

NOT JUST AN *Admin*

DISCOVER THE RESPECT,
VALUE AND POWER OF THE
ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION

If you've ever said or heard an admin say, "I'm just an admin," this book will change your view about the administrative profession.

PEGGY
VASQUEZ

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Administrative Profession

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NOT JUST AN
Admin

PEGGY
VASQUEZ

OTHER BOOKS BY PEGGY VASQUEZ

*Mean Girl No More: How to Shift from Sabotage to Support
and Build a Powerful Inner Circle*

Dedicated:

***To Rene' my rock, my love.
Thank you for believing in me.***

***To my children and grandchildren,
you inspire me to create a better world.***

***To my former coworkers and bosses for
sharing knowledge, feedback and
expertise to help me grow and
become the person I am today.***

***To my inner circle (friends, mentors and
coaches), thank you for encouraging me to
pursue my dreams.***

***To administrative professionals
around the world, for knowing
you are NOT, Just An Admin!***

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Foreword

This is a valuable handbook for anyone wanting to succeed. It is rare for us to find information that can make a difference both in our professional careers and personal relationships in one easy-to-read book. Filled with thoughtful questions and answers, this book leads the readers on an exciting and well laid out journey to understanding what it takes to achieve the success they desire.

I met Peggy Vasquez at an Administrative Professional Conference in 2012 where I was the keynote speaker. I have watched her grow from a person who was nervous about introducing herself to me, into a confident, self-assured, and highly successful professional. She has learned how to make things happen in her life and career and is passionate about sharing her knowledge with others.

This book is a personal journey with the author into self-discovery, self-respect, and self-confidence. Experience is a wise teacher. In writing this book and sharing her journey, Peggy supports and encourages you to find and achieve your dreams. She is committed to her purpose—helping others succeed. With an unabashed passion for the administrative profession, she empowers you with tools and techniques to help you succeed. While this book is geared to the Administrative Professional, I see it as worthwhile reading for anyone in the corporate world.

JUDI MOREO, AUTHOR

YOU ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH
ACHIEVEMENT JOURNAL

CHAPTER **ONE**

Respect:

You've Got To Give It To Get It

"Self-respect cannot be hunted.

It cannot be purchased.

It is never for sale.

It cannot be fabricated out of public relations.

It comes to us when we are alone, in quiet moments,

in quiet places, when we suddenly realize that,

knowing the good, we have done it;

knowing the beautiful, we have served it;

knowing the truth, we have spoken it."

—WHITNEY GRISWOLD

CHAPTER ONE

Respect: You've Got To Give It To Get It

Terror! That's what I felt the first time I was asked to give a presentation at an upcoming conference. Instead of feeling excited about the opportunity as I had in the past. I had a huge feeling of heaviness about the whole thing. I had a new sense of responsibility to answer the "cry for help" I had been hearing. Over the past several months, the same conversation kept being repeated, almost as if someone was playing the same song over and over again and as each word is sung you know what the next lyric is going to be. It was becoming a Déjà vu type of experience. The "cry for help," message I was hearing and am still hearing is: "People don't respect me and my role as an administrative assistant. I don't feel valued. I don't feel respected." I realized that my terror stemmed from my own feelings that others did not respect or understand the position I was in and what it actually entails.

When I first heard the message, it felt like someone was having a bad day or on a train ride to "Victimville." Over time, the message started sinking in and I realized the "value and respect" message was a real issue to many administrative assistants. (*I believe this feeling is becoming more and more prevalent for anyone in the work force today, not only for the administrative professional career family.*) I realized the "cry for help" wasn't just someone whining or being a victim. It was a deep seeded pain and a

feeling difficult to admit or express. Those sharing the message were not just venting...they wanted change! They wanted the situation to shift and didn't know what to do to cause a change. What made it worse for me was I didn't have an answer. All I could do was listen to their pain and frustration with compassion. I left each interaction feeling frustrated. The energy to solve the problem was swelling up inside of me and the desire to provide an answer was growing.

Then one day the answer came to me, seemingly out of the blue. *(If you're anything like me, this happens often and we both know it is a gift, like manna from heaven, right?)*

Here's what I heard:

The answer is

It all begins with us, as individuals and administrative professionals! First and most importantly, we must have self-respect.

Secondly, we must have respect for our profession as administrative assistants,

and, lastly, we must demonstrate respect to others.

It's a "Got to Give It to Get it" response. We must have self-respect and respect our profession. Then, actively demonstrate respect for others. When we act in this manner, we greatly shift the way others treat us. Our actions cause a reaction. When we respect ourselves, others treat us respectfully.

I've heard so many admin's say, "I'm just an admin." You can feel the defeat, sadness, and pain as they

say the words. You've got to know that you are not "just" anything. When you use the word "just" you are diminishing you and your role. My goal for writing this book is to help you know without any doubt just how valuable you are as a person and in your role as an assistant so that you will never, ever, ever say that you are just an admin again.

I've worked for many different executives over the past thirty years. About six months after accepting one position, I learned that my manager had a long history of being disrespectful to his former assistants. Thankfully, no one shared this news with me in the beginning. If they had, I likely would have believed he was a horrible manager and would have brought negative energy and behavior to the relationship which would have created an entirely different dynamic. Instead, I believed this was a great opportunity and brought all my best skills and positive attitude to the new position. In fact, when I learned about his poor reputation, I was completely surprised because what was being described had not been my experience at all. I believe this was largely attributed to the dynamic we created together.

