

# Coffee Break Confidential: Real-Life Tales from Assistants

By Christina A. Maslova



**Christina Maslova**  
**Coffee Break Confidential.**  
**Real-Life Tales from Assistants**

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**Аннотация**

Take the tea of coffee, tasty cookies, and just enjoy reading. You will know how is it to work in Japanese company; how to pass interview if you want to start working as a secretary; what kind of mistakes assistants do and what applications use; and what else assistants can do between travel management and meetings set up. Meet your colleagues from Japan, India, UK, Slovenia, Philippines. Thoughtful, with humor, great knowledge and experience sharing – this what you will find in this book.

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# **Coffee Break Confidential**

## **Real-Life Tales**

### **from Assistants**

**Christina Maslova**

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I want to say Thank You to Pavel Potapov, one of the greatest leaders,  
whom I've ever met. It's true.

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Artist

Illustrator.

Imagination is the key to tell and see.

A part of @whatitalyis team

All my ☕ at #littlecoffeestories  
[cinziabolognesi.myportfolio.com/](http://cinziabolognesi.myportfolio.com/)

E-mail:

[contact@ninibilu.com](mailto:contact@ninibilu.com)

My Big Thanks to colleagues:

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*"Faith is taking the first step  
even when you don't see the whole staircase"*

Martin Luther King

# Who I Am and Why You Have to Read This Book

I was born in Moscow, in doctor's family. I've graduated from the Russian State Trade-Economic University with a diploma of economist-manager of the enterprise. I started to work when I was 20, tried a lot of companies – Russian, European, Japanese in order to find what suits best, because I have never could not stand if I do not like something or do not feel that I belong to the place where I am.

I've never thought that I will write. But, my first article was published in 2013, my first book in English appeared in 2017, in Russian – one year later. And now – I sit and write this preamble to my second book.

I always write about job and everything what is connected with an assistant's job. I work as an assistant already 15 years. And though right now my official job title is Head of Administration, I'm still – firstly Executive Assistant, and then everything else.

In this book I've put together different stories and notes from my experience and also from my colleagues. First book was a little bit more serious, I wanted to share what I think about job and why you need it. This one – is for coffee, thinking about different situations, work or life, and, probably, finding yourself in some articles 😊

Why I write it? One day I decided that if you want to do something, if something great appeared in your head or even if you think that it's might be not great – you have to Try and Do. If you have any idea – please, try to do something with it. I wanted to share my thoughts about my job, because it is very interesting, very promising and very complicated. I wanted to share what I know.

I wanted to talk to people. Through my articles, through my books. And it worked. After 2 years I have more then 12 000 contacts. I found my colleagues in many parts of the world and very happy that we are connected and communicate.

Everything I write about – is from my own knowledge, from my own mistakes, my experience, my communication with colleagues and partners.

In August, being 37, I wrote small note – about what do I think being 37. Here it is. And hope it will help you to understand me better and find out who I am 😊

**I'm still-just-yet (!) 37 :-P**

**I have few regrets. But I do not regret about them.** Yes, I'm a human being – but who's not. Like Franky said – I did it my way? And I think to regret – it's just to waste the life. There

was a time when I thought that being mistaken is something what I should avoid. When I afforded myself to have the right for mistake – I started to breathe calmer and lighter. It's a great thing – to afford not to judge yourself too strict. Moreover – you have an indisputable right to afford this.

**I have a lot of wishes and dreams.** It's a big thing when you do not lose power to wish and dream. Keep this ability in yourself – to want something. Even small stupid things, like new case for your iPhone, or yellow diamond;) Last one not small and not stupid, but still. Or, to travel where you have never been. Or, to start the new project, or renovate your kitchen... or whatever – it's a lot, when you feel that you are full of emotions and passion, and your life can give you more and more – just lend your hand.

**I'm proud** that I can take part in different projects, that I'm invited and I can communicate with a lot of people around the world. It's an honor.

**I'm happy** because I'm surrounded by people whom I love with all my heart and who loves me.

**I feel no regret** that being 22 I didn't marry the guy. I was fool. I did not know what I want from him, I did not know what I want from myself, from my life, from marriage. I had no responsibility about anything. I was born when my mum was 21. Another time, another history. My story – is my story. No matter what is said, like I'm already a little bit old woman to have children. I want family, I want children. Because right now I know what to do

with all this.

**I feel that I live in rhythm of “It’s My Life”.** This is now or never! But sometimes Macarena is also dancing in my head :-D

**I’m happy** because I have the job which I love. It was a long way to get here. Long and complicated. But it was worth it. Nothing can be achieved without taking yourself from the sofa and start acting.

