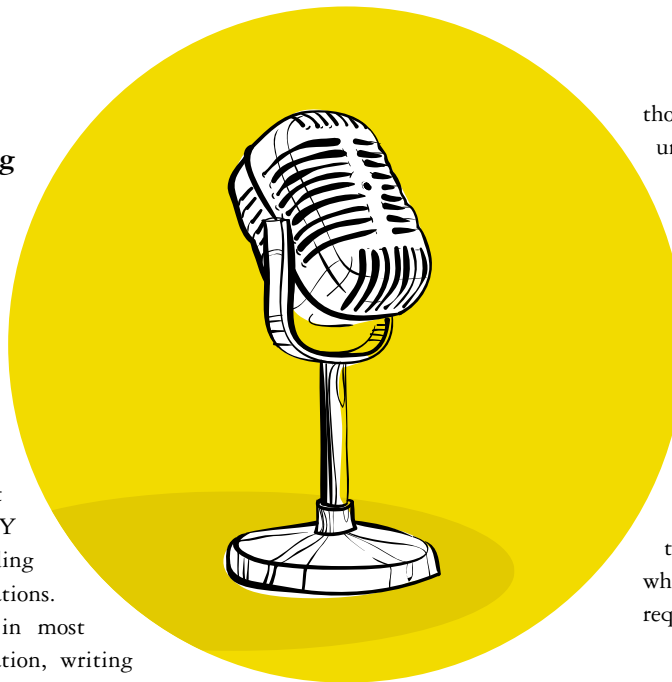
Opinion

Attitudes to Training, Business Improvement & Stress.
Five administrative professionals from around the world
share their experience and opinions

What is your company's attitude towards training its admin staff?

Sonia Sharma - I feel training and development is an investment in our career. EY has balanced approach to learning and development for everyone in the organization. Very few courses are mandatory for all. We all have to do at least 2-3 courses a year. Here in EY our training is designed according to a person's position & associations. Secretarial staff are included in most training related to communication, writing skills, using online tools, & working with presentations. Admin staff also get leadership training depending upon their post/designation. For example if a team member is promoted to Assistant Manager level then they get exposure to courses on team building. I myself do at least 2 mandatory courses a year.

Elle Sandes - I have been put in a pretty unique position with the company I am at now because I am the only admin staff for 2 offices, which makes training a must. When I approached my manager about training courses or possibly furthering my degree, the response was absolutely positive. Because 2 years ago the company had nobody to do admin, my presence there has made a huge difference. Everyone can get on with their main job function and not worry about the little things, which in a sense has made me an invaluable team player. They view initiative and ambition as a desirable quality that deserves to be encouraged.



PJ Davenport - Because I have an extreme thirst for knowledge, I am a strong supporter of on-going skill development, software training, and career enhancing activities. As such, I constantly upgrade my skills and knowledge related to the latest software, gadgets, tools and resources available to assist clients in meeting the goals that they have set for their business. I work with a great group of Virtual Assistants who provide referrals to each other for client service requests. However, before I refer a client to a VA, I verify their skills, expertise, and experience to ensure that the client will receive extraordinary customer care and superb service delivery. Furthermore, I double-check the latest training the VA received on the software and tools required to satisfactorily complete the project.

Anuradha Ramchand - Administration is always considered as the non-revenue generating department in an organization,

though the fact remains that they are the unsung heroes. Any investment in this team never figures in the priority list. Occasionally, management feels the pinch of consciousness that this team has been left out of company training and a program is organized for them. But the fact remains that most of the time it is only a soft skills training that's imparted. Admin staff are the ones who rise to critical situations within the facility and resolve them. They are able to gauge the quality of service provided by the respective vendors, or to even identify what has gone wrong. After all multi-tasking requires multiple skills too.

Mariella Hristova - Many of the companies in Bulgaria do not understand the importance of having well-skilled administrative professionals or training them. The company, where I am working currently, does not provide training at all. One of the requirements when I applied for the job was to have previous experience on a similar position and to be able to start immediately with no expectations to be trained.