When you begin a new partnership, each person brings his or her own dynamic to a situation, including past experiences, baggage, self-respect or lack of respect and many other aspects. All of those attributes create the unique dynamic between the people involved. It is the essence we bring to a situation that causes people to treat us in a certain manner. The way in which a manager may have treated a former assistant doesn't mean it is the way he or she will treat you. We all have the ability to shift our thinking and our behavior. *(We'll talk more about partnerships later.)*

So, how do we make the mental shift? Where do we start? We begin by having healthy self-respect and valuing ourselves.

SELF-RESPECT

If you want to be respected by others, you must respect yourself. Only then will others feel compelled to respect you.

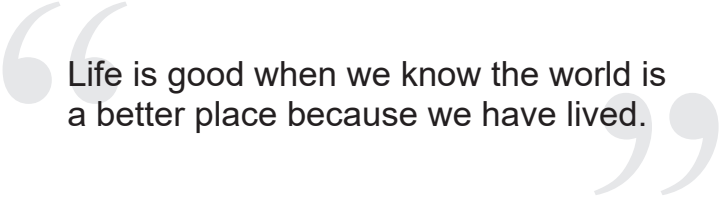
We are much more than our administrative assistant role. Most of us have many different roles as well: spouse, partner, sibling, friend, parent, grandparent, to name a few. We are individuals with values, principles, interests, strengths, talents, goals and dreams. The latter is what truly defines us and makes us much more unique than any role we chose to play.

Our greatest moments are when we are in the service of another. Experiencing numerous leadership retreats, attending and speaking at several administrative conferences, and reading a multitude of self-help books, all pointed me to this belief. Motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, sums it up really well: “True joy comes when you inspire, encourage, and guide someone else on a path that benefits him or her.”

During a leadership team retreat, the teams were given the assignment to write our personal mission statements. The consultant limited us to one short sentence. Most of us began with a long paragraph and it took several passes to condense our wording to the required one sentence assignment. Some of the team members wrote flowery and beautiful mission statements, other team members mission statements were bulleted statements. When we had completed the assignment, each team member’s mission statement was clear and easy to understand. The one I wrote over twenty years ago is still my same mission statement today:

Peggy’s Mission Statement:
“I empower others to succeed.”

Have you ever noticed the feelings you have when you are helping someone else? Why would we rather help one of our friends clean her home instead of doing our own dirty dishes? Why is it more fun to organize someone's office instead of our own piled up workspace? It makes us feel good! When we serve others, we are filled with positive feelings. We know we have helped someone and he or she is better because of our actions. We have a sense of accomplishment and purpose. We know our act of kindness, no matter how small or how large, has created a ripple effect on that person's life and, therefore, on other lives!



Life is good when we know the world is a better place because we have lived.

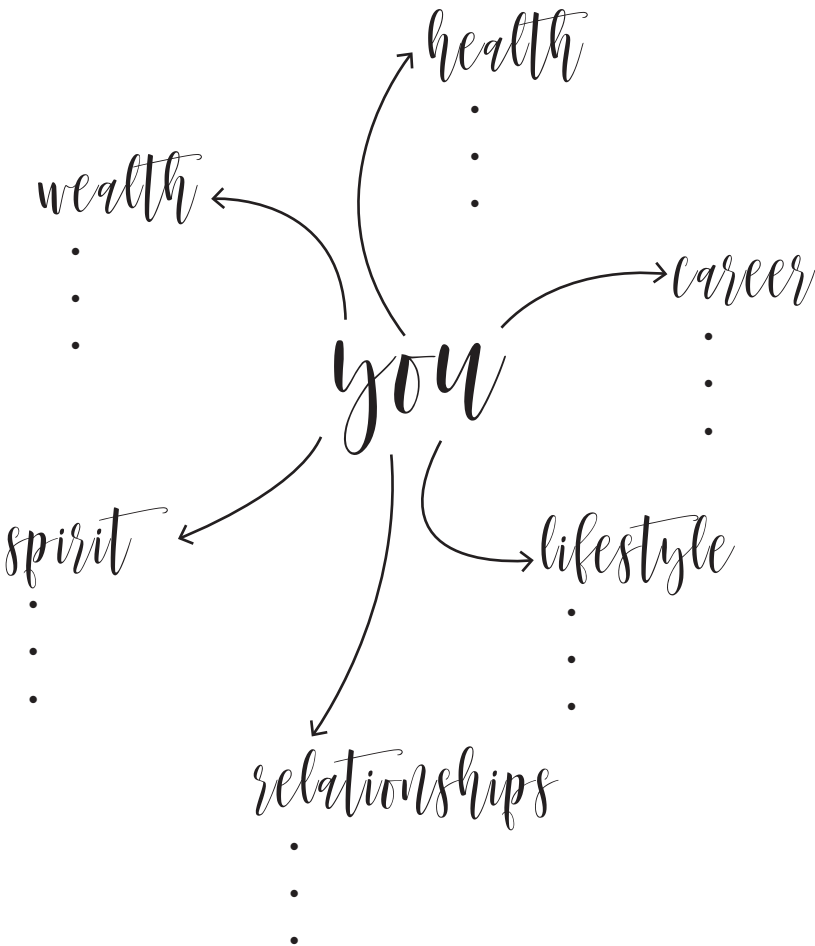
VALUES

Knowing your values and living by them enables you to experience self-respect. Your values are engrained in your heart, mind, and soul. Your values are your guiding compass and will steer you forward. Your values are what you access to make tough decisions. Your values help you stay on course when things are difficult.