**I have the answer** on the question – where do you find time for all your projects? Sitting on the kitchen, which right now is under renovation, and checking my mail; thinking that yesterday I talked to my colleague from Japan while I’ve been in the bus on the way to the office; or recording the video for Brazil project at 12 at night; or thinking about 3rd book, while 2nd one is in the process of checkup; or writing notes; or planning the participation in December Forum for assistants. I know the answer. I just want to do all this. And I’m doing. Just doing.

**I feel that sport is my best friend.** Otherwise with my passion to cookies, ice cream and all other very tasty things I will be 100 kg :-D Yes, now my body needs more sport than before. It’s true, I do not get younger. No regret. Just correction. And this is the point where – more is better than less :)

**I feel that the trainings of personal growth gave me a lot.** It’s a good thing. Even if you think that you have everything fine. It’s good to learn yourself, it’s good to learn new things.

**I understood that I don’t need a lot of make-up.** It makes me older. Just a little bit. But well maintained skin is much better

and more attractive.

**I feel that 37 is a wonderful age.** Not too young to be very stupid, but not too old for a few stupid things :-P

**I'm very glad** that when I was 6 parents took me to English school. I cannot imagine that I don't know English and can't talk to all of you around the world. I feel that one day I will start to learn Italian, or Japanese :)

**I know that happiness is in a small little things.** Like: making autumn pictures, sound of the rain, cosy café, helping somebody, read the favorite book, meet friends, birthday celebrations. In each and every moment you can find it.

**I know that negative emotions kill.** Don't use them. Try to be positive. I know, sometimes it's difficult. And the only thing that we want – just close the door and cry. I do. Sometimes I cry, because I'm tired. But this is just the way to understand that you need time to stay alone for a while and have a rest. Everything will shine again. That's it.

**I feel that I always have to try.** Whatever I do. Otherwise, I will betray myself and the life which was granted to me 37 years ago.

**And I think that finally I've found my word. It's Passion.**

# From Author

Here we go. With my second book. There were a lot of positive feedbacks about my first book “Assistant’s Path in Russia: a Guide for the Profession”, which was published both in Russian and English, so I decided not to stop by ☺

I’m very proud and glad that the book was read by my colleagues all over the world, it is a great appreciation that I did something useful and helpful.

I thought that definitely can share another my thoughts and stories which can be funny, or probably not. Which can happen just in my country, or maybe somewhere else.

I decided to write about team buildings, office, gifts, add some simple notes, so about everything what I have faced during my career.

Now you hold in your hands the **book “Coffee Break Confidential: Real-Life Tales from Assistants”**.

I hope you will like it.

Don’t take it very seriously, take the coffee or tea and just enjoy the reading. I’m always saying that whatever you do in your life – you should enjoy and be happy ☺

But, before you start I want to share with you a very little story, which happened with one of my colleague and my dear friend. It’s not related to the job of assistant, but it’s related to the fact that when you decide to take the step and change something

in your life, a lot of wonderful things begin to happen. And doesn't matter if you decide to travel where you have never been, or you decide to change the job. I believe that when you sincerely want something – it comes to your life.

It was long ago and happened when we decided to visit our dear friend in Dominican Republic. Irene has moved there after she's been married and a year ago we have finally visited her...

*“The plane landed in Punta Cana.*

*– Lord, what a silence! – Valentina exclaimed, as soon as we descended the ladder.*

*– Maybe we should relocate here? – grunted Kate. Previously, the morning was always given to this young lady with difficulty. And then there's the flight stretched in a few hours.*

*– Yes, you see what a beauty! – Valentina never ceased to squeal, not paying attention that people have already begun to turn around.*

*– Hey, I'm here – rang to their left. Turning the heads we saw Irene.*

*Hugs and exclamations took another ten minutes. Staying comfortable in a new minivan, we set off towards the city.*

*And the morning was really wonderful. The plane landed at six in the morning and the sky was still brightened by the predawn rays of the sun. Dominicana, one of the favourite places of divers. State, with a population of less than in any major city in the world.*

*Irene lived here for a little over a year.*

*• At first it was hard to get used to, – she said as we drove –*

*Mostly because of the silence. At first, we hardly slept at all.*

- Hey – Michelle interrupted her, – Aren't we going to the hotel? I was here a year ago; I think we should have turned to the left?*
- Oh, I forgot to tell you – slyly squinting, Irene paused – we have a house now, so you will live with us.*
- That's awesome! – Valentina squealed so that Kate jumped in her place, banging her head on the ceiling.*
- Goddamn it... Val! – Rubbing her head with her hand, Kate looked as if she had been pushed after hibernation.*
- Kate, dear, we will come soon and you can sleep – Irene smiled conciliating – We know how you hate to be dragged somewhere early in the morning, but this is a rest.*

