

## **The New Secretary – By Madelaine Befus, Teresa Kisilevich & Charlene Wyatt**

The role of the “Secretary” has changed substantially over recent years. In fact the title “Secretary” is rarely found these days. These very necessary people who work at the nucleus of any business office have not disappeared; in fact they are more important than ever. These essential team members are now called Administrative Assistants or Administrative Professional. The traditional “secretarial” skills of routine typing, filing, transcribing, and telephone duties are still required; however today’s office professionals must now also know how to manage a computer and software programs including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, web page maintenance, presentations, accounting, electronic calendars and scheduling software and more, including custom software programs unique to their employer’s business.

As technology has changed the way we work in the office, so too has it changed the role of the Secretary. A modern Administrative Assistant is recognized as a professional who can make decisions, offer opinions, implement changes, and take responsibility for independent actions. So important are these people that one day a year is set aside to recognize their contribution to business. This year, April 26 is dedicated as Administrative Professional day. The International Association of Administrative Professionals showcases the importance of these professionals on its website at [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org).

An Administrative Assistant must be mature and professional, a good communicator, a self-starter, have great time management skills, be assertive, poised, self-confident, able to deal with people at all levels, able to handle stress, and be a team player. They must also be creative problem solvers and have the willingness to learn, grow and accept challenges.

Today’s Administrative Assistants also require competencies in numerous areas such as: Project management, integrated computer software applications, organization and scheduling, communications and research, web site maintenance, meeting planning, travel planning, desktop publishing (brochures, flyers, newsletters, and annual reports), creating presentations, coordinating direct mailings, maintaining computer files, directories, and databases & bookkeeping.

How do you become an Administrative Assistant? There are a number of routes, including completing a certificate or diploma program in administrative studies, such as the Applied Business Technology certificate program offered at the Okanagan College. This program can be completed by attending daytime classes or taking online courses. Graduates from this program are in high demand in today’s changing workplace. Graduates can be found working for many local, regional and national companies of all sizes. In fact, there is more demand for grads than there are graduates completing the programs. Some graduates decide to continue their education by entering the Legal Administrative Assistant certificate or Business Administration programs at Okanagan College. Others use their administrative courses towards further certification as certified payroll specialists or bookkeeping certificates. Whatever the student’s choice, one thing is true – traditional jobs continue to evolve with technology and administrative professionals will always be respected for their skills and knowledge.

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