Executive Assistant / Office Manager

The following traits are important in an office manager or executive assistant. Use this list for hiring or for coaching an existing employee. When hiring, ask the applicant to describe his or her work style, with examples, and listen for evidence of these traits. For coaching, review the list with the employee and determine where improvement is needed.

Responsible

- assumes personal accountability for one's own work
- when something isn't working, finds a way to fix it
- gets things done, and has a reputation for doing so

Understands the Organization

- understands what makes the organization "tick" – knows who/where to go for information and answers; knows the priorities; understands how things are connected
- is eager to gain knowledge of the organization
- knows when the boss has to be involved in something; and when not
- has the confidence and tact to inform the boss quickly of negative situations or observations
- is able to create useful office policies and procedures

Ethical

- actions are guided by a clear understanding of right and wrong
- can be trusted with sensitive information

Disciplined

- able to impose structure onto life and work
- able to set goals and to use them every day to guide actions
- able to help others get and stay organized
- able to find information quickly, without having to look everywhere for it
- keeps files organized; documents are backed up
- maintains a follow-up/pending system so that things don't get dropped
- keeps calendar current with complete and accurate information
- keeps work area organized and neat in appearance

Flexible

- adapts to changes as they occur
- accepts the situation as it evolves
- maintains an even demeanor regardless of what is going on
- able to facilitate schedule changes and early/late meeting starts
- able to shift priorities and delay non-critical tasks
- when necessary is willing to come in early or work late to get the job done

Competent

- has expertise; is able to master a task
- knows computers: all the programs necessary for the smooth functioning of the organization; searching the web to get information and solve problems; basic trouble shooting of problems without having to call for help all the time; able to teach others how to use programs
- knows how to operate other office equipment

Anticipates

- knows due dates and prepares in advance
- reminds the boss of upcoming events or actions
- knows what the boss will need in a given situation, without having to be told
- does things without being asked, in order to speed things up
- able to make appropriate decisions regarding certain details, without having to check with the boss each time
- debriefs with the boss to ensure that anticipations are correct

Integrator

- able to build feelings of mutual support
- relates positively to all employees and volunteers
- relates positively with vendors, visitors, and all external contacts
- is driven to be of service to others
- knows how to listen and understand others' perspectives
- expresses own ideas and suggestions effectively
- sees the big picture and how it affects the day-to-day
- offers and accepts useful criticism
- is assertive yet gracious in saying no

Positive

- naturally looks on the bright side
- projects a positive image of self and the organization
- smiles
- is great on the phone and face-to-face, always professional
- keeps calm when the other person is not calm
- shows empathy – acknowledges the difficulty of a situation to others who are involved
- is especially welcoming and responsive to anyone visiting the office