*Fifteen minutes later, the car turned into an alley, on both sides of which, at a fairly decent distance from each other, stood at home. Turning to the third right, Irene turned off the engine. The fence was entwined with ivy, on the lawn in front of the house in a neat order are located flower beds. The house was a two-story, and judging by the appearance is quite spacious.*

*– There is a swimming pool in the backyard, – Irene said – Many here fill it with ocean water, but it's too salty, so we use*

*regular water. Some of you will have to live alone, the rooms are for two. Although, if you want, we can move the bed. Sam will come only in the evening, so you can start a permutation.*

*– Do not move anything. I have nothing against retirement. Eyes are closing. Show me the room, and I'll go to sleep – Kate yawned.*

*We looked at each other, but said nothing. In the usual time, Kate was ready to light the day and night, but lack of sleep just knocked her out of a rut. And the cute pretty girl was turning into a bore. Showing her the room, Irene quietly closed the door behind her and went to help us to disassemble the luggage. Do not bother to undress completely, Kate pulled off her jeans and fell on the bed.*

*The evening promised to be wonderful. The weather was gorgeous, the sun was setting, the sky was not cloudy, and the wind only occasionally stirred the branches of trees. A small cafe is conveniently located off the coast, so that the sound of the ocean was heard.*

*We chose a table away from the speakers so that the music would not interfere with the conversation. Having ordered four portions of mojito and a huge, at all at once, portion of the Mediterranean salad, we unanimously clinked to make the holiday a success.*

*– Kate, what happened? Why don't you drink? – Michelle asked, seeing as a friend froze with a glass in her hand – What ...?*

*– Oh shit! – Michelle exclaimed, following the look of Kate. Michelle best of all us knew a young man coming our way.*

– *What the... damn yourself!* – whispered Valentina.

– *Interestingly, his wife is also here. Although, it is unlikely she would let him walk on the beach like that, Irene sarcastically remarked.*

– *Yes, the rest was a success, no doubt,* – said Kate.

*Max Harper in person. The first young man Kate, they met at the university. The novel stretched out for eight years with breaks. The finale of which was the marriage of Max completely on another girl.*

– *So, ladies. Do not forget that he is married and this is the page of my story, which is in the past. Give me a couple of minutes. He wouldn't need any more – after drinking her glass in one gulp, Kate began to rise at the meeting of the former passion, but Max was ahead of her.*

– *Girls, good evening!* – smiled the young man, and turning to Kate added – *Did not expect to see you in the Dominican Republic, surprised and... delighted – Can I steal you from my girlfriends for a while?* – He said, holding out Kate's left hand, which has not a wedding ring.

– *Okay, okay, so be it* – Kate smiled, giving him her hand – *It seems I have no choice.*

*"I'll tell you what, girls, no matter how we play a wedding here," said Michelle thoughtfully, when the couple moved a fair distance from their table. "It seems that this time everything is serious."*

*"Then for Kate!"* – exclaimed Irene.

– *Agree!* – raised her glass Valentina.

*“And may love always find its way home!” – said Michelle.*

*I saw them walked along the ocean shore. A young man next to Kate clasped her hand tightly in his hand. They did not speak. For so many years of dating, the words were not needed. The surf was noisy, the sky was illuminated by the sunset rays of the sun. And, perhaps, indeed, this evening, after many years of wandering, love has found its way home”.*

Is it worth to say that couple of months later we were celebrating another wedding. My friend Kate, being along already for several years, prior to this trip has lost the job and was sure that nothing great should happen in her life.

After our return, Kate became Mrs. Harper and found the new job. And now Max and Kate have two beautiful twins ☺

Do not take it as a too sweet story. I want to say that even if we think that nothing positive can happen, it will do.

And this is the principle. **When you decide to change the job, when you decide to relocate, when you want to go where you have never been – just do it.**

**Taking the very little step – can be followed by something great. If you have read my first book, you remember – I wrote my first article in 2013. 6 years later – it is my second book. But without that first article, who knows if something could happen at all. My friend Kate didn’t want to go with us. She is afraid to fly.**

**Neither me, nor Kate haven’t seen the whole staircase ☺  
And what about you?**

*Christina A. Maslova*

# **I. Myths and Legends About Assistant's Job**

## **Everyone Can Do It**

Well... you can try. At least. However, of course, not everyone suits for this job. And, no surprise that not all of assistants are successful in what they do. I'm strongly convinced that before to dive deep in this job – the first question should be – why do I need it, second – how special I am to be successful. Yes, assistants – are special, unique people.

If to touch the philosophy – what is success itself? What it means to you? You want be popular, want people to know about you. Or, want to become the manager who leads the big company? If to think – assistant's job is not about success, as we understand it in our ordinary life. Moreover, I know people who do not consider assistants as part of management team. Then, what it's about if not about success and not about recognition. And while making the step to become an assistant – you should be ready to face this reality. You should be sure that the reason why you have chosen this profession is not because you're looking for success. That is why – the questions are why and how? Sorry for tautology. And that's why not all of us can

do this job.