There are many exercises available to discover your values. If you haven't done an exercise before or if it's been awhile, I encourage you to take a moment to discover, or to rediscover your values. The following is an abridged version of the one I teach in my "Values Discover" workshop.

There are six main areas of your life: Health, Relationships, Lifestyle, Career, Spirit and Wealth. As you consider these facets of your life, ask yourself, "What would make me happy in each one of these

areas?" Write down the first two to three things that pop into your mind for each area of your life below. There is no right or wrong answer. These are your answers. These identify what you value, want, and desire.



Pause for just a moment and imagine you are at your annual doctor's appointment and you have just heard your doctor say you have an inoperable disease and have 12 months to live! Take a moment to really let

that feeling and the emotion sink in. What if 12 months was all the time you had left on this earth? What would become most important to you? What would rise to the top of your list of desired experiences? Where would you want to spend the most time? On what would you focus?

Typically, after going through this experience, we need to reassess what we originally wrote down and what we thought we wanted in each of the six areas of our lives. Do your initial responses regarding what would make you happy still have relevance and meaning? Does it make sense? Is it a priority? Or, do you need to make new choices?

There was a time in my life when I was completely out of balance. By the way, I believe “life balance” is a myth! I don’t believe anyone spends proportionate times in each of the six areas of his or her life day after day! If you believe that is what you need to do in order to be balanced, you are setting yourself up for a huge disappointment. The reality is, at times your focus may be more on family due to raising small children, other times it may be on your career due to a recent change of employer, or it may be on your health due to a recent trip to the doctor! Your life becomes that on which you spend your time and where you focus. If your focus is only on one area of your life for a prolonged period of time, you are likely way out of balance. I experienced one of those prolonged periods of time and almost all of my focus was on wealth and my career. My husband and friends can tell you, it was all I ever did or talked about! My focus, my time and my thoughts weren’t about my health, my family, or my spirit. My entire focus was on my career and wealth.

One day, I was sitting in a doctor’s office for my annual appointment, watching the clock and growing more

and more frustrated as an hour passed by and I no longer had anything to “work” on. This was long before smartphones, laptops and iPads. The only thing left to do was to look through the magazines in the waiting room. To my disappointment, the only ones they had were “women’s” magazines. You know the types: *Redbook*, *Parents*, *Home and Garden*, the soft and mushy types, not the career and money hungry type of spreads I was interested in reading. Well,

I was bored to the point that I started thumbing through these women’s magazines and was soon submerged in articles about women’s health, family, home and relationships. I was so NOT interested. I couldn’t bring myself to read one article. I thumbed through page after page looking for something relating more to careers when suddenly I came across a picture of a tombstone and the headline read,

What will be engraved
on your tombstone?

I’ll never forget that moment. It hit me so hard, as if the tombstone had sprung off the page and hit me across my head! What had happened to me? How did I get so far off track? I didn’t want what I was chasing to be written on my tombstone. Who writes, “Amazing Employee” on her tombstone? What I wanted engraved was, “Amazing Wife and Mother,” however I wasn’t being an amazing wife and mother. I was selfish, self-centered, and focused only on me and my career. I hadn’t realized how far away I had drifted from my core foundational values until that moment. It was a tremendous wakeup call.

I am forever thankful for that doctor running two hours behind schedule. She doesn’t even know it, but she

saved my life by putting those magazines in her waiting room. I had the good fortune of receiving a wakeup call before I was on my death bed full of regret and wishing I still had 12 months left to live a life according to my values. I had the chance to get my life back on track. That one moment made me re-think everything.

As you look at what you wrote in each of the six areas of your life and you find what you originally wrote doesn't align to your values, it's time to re-assess and re-focus on the things that really matter the most to you. This is what it means to be "true" to you...to live by your values. Doing so will provide you with tremendous self-respect and genuine happiness.

We earn self-respect, when we live according to our values. When we do the things that are aligned to our values, we are demonstrating self-respect. When we listen to our inner voices and say the things out loud that are in our hearts and minds and when we passionately feel we must voice our thoughts and feelings, even when they are difficult and unpopular, we earn self-respect. Honoring our values and acting upon those beliefs in the face of adversity or risking approval of others can be difficult and is exactly what is needed to obtain self-respect. It is when we disregard our values and our inner voices that our self-respect erodes and we begin to act "less than." Self-respect is knowing we are not less than others...instead we are equal. We are good enough to deserve love, happiness and success. We are good enough to be treated with respect from others and, most importantly, from ourselves.

“Respect yourself and others will respect you.”

—CONFUCIUS

Self-respect is not thinking we are better than someone or having a large ego. It's keeping a healthy balance based on our values and being aware of our short comings and our accomplishments. It's having and showing respect to others.

RESPECT FOR OUR ROLES

When was the last time you really thought about what was in the palm of your hand as an administrative assistant? As assistants, we have tremendous power to influence our managers and others around us. We often act as advisors, counselors, coaches and mentors. We also act on behalf of our managers.