What would you change in your business if you could?

Sonia Sharma - We can improve only if we are open and welcome changes. I like to explore alternate ways of doing tasks. At organization level, I would like to change our system of offsite get-togethers only being with immediate teams or business units. I would like to organize a pan-India meeting for all admin & assistant staff in our organization. It would give us an opportunity to get to know our colleagues personally.

Elle Sandes - I can honestly say that there isn't one thing that I would change about my business. Our company is unique and not run in a traditional way, which for me and my personality works extremely well. There isn't a sense of micro-management or elitism that is found in some other companies I have worked for. Rather, we are more like a family that pulls together to benefit everyone. I have to say that this is the best company I have worked for and am very proud to be a part of it.

PJ Davenport - I am quite satisfied with my business model now. If I had to change anything, it would be to engage the support of a business coach with a proven track record of successfully working with Virtual Assistants. I would expect the coach to provide expertise in developing products and expanding services that would provoke me to think bigger, work smarter and optimise transformational services to clients. All would be a great boost to keeping clients organized and on track with calendar management, travel planning, professional image with clients, business development, and on-line presence ...which tend to be problem areas for coaches and entrepreneurs. Resolution to problems eliminates pains and frustrations that business coaches and entrepreneurs often struggle with daily. By this, I mean my business is about helping clients grow their business faster by off-loading their administrative and non-money-making tasks that don't contribute to their bottom line. My clients benefit by having their businesses smoothly managed without sacrificing quality - and cuts 5 (or more) hours of wasted time out of their week! Any change could only enhance the benefits to my clients.

Anuradha Ramchand - At this juncture I can't think of any great strategic changes in my business but definitely I would like to work on the way knowledge and job related information is cascaded to new employees and to focus more on developing innovative and practical ways of sharing knowledge and information. I personally do not enjoy being trained by PowerPoint and then taking tests after the session. It's boring and I don't think it is effective. These sessions tend to go over my head most of the time and it is even worse when the person delivering them doesn't make the program interactive. I prefer a more interactive and practical approach to it so that the time and money spent on the whole program derives the desired effect.



Sonia Sharma is an Executive Assistant to a Senior Partner at Ernst & Young, India. She was born and brought up in Delhi. Her father was completely against family females doing any type of job. Her elder sister got married as soon as she completed her college & the same plans were set for Sonia. But she was determined and never gave up. Sonia holds an MBA in Finance & Marketing from Symbiosis Pune, India. Sonia says 'if we are flexible, open to accept feedback & action, we can live wonderful harmonious life'.



Elle Sandes is an American Expat from California now living in London and Office Manager for the London and Manchester offices of a rapidly growing international Medical Communications agency. With 15 years of experience, including self employment, her next endeavour is to enroll in online learning courses to earn her BA in Business with an emphasis on Human Resources and leadership. When she is not busy with work and checking her Blackberry, spare time includes amateur photography, watercolour painting and the occasional trip to the gym.

Mariella Hristova - First, I would like people to start thinking and respecting the importance and the role of the assistant/s. Second, communication – I would like it to be transparent, well-defined and focused.

Which bit of your job is most stressful and why?

Sonia Sharma - Stress is a normal part of life that can either help us learn and grow or can cause us significant problems. Stress can be a neutral, negative, or positive experience. Some people are able to process many stressors simultaneously, while others can barely address a few. I think when we are reporting to more than one person many situations come up which can provide stress. I am working with group of almost 35 people. There are many situations when the boss or other senior people give assignments with extremely short time-lines for completion. It gets more strenuous when all of them look for their work to be completed as

a priority. In these situations, I have learned to maintain my calm, to concentrate on my work & to keep everyone posted about how much of their work is done and how much more time it will take to finish off. Although at times it takes longer than the time-line given, with regular updates on their work completion, they are prepared & understand my position. Stress can be managed by regular exercise, meditation or other relaxation techniques, structured timeouts, and learning new coping strategies.