It's for elected ones, who understand their own place in the story and the roles of others. And, of course, who can accept the opinion of people around and know what to do with it. First of all, of course, not permitted to be broken by this opinion. But this is not what I wanted to talk about in this note. Some of you, or probably most of you, will agree that it took years to get “armored” and face the difficulties on our job with smile. To become those who can shake hands with business owners and don't feel themselves “bounded by privilege”. Do you know why? Because the business sharks are supported by our colleagues and they know the value.

Everything what assistants finally get – is the respect. But, it costs so much more! And, believe me, assistants would not sell this even for billion dollars. A! Final question before to decide that everyone can do this job – do you really ready to work for the respect of one person? In this world when money sometimes plays much poorer role than you can imagine.

# Communication – it is an Extraordinary Skill

But as a fact, you need just one thing – *TALK TO PEOPLE*.

First of all, let's define. There is an internal communication with partners, colleagues, boss. When you discuss the contract, the business issue. It is one thing. But, I would like to talk about external one, when you need to go and ask, take the phone and call, open the laptop and write, when you need help, answer or advice.

Recently, I stirred up, I think, almost the whole office of Disney Land Paris because I couldn't buy tickets online. Neither on their com. web site, nor the co.uk. It just told me "your reservation couldn't be completed" during several days. The call on the number mentioned on the web page finished in a 5 minutes as I heard – yes, we know the problem, try later. That's it. My dear boss – go to Paris, and buy the tickets at the cashier's office. But, as you can imagine, the issue is really simple and quite stupid. And it couldn't be finished like this.

My big thanks to Marco Bernini, Vice-president Parks Operations chez Disneyland Paris, he wrote me the number of his office, where his assistants helped me to solve the problem. And now I know both names of assistants and the Russian representative of Disney Land Paris. The secretary in my office was surprised when heard that I communicate with top

management of Disney Land Paris. And she asked, how did I know all these people?

I don't know them. And I don't know a lot of people from my almost 8 000 contacts on LinkedIn. And they don't know me personally. But, the main thing what I say on my master classes is that people, in most part, are very nice, open and friendly. And the only thing what you need to do – is to go, write or call and ask. And there is nothing extraordinary in this. I communicate with my colleagues, business owners from Brazil to Australia, I know what I tell you about. And it's a very efficient tool I should say. Not your communication skill. But your openness, your wish to talk to people. Our big mistake is that we don't want to deal with people. But, as a fact – very often to solve the problem you need to do a very little step. *TALK TO PEOPLE.*

# **We Can Not Burnout**

No, we can. Just because we're all human being and if you think that you can work 24\7\365 on maximum of your skills – you're wrong. Dead wrong.

It's true that most of assistants are perfectionists. The intention to do everything with high class efficiency and speed – this is what most of us had used to. But, in fact, sometimes you need to stop and do ordinary things just good with no rush. And, very often most of us feel shame, because internally it means that we don't do as much as possible. But we forget that sometimes it's not needed. This is the conflict between you and yourself. The internal burnout when you need rest, but yourself cannot afford it, because, well, I'm professional, I can do everything and any time.

I notified this, approximately twice a year if to talk about me. Twice a year I need to slow down. Then I talked to a few of my colleagues, and during the coffee meeting they told me that have the same issue. So, somehow the statistics is correct. When many years ago I went into sport, my father, who is doctor, told me that human body is a kind of a machine. You cannot load everything you want inside, because one day it will be broken. You should take care of it. I think the same approach should be used when we talk about job. We cannot “run” the whole year. And, you shouldn't be upset that you cannot. Because it is a normal thing.

When you feel, that already are on the line after which you will burnout and will reach the level when you don't want any job, you should stop. We should take care of our job and if we want to do it perfectly – every job needs breaks. Otherwise we face bad mood, we face illness, we feel as we don't like our job at all, though it's not true.

I notified an interesting thing. I usually eat in the office. Very bad habit to eat and continue read mail. As I used to do everything quickly, I eat quickly in the office. But the same I notified when was sitting in the country during lunch on vacation. I eat quickly though there is no rush, there is no mail to read and meetings to run. Mentally, I continue working and running. And it was a very upset observation, I should say. When you don't have habit to stop when you need. It took me couple of months of an intensive internal work to get used that I should think, I should control what I do and how, when I eat, when I need rest, what and when I feel.

But, finally I understood the main – when you afford yourself the normal breaks, the return to the work is much more pleasant. And, when you feel that one more step and that's it – you should stop.

Just remember that work is always there, but life has tendency to end.

We all need to press "Pause" button sometimes. Learn to rest.