As I think about the many executives I've supported, I can easily recall moments where only my executive and I knew about a particular situation. He trusted me implicitly and needed someone to confide in. Behind closed doors, we discussed the situation and all the nuances. We weighed out possible options. Together, we strategized and determined the next steps. It's in these moments that our role is extremely valued and we, as individuals, are held in the highest regard. When your executive knows you are there to make him or her and the company successful; you are treasured more than any recognition ceremony could possibly indicate. These are the moments I cherish. These are also the moments of power and, if used respectfully, we can make a positive difference. Administrative assistant's shape and influence business decisions. Honor and respect your role. Use it for the greater good.

Over time, you will see how you directly made a difference as you hear your executive repeating words you provided, using your ideas for a new approach, and implementing decisions you made together as business partners.

There are only a few positions with this type of power and influence and being an administrative assistant is one of them!

We also have confidential information we share based on business protocol and sound judgment. There are times we learn about information we wish we didn't know, especially in times of mergers, organizational restructures, budget shortfalls, downsizing, legal issues, poor performance consequences and resignations. These situations are all calls to leadership. It is imperative that we hold this information in the utmost of confidence, even when it may directly impact those we are close to and care about.

When going through a large restructure, one of my closest friends disagreed with the approach the leadership team had implemented. She came to me full of energy, doubt, fear, and anger over the plan to change her organization and the team structure. Fortunately, I had been involved in the meetings where the discussion and decisions were made. Without disclosing confidential information, I was able to give her enough insight to help her shift to getting on board. What really helped her move forward was when I told her the leadership team didn't make a quick decision, that all possibilities were considered and on the table for discussion, even the ones she had just shared with me. It also made a significant impact that I genuinely cared and listened to her concerns. These are the moments when we act as change agents to carry out the decisions of our executives. *Again, administrative assistants have tremendous influence and power...* Power that can be used to make a positive difference in the lives of those we work with and support.

Given this same situation, what would the outcome have been if I would have sided with my friend? What if I had joined in on the negative spin, found fault with the leadership team's decisions, talked about all that was wrong with the restructure, and asked questions that produced seeds of doubt? If I would have pointed my finger at the leadership team and said that I didn't agree with their decision, but it's what "they" decided, it would have had a negative impact. When you are part of a powerful partnership, you must be part of the team. You can no longer point to "they" because you are part of that team. Think about how you've used your power and influence in a positive or negative way.

We've all heard the phrase "actions speak louder than words." Our words and actions need to demonstrate respect for others and for ourselves. Doing what we say we'll do and being trustworthy shows our character. By demonstrating self-respect and respect for others, we'll earn and keep respect.

When we respect ourselves, it shows and encourages others to treat us respectfully. When we don't respect ourselves and our positions, we might as well put that message up on a billboard for everyone to read because it's that obvious! When we act disrespectful of ourselves or our position, others will most likely treat us disrespectfully.

CALL TO ACTION!

If you find yourself saying or believing: "People don't respect me and my role as an administrative assistant. I don't feel valued. I don't feel respected." Then it's time to take action and be part of the change.

I Challenge You to Take A Stand and Join Me:

1. Be one of the best administrative assistants you can imagine.

2. Demonstrate self-respect.
3. Demonstrate respect for the administrative profession.
4. Show respect to others.
5. Share this message with others; ask them to join you in this challenge.

Shifting a culture and eliminating stereo types takes concerted effort, time and patience. Raising the respect for the administrative profession won't happen overnight. It won't happen if only one or two of us demonstrate these behaviors. Individually, we can make a difference for ourselves. To make a difference for the administrative profession as a whole takes all of us taking on this challenge. Imagine for a moment that every administrative assistant you knew demonstrated these behaviors!

CHAPTER **SIX**

Powerful Partnerships

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress;
working together is success.”

—HENRY FORD

CHAPTER **SIX**

Powerful Partnerships

One of my most successful partnerships is with my loving husband, René. We've been blessed with a marriage that has withstood the test of time for 30 years. Our greatest blessings are our four amazing children, our fabulous daughters-in-law, and our incredible grandchildren. René and I have been together longer than we've been apart and I can't imagine our lives without one another. There is nothing I treasure more than my family.

My husband is my best example of what it means to have a successful partnership. When you've been together for nearly thirty years, trust me, you've seen some incredibly human and vulnerable moments. We've been there for each other through the good times and the bad. We've seen each other at our best and our worst. There have been times when we felt the only person we had in our corner was the other one, and at that moment, the only thing we needed was each other. In fact, when we were married, we didn't have a lot of people in our corner and our theme song was, "Ain't no stopping us now" by Brothers Johnson. To this day, when we hear that song, it still brings a smile to our faces because we knew then what we know now...if we have each other everything else is going to be alright.

Ironically, many of the same factors that create a successful marriage are the same factors that create a successful business partnership. First, and foremost,

it takes trust. Without trust, there is no foundation. Secondly, you must realize you are better together than you are apart and you rely on one another for your success. Thirdly, when you go through a challenge together and help each other get through it; your bond becomes stronger than ever.

No matter how great your current partnership is with your executive, there is always room to improve. When you understand how impactful a powerful partnership is on your career, you'll be motivated to learn how to manage the relationship to get the highest possible return.

WHAT IS A SYNERGISTIC PARTNERSHIP?