Elle Sandes - If you ask any admin professional, you might find that there is a common theme; constant distractions. These distractions lead to having to re-prioritise your diary on an almost hourly basis, which can not only be stressful but frustrating as well since its not always possible to just focus on the one task that you need to complete. Sometimes what should take an hour to complete can take up to 3. Admin is not for the faint hearted. There is a level of clarity that needs to be exercised



P.J. Davenport is a third generation entrepreneur, Virtual Executive Assistant and the CEO of Davenport Executive Services. Often referred to by her clients as “the glue that keeps everything together,” they regularly credit her for tremendous success in impacting bottom line results for their businesses. She provides them more time to do what they want, elimination of worries and frustrations when trying to handle everything alone, and relief from non-income generating activities. Her business management experience, passion for helping business owners succeed, and sincere interest in becoming an integral part of their business achievements help business owners get the results they want.



Anuradha Ramchand works in the Supply Chain Management team in Hewlett-Packard, Chennai. She has over 9 years of quality work experience in administration, facilities and as an executive assistant. She has a great interest in training and development, as well as being a multi-linguist conversant in 4 Indian Languages, English and German. She loves working as an executive assistant because of the privilege of reporting directly to the management team and getting an overview of an organization as a whole. She is currently doing her MBA in International Business.



Mariella Hristova is from Bulgaria and has worked as an administrative professional since 2000. Currently she works as an Executive Secretary in a telecommunications company. Throughout her 9-year experience, she has played different roles in the companies she has worked for. Her goal is to demonstrate proficiency in all core office and administration functions, internal and external communications and organization of events. Mariella says ‘The assistant’s role is a key for each company. Mine gives me opportunity to meet new people, to service and satisfy clients, independence to experience different cultures and gain extra knowledge’.

in order to keep all the plates spinning. Having said that, I can’t see myself doing anything else.

PJ Davenport - Along with many entrepreneurs, I often don’t take time for myself, which can cause stress. Most of my week is spent crafting creative ways to connect with my “ideal client,” fine-tuning my services and delivery methods, and, of course, providing stellar administrative support and business development services to my clients. Fortunately, this issue has been resolved by simply creating a task list and prioritising each task with accompanying time-lines for completion. In addition, I carefully plan my days by reserving time slots on my calendar to devote exclusively to important tasks or projects. The most important factor in this process involves reviewing the list daily and making adjustments as necessary. It is equally important to re-evaluate the validity of each task, and either allow sufficient time to complete it, delegate it, or merely remove

it from the list. This process has proven to be an excellent technique that eliminates a great deal of stress. I now have more time to devote to leisure activities and do other things I like!

Anuradha Ramchand - To me the most stressful task is preparing reports on the work activities performed in a day. Most days are occupied with various tasks that consume longer time than scheduled. It becomes very tough to bring into reports the very minor activities which still consume a quantifiable portion of my working hours. The sad fact is that everyday has numerous minor tasks that might not seem important at first sight, yet, take a second look it would have been a stitch in time that might have saved lots. Major tasks and innovative activities is what a boss wants to see in an activity report. “Have you made a value addition?”, is the common question but they fail to understand that even maintaining what is existing is not an easy task The minor activities are the major contributors to maintaining the existing levels. How can one

build further if you don’t maintain what you have already? Taking a look at my own report makes me feel emotionally dissatisfied if I am not where I need to be on a major project, leading to emotional stress - the worst stress of all.

Mariella Hristova - The most stressful part of my job is deadline commitments and action points, especially when the managers I am working with delay the circulation of information essential for a task to be closed, or underestimate the importance of subjects. In many cases, deadlines are set from today to tomorrow, with no clear definition and proper information of what is expected to be done. Sometimes, I am involved in correspondence/s, rolling for weeks, and at the last moment there is an expectation that I will accomplish a task/s tomorrow.