# It's Very Easy to Deal with Any of Your Colleagues

Unfortunately, no. When we do something fast, when we drive the challenges and want to improve the processes, be ready, that some of your colleagues just want to get finished what should be. And when you try to say that – hey, guys, I see here the room for improvement, because this... or that... you can face the wall.

Several years ago, I was very upset by one of such situations. I have a big experience dealing with different personalities, and even though it's really hard not to find the way to talk to me – it's true, I love people and always open to any ideas and initiatives, well, I must admit, that sometimes, you need to let people work as they do. So, returning to the point. I was really upset – I just couldn't understand why they don't see the room for improvement, why they don't want to change the process, why they, at least, don't want to discuss what could be done?

Once, one of my bosses, being very wise man, told me – look, you shouldn't spend your energy on this, you shouldn't be upset, because they are not the only ones whom you will meet in your life being the people, who are not on one side with you. And *it is normal*. We all have people in our teams who work differently, who don't have the same approach – hey, let's do it, let's run, do it faster, better, etc. No.

I should say, that really, sometimes, it is being very upset

thing, when you don't see the feedback in the eyes of your colleagues, when you propose good reasonable things to be done. And it's not about how easy it can be to talk to them. No, we absolutely calmly can meet during lunch and discuss ordinary processes, but when it comes to do a little bit more or, what is more important, differently, please, be welcome to the club of witches who push them, and try to make confusion in their established life.

And it is ok. Sooner or later it will move. Because in the terms of current economy situation business cannot wait too long when everybody wake up. But in every team we have such people. And it is ok as, well, we are all different. There is nothing ideal in our life. You need to show more flexibility communicating with people around us. Be sure – they know their job, but being slow, they can be annoying in their wish to keep things as they are. From psychological point of view, they want to keep the stability. This helps them to keep balance. We know that business world is very fast and we should be very flexible in our approaches. But, keep calm and just accept the fact that you cannot expect all to run as you do. Marathon distance is always different to different people. Be generous in understanding others.

# We Can Do Everything in 24 hours

Probably, I will upset somebody, but no. Not everything, not always, could be done in 24 hours. That is life. And here I would like to share few tips, which I use to organize myself.

First of all, our job is very multifunctional and requires high speed. But, even if you have all qualities of a perfect assistant, you will not be able to fulfil everything in 24 hours, just because we're all human being. But, you can try and organize yourself to make maximum out of possible, pay attention to everything and everybody and remember about yourself.

1. And the first from the list is... ta-dam! Rest! Find the time for rest. In terms of stress your body presses button for energy saving, which as you remember you don't have enough, and your ability to work efficiently reduces. So, the main thing is – to have lunch. And 15—20 minutes per day to have small break. One of my colleagues shared her experience, during the day – she goes out of office to breathe – 5—7 minutes. Even your Apple Watch pushes you to stand up, to breathe! So, please, start doing this. Keeping phone silent (nobody will die if you not answer the call immediately). Your ability to organize your own rest will have the direct impact on how you feel and how you work. And, of course, sleep is also important.

2. Split the tasks according to importance. Make the list, keep the reminders on iPhone or mail, no difference. I know that we all love to do things now, straight away. But, no. You should know the limit and keep balance. Split the tasks by people or timelines.

3. You can join 2 or 3 tasks in one. There are personal and business tasks, which can done in one time. Sometimes, it helps a lot. For example. If I order corporate gifts and I know that I will need something personally, I make 1 order, splitting the invoice into two parts. I don't spend additional time for gifts, shops, etc. Think few minutes – if I need something – and then go and order.

4. Learn how to work with colleagues and partners. You do not do everything by yourself and, what is more important, you should not. Learn how to delegate. Yes, most of us have problems. Because we know better, we can do faster, and easier. Stop. The number of tasks has the rule – they increase. And you need to think ahead and learn how to make your life easier. Especially it's related to travel agencies, to different services. They get money. So, use the resource. Most of assistants are “red”. Recently I've read the book by Thomas Erikson “Surrounded by idiots”. And this definition “red” is taken from this book. Read it, it's interesting approach. Then I spoke with few of my colleagues, and we must admit, that does not matter which “color” you are. Most of assistants are “red” at work. And this is also influence on our communication with colleagues.

Learn how to be more flexible. Not all are so speedy as we are.

5. Make simple tasks straight away. Don't store them. If it is one call which is needed or letter – do it. You even do not have to add this to your list. Just done and that's it. Small and not urgent tasks make the garbage in your head. For example, if you should remind your colleague about something – write letter and close the deal. It is 1 minute. If not – you will always feel like you have a lot of and nothing at the same time. And despite that it's very little things, it will influence on your work load.