The first time I experienced a synergistic relationship was with a Vice-President. The partnership started out with him recruiting me, which is a pretty fantastic way to start. He told me had an opening for an Executive Assistant and I was the perfect person for the position. He told me my strength in leading teams, my professionalism, and interpersonal skills were exactly what he needed. He made me feel very valuable. He had a clear goal and purpose for me. He also gave me complete authority and freedom to act. He valued my opinions and thought of me as a professional, a leader, and a partner. We became a united team and mutually respected and trusted one another. Our goals and values were aligned, and our styles complimented each other. We experienced successes and overcame challenges together, and we mutually enjoyed working with one another. This is the type of partnership every assistant should have the opportunity to experience!

I want you to experience what it is like to:

1. Feel valued and respected.

2. Have a clear goal and purpose.
3. Have authority and freedom to act.
4. Be thought of and treated as a professional, a leader, and a business partner.
5. Be part of a united team and have your goals aligned with your executive.

The definition of a synergistic partnership is when the result is greater than the sum of their individual effects or capabilities. To me, synergy is where the result of the efforts of two or more people is greater than individual results. Synergy is the ability of a group to outperform even its best individual member. A synergistic partnership may be difficult to express, however, when you experience synergy, you feel it before you can see it or describe it. Whether you are the executive or the administrative assistant, once you experience a synergistic partnership, you'll never want to settle for anything less.

There are many benefits to having a strong partnership, some benefits are:

- Empowerment
- Increased productivity
- Less relationship management
- Trust and communication
- Shared values
- Common goals
- Getting each other to give his or her best for the benefit of the partnership

- Bringing out the best in each other
- Humor
- Fun
- Celebration
- Camaraderie

DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP

There are three basic ways to develop a partnership:

1. Understand who the partners are and their styles.
2. Understand their roles and priorities.
3. Establish routine communication.

I've worked for a variety of manager's who were as diverse as you can possibly imagine. They each had their own unique style and way of doing business. Each had his or her strengths and weaknesses, as well as quirks and hot buttons. It would be a mistake to assume all executives would want to manage their offices the same. You'll need to ask some strategic and critical questions in order to find out everything you need to know about your executive. The key is to learn as much as you can. Think about it this way, how can you support someone you don't know?

SETTING THE FOUNDATION

During your first week, find out how your manager prefers the office and the workload to be managed. While asking questions, offer your office management experience by providing suggestions. Working together, determine the best method for managing your office.

Here are a few of the questions you'll want to ask:

1. Would you like an open door policy? Or, would you appreciate the role of a gatekeeper to limit and/or screen the drop by visits?
2. Are you a morning or afternoon person? What time do you usually arrive at the office and leave the office?
3. Would you like me to answer your phone or would you prefer to do so? Would you like me to screen your calls? Are there certain callers who you want to get through no matter if you are in a meeting or otherwise busy when they call?
4. Is there a preferred time for a daily meeting? Would you like to have it at the beginning of the day or the end of the day?
5. When is the best time to approach you regarding a sensitive subject?
6. When is the best time to schedule high level meetings?
7. What are your pet peeves and quirks?
8. What are your expectations regarding how email, voicemail, and incoming mail are handled?
9. What is your expectation regarding tracking deliverables?
10. What are your expectations regarding how the administrative assistant acts independently and on behalf of the executive?

MOVING PAST THE BASICS

Once these basic questions are answered, you can move past the basic partnership level by finding out what's important to your executive. Talk to him/her about

roles and priorities. Let it be known you want to do all you can to help create success. Ask for a copy of his/her goals and have a conversation with him/her centered on those goals. Align your goals to those goals.

Find out what your manager thinks and worries about. To assure your manager's success, you need to know what your manager is accountable for and what is measured. Once you have this information, find a way to help your manager deliver! I promise you, if you help your manager reach one of his/her goals, he/she will value you tremendously.

These are strategic questions to help you form your partnership. With answers to these questions, you'll be aligned with your executive and be able to manage the day-to-day operations. You will also be able to increase your level of interaction with his/her direct reports and earn his/her respect because he/she will know you are in the know at a strategic level. You'll be armed with information that will provide insights and judgments which will help you determine what actions to take and when, as well as how to manage your executive's time, calendar, and priorities.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communication is essential in developing a powerful partnership. Communicate clearly, openly, and often. You can communicate in person, email, text, written notes, or whatever medium works best for the given situation. All the executives I have worked for have stated the hardest part of their jobs is communication. There is a huge amount of information coming into an executive's office. Decisions are made based on that information and then information is shared. Often the information needs to be massaged before it can be shared. The political landscape needs to be considered. Together, you and your executive need to determine

who will need what level of information and what background needs to be provided with the information. Your ability to handle the communication on behalf of your executive is worth its weight in gold! This is an area where you can really save your executive time. When you master this area, you'll be able to draft messages on behalf of your manager, before you and your executive even discuss what messages are needed. Over time, your executive will defer to you to handle those messages.

Most of assistants support very busy people. Because of this, it is imperative you don't leave the daily meeting with your manager to chance. Instead, schedule time with your manager. As administrative assistants, we control our manager's calendars. It is our job to make our managers more effective and more successful than they could be without the support of an administrative assistant. Your meeting with your manager is crucial to his/her success because you are managing the executive's calendar, triaging email, tracking deliverables, obtaining information to prepare your executive for meetings, gathering and writing talking points and getting all the details about upcoming events. When you meet with your executive, make the best use of his/her time by being thoroughly prepared and having all the information you need at your fingertips so you can quickly and concisely answer any question he/ she may have. To do so, you must be in the know and have an understanding of what is happening today, tomorrow, and in the future.

