

Professional Assistant's Role Has Evolved

Think "professional assistant" is just a fancy name for a secretary? Assistants to several top Mobile area executives said think again.

"The assistant's role in today's business world is very different from years past," said Betty Blakeney, executive assistant to Thomas Bates, who is vice president and site manager of Degussa Corp. "In one day, I may plan a luncheon or dinner for visitors to our plant site; I may work on an assigned project; or I may work on an ad for a baseball team that Degussa is sponsoring."

Blakeney should know. Her career as a professional assistant spans 40 years, including 26 years with Degussa.

The role of the professional assistant, which will be honored Wednesday, April 27 on Professional Assistants Day, has changed over time. And many area assistants cite technology as the most important factor in that change.

"Your responsibilities increase when you can do routine jobs so easily on the computer," said Carolyn Wilson, communications assistant at the Mobile Area Chamber. "We're doing a lot of things management used to do, such as creating budgets that used to be done by hand."

Wilson, who is also president of the Mobile Chapter of the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), said the widespread change of job title from "secretary" to "professional assistant" coincided with the advent of the personal computer.

"Before the title change, I used my computer mainly to check e-mails, create letters and reports," said Wilson. "But once the title changed, the responsibilities

changed and I had the opportunity to attend computer courses and learn new skills, making me a more valuable employee."

Not all the changes wrought by technology have been positive.

"Some of it has created a lot more work insofar as more e-mails and communication," said Carolyn Feltus, administrative assistant to Vice President of the Mobile Division of Alabama Power, Cheryl Thompson. "You have to go through the volume (of e-mail) that comes in, sift through that and set your priorities without being overwhelmed."

Indeed, such "soft" skills are still critical to success in this field.

"The most important skills required of a professional assistant today are organization, sound decision-making and people skills," said Maureen Miller, executive administrative assistant to Mobile Gas President and CEO John S. Davis.

Others concur. "For me, the most important (are) communication and listening skills," said Blakeney. She adds "a can-do attitude, time management,



From left to right (seated) Betty Blakeney and Carolyn Wilson (standing) Carolyn Feltus and Maureen Miller.

Struggling to put together that special gesture for your favorite administrative assistants?

Show them they outshine all your expectations with the Administrative Professionals Day Luncheon at Colonial Mall Bel Air on April 27 from 12-1 p.m. In addition to a delicious lunch, there will be goody bags, giveaways and a presentation from motivational speaker, Judy Marston.

The event and luncheon are free, but reservations are required. To reserve a place for your assistant by April 22, call 478-1893.

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people skills, negotiating skills (and leadership skills) are necessary to the success of a professional assistant.

These skills enable professional assistants to take on management responsibilities unheard of in earlier decades.

"We have become more than just the secretary who takes letters, sends out correspondence, answers the phone and (gives messages) to somebody to handle," said Feltus, who has been an assistant since the mid-1970s. "Many times, we're in a position to handle a call, take care of a customer or refer them to someone who can help them rather than the executive having to handle that."

Many in the field worry the public's perception of the professional assistant's role hasn't kept up with the times. "I believe some people may think we still make coffee and file our nails or, at the very least, just sit and type all day," said Miller. "Professional assistants in today's business world are multi-taskers and pretty much do it all."

Those who are interested in becoming professional assistants shouldn't let such misperceptions discourage them from entering the field, these assistants said.

"Don't think it's a minor job," said Blakeney. Feltus agreed. "These are great jobs. You will meet a lot of wonderful people along the way (and get) a lot of wonderful exposure to

business at its finest. It's a great, great profession."

Miller, who has been in her current position for five years after 23 years as a legal secretary, had another piece of advice for those considering this career.

"The most important thing is to like what you do," Miller said. "I actually enjoy my job — it's fun to come to work. Each day offers different and unique opportunities and challenges."

Treat Professional Assistants To Something Special

Professional assistants will be honored Wednesday, April 27, deemed Professional Assistants Day. Consider recognizing these assistants' contributions with gifts and goodies from Mobile Area Chamber members. Below is a sampling of ideas for something special to honor the work professional assistants do throughout the year:

BAKED GOODS, CAKES, CANDY AND

OTHER SWEET TREATS:

Applicious Gourmet Chocolate Apples & Candies	456-7644
Buttercream Dreams Specialty Cakes	479-7433
Pollman's Bake Shops Inc.	438-1511
Mobile Popcorn Co.	479-2492
Tanner's Pecans & Candies Inc.	473-4560