6. Come to office earlier. I know, I know... we all want sleep. But morning without boss and colleagues makes you calm and gives you opportunity to work with documents, drink coffee in a relax mode, remember all small things to be finished. Calm morning – it's a great tool. And an excellent start of a new working day.

7. Your working place should be ideal. No old papers, no invoices, which should be in accounting, no bills and etc. When you go home your table should be almost empty. The same with Outlook. Make folders, split mails. Organize everything with maximum efficiency to use it, with minimum time to find. Your time is precious. Learn how to use it properly.

And finally, small advice. Say thank to yourself. And make

sure that in order to keep up, you get high on what you are doing. Our bosses not always have time to say thank you. It doesn't mean they do not want. No. But, their time is running faster than ours. So, sometimes, remind yourself that you're well done! Because without us – their working day would be much more complicated 😊

## II. What Do I Think About Reception?

Once I've heard a very interesting opinion that secretary person it's just – tea\coffee, meet guests... To say that I was “a little bit” surprised – it's to say nothing. The true is that the modern world is very fast, very energetic, and to meet the requirements every person in your team should be Very Professional. And the reception secretary is part of it and the first one to prove the company's image. Personally, I think that reception person should not have a lot of experience. It's easier to learn how to work in your company and help to set up the proper mind and understanding of the processes. But, in general, what do we look for when we try to find the “ideal” candidate for this role?

- Look. Definitely. You will never afford jeans or extra make up. The understanding of how you should look like on this position, one of the key success to get the job. And Fridays are not an exception.

- Smile. It's easy to bring coffee. But, is it easy to be happy to see everybody from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.? If you have never tried – do this. Just try. I would say, that sometimes this job would be more complicated than to be a PA.

- Willing to help everyone. Absolutely everyone. And, how about this? To find the proper solution even if you do not know where to run.

- Answering the phone calls. 10th, 50th, 100th... With smile in voice and absolute desire to convince the caller that we are happy to hear him\her.

- Punctuality. And better to come in advance for 10—15 minutes to be able have a look if everything is fine in conference rooms and etc. The reception person just cannot be late. Cannot. That's it.

- Stress resistance. When two or three people stand near you and all need urgent help already yesterday. To make sure that you pay attention to everyone, keep the deadlines. It's not an easy task.

This is at least what I have thought about when was searching for “ideal” candidate. And the list is not full. However, we used to think that every person could be easily replaced, well, yes, it's true. But, to find the right one it could become your real headache. I convinced that reception secretary is a very complicated job, and true professionals can grow from this profession.

## **III. About Boss**

### **Why Would I Work for a Bad Company or a Bad Boss**

First of all, let me clarify – we talk about a bad company or a bad boss according to how we define “bad”, and whether or not we belong in a particular organization.

If you don't belong or fit well in a particular organization, there is no reason why you should stay there. Even if you're paid a lot of money. The only possible and acceptable exception – which I hope none of us has faced or would ever face in our lives – is when we have to stay because there is truly no choice. No choice because you absolutely need the job. Without it you cannot pay bills, buy food, support your family and your life. This should be the only reason why you would ever consider working in a bad place. By “bad” place I mean, of course, a job you don't like, a company you don't like, a boss you don't like, colleagues you don't like, etc. But even in these circumstances working at such a job should just be a temporary measure while you look for the job you would love to have.

Some assistants who have just started their career try to work in a prestigious company with a well-known person, and

sometimes they don't understand the price they pay. But the same goes for small companies and unknown executives – the issue will be the same. A good situation is if you really love your boss and the company. Even if there are some complicated situations, you simply don't care about all these problems. Because you love your boss and your company, these situations don't matter to you. You wake up in the morning and you're totally happy because you want to go to work.

But, and there is a big but, if you are not comfortable because of the boss, or because of the company, and you don't look for something else – it will become your biggest problem. When you work at a job where you truly don't belong, where the atmosphere is uncomfortable, the challenge is you can start thinking that this situation is normal. This is something you must guard against because it is not normal and you should not consider it normal. If you accept the circumstances, which should not be accepted by default – the result could be that you get sick often, get stressed, or worse, you could fall into depression.

Many of us have forgotten that we should be happy at work. You should be happy in what you do, where you do it, and whom you work for. But, very often we're afraid to take that step and check the market and try to find a better job. We try to convince ourselves that things are fine, we can handle it, we are strong, we can put up with the situation for another year.

Mentally, we accept the bad terms and are afraid to change something. A simple example: I would never work with someone

who smokes. Good salary, good location? No, no, no! I cannot handle the smell of cigarettes. If I breathe it – I feel unhealthy.

Working in a place where you don't feel good about the job or the environment is bad for your mental health. Speak to psychologists. They will tell you that there is nothing worse than being in a place where you feel nervous all the time, it's even worse than breathing cigarette smoke.