I've heard administrative assistants say their managers don't want to meet with them and don't see value in the daily meeting. I'm always perplexed because I've never had a manager say this to me. I know, without any doubt, the information I give to my manager in the daily meeting isn't provided in any other meeting. My

manager could likely obtain a portion of the information I provide, if he wasn't in meetings for most of the day, which is why triaging email is such a key part of the role of the administrative assistant. I know I am saving him time and he knows it as well. Our managers are often in meetings and haven't had time to review email the entire day. When we meet with our managers and alert them about emails, deliverable due dates, and gather information based on upcoming meetings, we save them time. Demonstrate your value by making it your mission to save your managers time and facilitate their success.

When I supported an executive, typically I had a long list of things I need to discuss with my executive. I arranged items in priority order to assure what I must cover, got covered. I paid close attention to my executive to make sure he's still "present" and hasn't drifted off because of the many obligations on his plate. If I felt he'd "checked out" and is no longer able to take in the information or have the discussion regarding the things on my list, I paused and said, "That's it for today. The rest can wait until tomorrow." Often, he'd urge me to continue reviewing the remaining material. Most of the time, he would say, "Thank you. You know me too well."

Playing the role of an advisor is another key role of an administrative assistant. I've learned to allow room to discuss what my executive would like to cover, instead of only being focused on my list of "to do's." Often, when I asked him how things are going, or what's on his mind, he'd open up and share something with me he wants to discuss. It's during these times the administrative assistant becomes the advisor and a stronger partnership develops. The door is opened to a deeper level of dialogue and brainstorming begins as the executive asks for advice regarding an approach

or an idea he /she is considering. This sharing of ideas allows your executive to see how well you know the organization and all the players. When you help your executive see another view point and offer another approach, it helps the executive consider many other aspects of a given situation. These are the types of conversations where trust is paramount as well as the ability to hold information in confidence. This interaction defines what it means to work “with” someone versus working “for” someone. When this happens, you have moved from the typical administrative assistant role into the role of a business partner.

One of the best ways to help your executive is to use the art of strategic questioning. For instance, your executive has agreed to provide a presentation to someone who isn’t directly tied to his/ her priorities. By agreeing to this activity, his/her schedule is now tied up and no longer available for something more strategic that does align with priorities. You can guide your executive back to what is most important to him/her by asking strategic questions, such as: “I realize you agreed to provide a presentation to ABC Group. Help me understand how this fits into the big picture and relates to your goals and priorities.” When you use strategic questioning effectively, your executive will be guided back to what is really important.

Once you experience this level of partnership, you realize what a powerful role you have as an executive assistant. It is essential for administrative assistants to realize the power they have and respect the power as well. If you misuse the power, you’ll likely only have the opportunity to do so briefly before your executive knows it and that opportunity will come to a screeching halt! Administrative assistants are in key positions to influence our executives. Many times, we are their advisors, confidants and encouragers. We

hold them in the palm of our hands. We can use this power to encourage them and pull them forward to greater success, or we can misuse our power for our own agenda. When you respect the power you have and understand your job is to help others be more successful with you than they are without you, you'll be respecting the power appropriately. Respect and realize the powerful role you have! I hope you re-read this paragraph and embrace it.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PARTNER'S STYLE

In order to partner well with others, you need to know their personality styles. Life would be easier if we all communicated the same and had the same thinking patterns. However, that is certainly not the case. We each have our preferred method of communication and due to these differences can find ourselves in the middle of a conversation or a meeting where the communication just isn't working.

Interestingly, our behaviors are predictable. The way we interact with others...our preferred method for communicating becomes a habit. We have probably used the same method since we were very young and have developed a pattern in our interactions with others. Sure, we've matured and have a different vocabulary. Most of us have learned we can't throw a fit and get away with it.

Mankind has been studying variations of four basic behavior patterns for 2500 years! Hippocrates identified four basic temperaments in 460BC. In the 1920's, Carl Jung developed a concept he called the intuiitor, thinker, feeler, and sensor, which are the foundation for the Meyers-Briggs Type indicator.

There are many interpersonal style models available. I've learned several: Meyers-Briggs, Social Styles, Colors,

Animals, DISC, and more. Most interpersonal profile testing uses a model with four quadrants to describe the various styles. Through all the books I've read and all the research I've done, I've learned no style is better than another and most people have the ability to express elements of all four styles. The question that always comes up when I do interpersonal style training is, "What is the best style for an administrative assistant?" Again, there is not one best style. No matter what your preferred style, you can be successful as an administrative assistant. It's important to note these interpersonal style profiles indicate your preferred communication style, not your communication capabilities.

I'll provide you a little insight into each of these styles through the strengths and limitations summary below. The best way to experience this information is through a workshop which includes a personality profile assessment and applied learning activities. This workshop is consistently one of my attendee's favorite sessions.