CATERED LUNCH FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANTS

ARAMARK	208-2116
Center Plate - Hank Aaron Stadium	476-9041
Alec Naman Catering Inc.	473-3900
Atlanta Bread Company	380-0444
Azalea Seafood Gumbo Shoppe	653-5400
Cliff Stapleton Catering Inc.	626-5680
Creative Catering	666-3133
Don's Catering Service	209-2370
Everything and More	343-1944
Heavenly Ham	345-7411
Lassere's Catering	660-8087
Martha Rutledge Catering	342-4700
Prepared Foods Inc.	456-4556
Tyner's Catering	434-9987
W.C.N.N. Full-Service Catering	605-7289

COFFEE AND TEA

AQUALite Water and Coffee Service	653-5655
Beaner's Gourmet Coffee	342-0166
Carpe Diem Coffee & Tea Co. Inc.	304-0448
Community Coffee	(800) 221-5480
Leroy Hill Coffee Co. Inc.	476-1234
Royal Cup Coffee	(800) 366-5836

CLOTHING, COSMETICS AND PERFUMES

Debra's	343-7463
Dillards - Colonial Mall BelAir	471-1551
Gee's Fashion Inc.	479-4949
Goody's Family Clothing	479-3512
Holiday Inc.	342-4911
J.C. Penney Co.	476-4560
Mary Kay Cosmetics - Elaine Burks Goubil	661-6260
McRaes	478-2300
Metzger's Inc.	342-6336

The Factory Connection	342-8849
The Leather Hut	653-5303
V & V's Specialty Shop	479-3535

GIFTS, GIFT BASKETS AND GIFT CERTIFICATES

Black Classics Books & Gifts	476-1060
Brown's Hallmark	473-2665
Colonial Mall Bel Air	478-1893
Crossroads Books and Gifts	776-1515
English Books & Gifts	478-8535
Gerhardt's Luggage and Gifts	341-0403
Gourmet Galley	343-3555
LifeWay Christian Store	476-0565
Nou'Veau Salon & Day Spa LLC	380-2900
Purse•pi•cas•i•ty	343-1844
The Giving Tree Inc.	342-5265
The Ivy Cottage	473-4438

FLOWERS AND GIFTS

Belle Bouquet Florist & Gifts LLC	675-3225
Cleveland The Florist	341-3555
Hall's Theodore Wholesale Florist	653-8563
Leaf & Petal Florist & Gift Shop	457-2750
Shore Acres Plant Farm	973-1602
The Rose Bud Flowers & Gifts LLC	457-6040
Trees of Life	607-0722
Zimlich's Patio & Garden	478-1484

JEWELRY AND GIFTS

Betty's Best Jewelry & Gifts	342-6113
Shamrock Jewelers	662-0027
The Karat Patch	344-5614
Knot Just Beads	473-8650
Claude Moore Jeweler Inc.	380-9400
Elliott's Fine Jewelry	344-0072
Friedman's Fine Jewelry	479-9469
Gold Art Inc.	342-6303
Goldstein's	460-9050
Lou's Jewelry	473-1706
Ware Jewelers	338-9273
Zundel's Jewelers	344-8300

RESTAURANT GIFT CERTIFICATES

219	438-5234
Backyard Burgers	631-3967

Blue Gill Restaurant	625-1998
Carrabba's Italian Grill	342-3662
Catalina Restaurant	342-1501
Copeland's of New Orleans	342-7446
Chick-fil-A	639-1163
Cici's Pizza	341-0880
Cock Of The Walk	666-1875
Cracker Barrel	473-6761
Downtowners on Dauphin	433-8868
Dreamland BBQ	479-9898
Ed's Seafood Shed	625-1947
Fazolli's	633-0328
Felix's Fish Camp	626-6710
Fire Mountain Grill & Buffet	662-0880
Foosackly's	343-0047
Golden Corral	639-9393
Jim Cannon's Brew Pub	432-7556
La Cocina Mexican Restaurant	342-5553
Lapizzeria	473-5003
Los Rancheros	344-5205
Martini's on Dauphin	433-9920
McAlister's Deli & Catering	478-1011
McDonald's Restaurants	478-3223
Michelle's Family Restaurant & Catering	478-6000
Moe's Southwest Grill	342-5233
Olive Garden Italian Restaurant	343-0467
Original Oyster House	928-2620
Outback Steakhouse	342-3276
Pizza Hut	626-6063
Popeye's Chicken & Biscuits	473-1742
Red Lobster	342-1660
Ruth's Chris Steak House	476-0516
Saucy Q Bar-B-Q	433-7427
Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Que	510-9000
Spot of Tea	433-9009
Steak 'N Shake	633-9900
Subway	344-5696
The Honeybaked Ham Co.	343-3100
The Krystal Co.	621-8961
The Pillars	471-3411
Wings Sports Grille	344-2131
Wintzell's Oyster House	432-4605
Zaxby's	607-7645
Zoes Kitchen	625-0977