So other than the necessity I mentioned earlier, there is no reason to accept working somewhere where you are not happy. I have a lot of examples in my career when I meet assistants and they look very, very tired. They don't look happy. They look as though they are barely surviving.

Work should be a very nice and attractive journey. Yes, we should learn how to work in different companies and with different people. And you should try. But, if you are sure it is not a good match – look for another job. Otherwise your work life will be one of trying to survive.

As **Jan Jones, author of “The CEO’s Secret Weapon”** told me, “You cannot do your best, most productive work if you are in an environment that doesn't promote or support your mental and physical well-being. If there are tweaks or changes that can be made to your workplace by discussing the situation with your boss, you should do so. You may be surprised to learn that they value you and would like to make the changes in order to keep you and improve the overall workplace morale. But if your efforts fall on deaf ears, you should consider making a move.

Otherwise, your creativity and motivation will suffer and you may develop negative work habits. Low morale workplaces are simply not conducive to high performance”.

# What Kind of Boss You Are: Mistaken or Learning?

This is a differentiation for me here when I try to understand what kind of boss I talk to. We all make mistakes. I've never ever seen an assistant who doesn't do mistakes. Actually haven't seen any other my colleague who does not. There are no ideal people, there are ideal intentions – somebody said.

Long ago, one of the company's owners whom I talked to said, that it's much more efficient to learn people, then to criticize them. He said, *"I do never tell people, that they have done a mistake. We try to discuss the situation and understand why it happened as it is and look for a proper solution to learn how not to do in future. Maybe this is the reason why I have many employees working with me for 8—10 years and more. I do really appreciate their adherence to my company. This is the trust which cannot be replaced by anything"*.

Obviously, for many of us critics it's a kind of a signal that we need to review our approaches, but on the other hand, many of us are very upset to find out that something wrong was done. When we see the understanding that nobody is ideal and to be mistaken – it is ok, and the approach is to learn together and talk – this is absolutely another story. For company it means much more loyal employees, because nobody likes to be criticized. Of course, depends on situation, but in most cases –

to be learnt is more efficient.

Is it worth to say that when we are afraid to be mistaken – our chances to mess up grow rapidly?

So, if you're the boss, what kind of boss you are – mistaken or learning?

## **IV. Where to Find Time for Everything? Be in the Stream**

Sometimes, I've been asked – you have a lot of everything, how do you find time, any secrets from time management point of view? Well, probably yes, but on the other side, it's only 24 hours in a day and nobody can do everything. And I'm the human being like others, and it's sometimes difficult to be everywhere. But...

I will tell just you – I almost don't use calendar. I have only one set up on my phone, and it's more like reminder, but not calendar. It doesn't mean that I don't plan – of course I do. But, the value is not in planning, the value is in determining what matters for you and simply doing it to achieve what you want. Exactly doing. It means that I try not to spend the precious time for something I don't like. It might very well be that you will think something like – hey, we cannot do just what we want. Yes, it's true. But to be in the stream with your own wishes and move step by step to be more and more involved in what really matters for you, it's the whole art, I will tell you. And I learn. I learnt, and I continue doing.

And the job it's also the part of it. There will be no success if you are not in the stream. You will never find time, if you're not in the stream. And to make time for what matters – it's exactly the

main and on the top of all secrets. Because there are no secrets at all. There is just your wish to understand what you really want. We all have the capacity to do more, we all have energy, but you can see the result only if you move the right direction. Your right direction. Your stream.

## V. How is that – To Be Proactive?

The question seems to be silly, but I decided to stop by because personally faced the situation that sometimes my young colleagues cannot understand what it is exactly about.

For example, you're working during 1—2 years on the position where there is only one requirement – do well what you're asked for. Then you found another job in another company where the basic principal is – that nobody will push you.

Btw, most of Western companies work like this. Yes, you have initial responsibilities, but to be able to achieve something in this company (and what is more important to grow) means that you should take more than is expected from you.

Always to be at least one step ahead...

Shortly, to be proactive means:

- do more (take on not only listed tasks in your job description);
- look around (there are always issues with processes and etc., pay attention to these issues);
- think about the possible decisions (when you find out the problem);
- think about implementation of what you have proposed;
- learn to listen and hear comments of your colleagues.

To be proactive means – that you should run for the job, and not vice versa. To wait when somebody will come and propose

you something will not work. In this case, your reputation in the company will be zero.

Be open to new tasks, even if they are not in zone of your responsibility. Keep your eyes open and look around. There is always a lot of what should be done. You need just come and take it. This will increase your visibility in the company, will show your interest to develop yourself, help you to communicate more with your colleagues. And, all this – your way to career growth.