Strengths & Limitations Summary			
Driver	Expressive	Amiable	Analytical
At Best	At Best	At Best	At Best
•Determined •Competitive •Demanding •Purposeful	•Social •Dynamic •Enthusiastic •Persuasive	•Caring •Encouraging •Patient •Relaxed	•Cautious •Precise •Questioning •Formal
At Worst	At Worst	At Worst	At Worst
•Harsh •Controlling •Shortsighted •Abrasive •Pushy •Power-seeking	•Overbearing •Unrealistic •Egotistical •Undisciplined •Manipulative •Hasty	•Comforting •Needy •Unsure •Dependent •Awkward •Easily Manipulated	•Critical •Indecisive •Old-Fashioned •Hard to Please •Moralistic •Unemotional

Throughout my career, I've worked for all different types of managers. Some were easier to work with than others. Some were pretty difficult. No matter what the situation was, I learned from each of them and am grateful for the experience.

Some of the managers I've worked for were so goal-oriented, it was as if they had blinders on and couldn't see anything else but the goal. I remember one executive who didn't even realize one of his direct reports was pregnant until she was out on maternity leave! I've also worked for a manager who didn't recognize the importance of thanking the staff, so I took on the task of telling staff thank you for the work they had done. It wasn't that he didn't appreciate the work that had been completed; he simply didn't feel the need to thank staff for doing what they were hired to do.

One of the best things you can do for your executive is to fill the gap. Know your manager's strengths and limitations so well that you set him/her up for success by utilizing your strengths to fill the gap in one of the areas of weakness. For example, if your executive is an Expressive type of individual and is so excited about a particular topic that he/she doesn't allow for others on the team to talk, provide him/her feedback and make a suggestion.

"Mr. Executive, when we were in the meeting earlier today and you were so excited to share the news about the XYZ project, I made a few observations I'd like to share with you. I saw Mr. Direct Report trying to make a comment, did you notice him? I've noticed when you get excited about something, sometimes it makes it difficult for anyone else to talk. Would you like me to give you a signal in the future to help you allow for staff to make a comment?"

I've used this technique before and it works well when your executive knows you are doing all you can to assure he/she is successful.

If you don't possess the strength your executive needs in a particular situation, team him/her up with someone who does.

This type of partnership won't happen overnight. Some partnerships form quicker than others, some partnerships are better than others. All powerful partnerships take effort and time. It takes time to develop, time to build, and time to maintain a partnership.

ADAPT TO THEIR STYLE

In our roles as administrative assistants, we need to be flexible, nimble and highly adaptable to our environments and those whom we support. When I ask executives, "What is the most important skill in the role of the executive assistant?" The most common response is, "Flexibility."

**Blessed are the flexible, for they
shall not be bent out of shape!**

In one of my workshops, we were discussing flexibility. One of the attendees said flexibility is one of the four corner stones for having a successful administrative career. He laughed and said he wasn't sure what the other three corner stones were, but he knew flexibility holds up all the rest! You can be the most competent administrative assistant on the planet and if you aren't flexible, you will not be successful.

WHEN STYLES CLASH

Frustrations often come when we work with someone in an opposite quadrant from our quadrant. For example: The “Expressive” who has a tendency to be pushy, expressive, likes risk and change—compared to the “Analytical” who likes consistency and the status quo, is reserved, and dislikes aggressiveness. Imagine the natural clash with these two communication styles. At the core, these communication styles are complete opposites. The way each of these styles prefers to communicate instantly rubs the other style the wrong way.

When you are in this situation, you’ll probably notice a shift in the energy between you and the other person. You can feel the invisible wall come up and the communication is stifled. You may even notice the negative energy before either of you speak, because we communicate with more than words. Our personality and communication style is expressed in our body language as well as in our verbal communication.

If you find yourself in this situation, I have a few tips for you:

Dial your style down. When you notice you aren’t communicating effectively, use your self-awareness skills to determine if you are coming across too engrained in your own style for the other person to relate to you. For example, if you are an “Expressive” type and you are talking with a “Analytical,” you may be too animated and too expressive for his level of comfort. By “dialing down” your preferred enthusiastic approach, you’ll find the tension begin to ease and communication begin.

Genuinely appreciate your differences. When you have a better awareness of the diverse styles, you’ll understand how each style contributes to the success of

the team. Once you internalize the fact there is no right or wrong style, and no style is better than another, you will be more apt to truly appreciate all styles.

Learn as much as you can about your style and the style of your executive. Knowing more about yourself will help you be more flexible so you can deal effectively with your executive and put your unique traits to work for you, instead of against you.

Mirror their style. When people perceive you to be like them, they are more comfortable talking to you. When you mirror others, you are a reflection of them. If they are standing, stand. If they are seated, sit. If they are smiling, smile. If they are reserved, be reserved. Use their same behaviors. Use the same rate of speech and posture. This makes the other person feel comfortable because he/she perceives you to be like him/her, which enables communication. This is not to say I'm advising you to be fake; it simply means to modify your communication style to allow your communication to be more effective.

When you use these methods, you are speaking their language which allows others to hear you and understand you. This does not mean you need to change and become someone else. It simply means, in order to communicate more effectively and develop a powerful partnership; you may need to make some adjustments to your preferred method of communication.

MAINTAINING THE PARTNERSHIP

Once you've established the partnership, you'll need to continue to nurture it. You can nurture the partnership in a number of ways. By performing at your optimum level and doing so consistently, your executive will know he can trust you to perform and can relax, knowing you've got all the details handled.