For example, you found out that there is a lack of communication between assistant's block and one of the departments. Take the lead role, propose to your colleagues, that you will take this job and on, let's say, monthly basis, will prepare the short communication letter with update. Agree on format, with your colleagues think about the content and move ahead. It's simpler than it seems to be.

You need just one thing – start doing this.

## **VI. If Partners Can Help in Your Daily Routine?**

Here, I would like stop by on the following. Assistants work not just with colleagues, but with companies-partners, who provide us different services. It can be travel support, events organization, suppliers (for example, furniture, food, etc.). And the reliable supplier – it's a big help in our daily routine. I think it's great when you find company and people there understand your needs, they do more, and try to find the best solution for you.

Of course, a lot depends on your skills as communicator. And this is also one of the skills which can be developed. Be sure that your partners stay with you during your whole career – doesn't matter where you work. If you know that there are people whom you can rely on – it's also your way to be more efficient.

And not to waste your time looking for the new supplier. Assistants have very limited free time. It should be spend with value.

When I come to new company, I always try to find out which suppliers company already work with and set up good relations with them in shortest period. Every supplier – from stationary to travel. If I need more, for example, private jets – I propose, evaluate the cost and we decide if we should sign the contract. It is myth that assistants should do everything by themselves.

Nothing at all. It's simply impossible. You should control others to do it for you.

I remember I had to arrange the corporate teambuilding in Portugal. Our local agency proposed interesting, but very expensive option. Usually, what you do – you send the request to travel agent and they book everything from tickets to food. But it costs too much. During our meeting with general director, my boss actually, we looked on costs, on budget and I told – let me organize myself. The question – are you sure that you can handle it – was not stupid, because they did not know that I have already done it once, you will read about this teambuilding further on in the book. So, why not?

But, should I say that of course I haven't done everything by myself. The tickets were bought through our usual travel agent, whom we work with on a business trips. The hotel was booked directly in Portugal. The guide and transfers were found by asking my colleague in Portugal. Of course, they advised the local, much cheaper travel agent, who arranged everything from guide and excursions to food and presents. And we have made the economy of 2—3 thousands Euro I think.

So, if partners can help you? Of course. Should you use all the resources to make your life easier? Certainly yes. Should you talk to your colleagues and partners abroad and ask for help? Definitely.

## VII. Confessional — My Most Embarrassing Mistake

Assistants are very attentive people, and mistake it's something more exceptional, than the rule. But sometimes, it happens.

I asked my colleagues to share stories about the mistakes they made in their work and tell them how they got out of difficult situations. Some of them are funny, and this proves once again that sometimes a sense of humour is essential in our work.

Funny thing – there are just few examples, because most of my colleagues couldn't remember anything serious, and this is one more prove that assistants can do the mistakes, but improve the situation quickly and nobody knows about it ☺

*“I forgot to order a taxi. To my luck, the hotel was not far from the office. When in the morning the chief came on foot and said that a car had not arrived behind him, there was no limit to my horror. I just started working in the company, and there it is. Despite this, the chief laughed, said that the walk helped him in the fight against obesity and no longer recalled the incident. I remember about it so far. But, for several years now, I have never forgotten about ordering a taxi. They say that they learn from mistakes” – Helen L.*

*“I confused the dates when booking tickets. It is good that*

*I discovered this by myself a few days before departure. Thanks to a good relationship with the manager of the agency where we book tickets, I changed them without penalties” – Sandra T.*

*“My chef does not eat flour (pasta, bread, etc.). When ordering lunch to the office, I always ask to exclude croutons from the salad. We even had to once change the restaurant, when in the one we use, the toasts were nevertheless put several times. Chef is very angry. And then, whether I was running in, or at the same time answering the call, in general, having already placed the food on the table in the office, I looked at the salad, and on top lay a pile of toasts. Well, I did not check it... it was too late to rush with a plate to the kitchen through the whole office; in the corridor I heard the voice of the chief. In general, I had to shove the croutons from the salad into my jacket pocket. Then I shook crumbs for a long time” – Ashley S.*

*“My boss asked to order flowers to one of our partners, and the addresses were mixed up. So, the flowers were delivered to another partner (luckily, she was woman too!). Surprise! I don't remember what kind of explanation my boss gave to the lady, who has got flowers by mistake. But, of course, we had to order another ones. We laughed and the point was taken for future to double check everything” – Ingrid F.*

**And what is your the most embarrassing mistake? #**

## **VIII. You Will Never Know What You Have To Do Today**

Sometimes, the requests from your boss can be strange, and sometimes funny. So, if colleagues tell you that you need sense of humor – trust us, because we know why.

So, what else we can do. My list is:

- To communicate with his\her “ex”;
- To receive the permission from landlord to paint the wall in apartment into pink;
- To walk with dog in the middle of working day in the city center;
- Bake cake and stand quietly on the sideline until boss tries to prove that did it himself;

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