Another key aspect in maintaining the partnership is keeping confidential information held in confidence. Doing so builds trust. When your executive trusts you as a confidant and as a high performer, you've got the foundation for a powerful partnership.

Show recognition to your executive for a job well done. The saying, "It's lonely at the top" is very true. I've learned that most executives appreciate being cared about as a person, not just as an executive. Demonstrate compassion for the difficulty of the position and the weight upon their shoulders. Most executives aren't recognized or thanked often enough, especially in light of everything they do. Make a point of finding ways to genuinely recognize your executive when she has done a great job.

Emulate a strong professional code by being known as someone who under promises and over delivers. Do 10% more than what is required, requested, or expected. One of the essential elements of a powerful partnership is accountability and follow through. What happens to a relationship when someone doesn't follow up? What about the opposite? What happens when someone delivers quicker than expected and with more information than requested? The latter is the behavior you want to emulate. Most of us don't want to work with a "whiner" or a "can't happen" kind of person. In fact, we avoid these types of people. Be known as the one who always follows through, is dependable, reliable and accountable.

**Mirror your partner's dreams;
the relationship will grow.**

Collaborate with others and help others succeed. The serendipitous part about this is that it will build your self-respect and confidence. Help people find a way to get things done.

Lead by example. You and your executive are a team which means you both must “walk the walk” and “talk the talk.” When you are working for the manager who is making the decisions, you no longer have the right to blame management. You are a team and you both need to support one another. Be the person you want to look up to.

THE POWER OF FEEDBACK

When you work with someone closely day after day, you will be in a situation where you need to provide feedback. The situation might be as small as telling your executive he has a dirty nose before walking into an All Staff meeting. These types of feedback conversations may be uncomfortable and awkward but fairly easy to do. Your executive will appreciate the kind approach and will know you had his back and saved him from an embarrassing situation.

There will be other times when the situation is much more impactful and can be highly political. These conversations are downright scary. This is where the trust you developed early on in the partnership will carry tremendous weight. Be confident and courageous enough to offer feedback and have the difficult conversations. The last thing your executive needs is another “yes” person. Executives need someone who they trust to tell them the truth. This isn’t what they want to hear or what will make them feel better. These are the conversations that are designed to make your executive better. This takes guts, confidence, judgment and caring enough about your executive’s success that

you are willing to take the risk. I've had these types of conversations with executives and, every time, I was scared, yet each and every time my executive was grateful for the conversation and thanked me for my open and honest feedback.

Years ago, I learned a method for giving feedback called "SBI." This method will work for giving feedback up, down, and across the organization.

S = Situation

B = Behavior

I = Impact

Close with message

For example: You have someone on your team who is disruptive in meetings. He is having side bar conversations and interrupting the meeting. Here's how to handle it.

Situation: "In our meeting earlier today."

Behavior: "I noticed you were having side bar conversations."

Impact: "This behavior interrupted our meeting. The team lost focus on the topic and confusion followed."

Message: "In the future, please keep side bar conversations to a minimum, so our meetings will be more productive. Will you do that for me and the team?"

When receiving feedback, first and foremost, assume the person providing feedback has positive intent and cares enough about you to help you succeed.

1. Listen with an open heart and open mind. It might not be warranted, but you won't get far without it.
2. Ask questions and assume the message comes from a place of goodwill and generosity. Skepticism doesn't help you hear.
3. Reflect on the message and consult a mentor to help process the information and determine changes you may make.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

When you've had a powerful partnership with an executive, it can be difficult to know the importance of setting boundaries. One way to assure you don't cross the line is to treat him/her with respect and dignity, always remembering your manager is your boss. Be careful about becoming too familiar and too casual with the person you support.

When I was first starting out as an executive assistant, I didn't understand this as well as I do now. There are some situations I wouldn't advise, such as having a drink alone with your manager. If your job requires you to travel with your manager, setting boundaries is even more important. The best way for me to say this is bluntly: Do not put yourself or your manager in a compromising situation. Enough said.

WHAT IF THE PARTNERSHIP ISN'T WORKING?

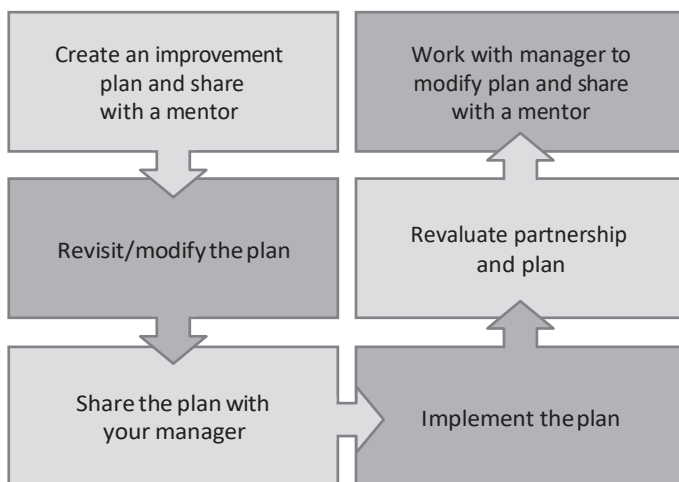
If you find yourself in a situation where the partnership isn't happening, the first step is to assess the partnership and identify what isn't working. Focus on the facts and remain objective as you ask yourself these questions. Do your best to avoid becoming emotional.

- Where are the gaps?

- Where are the challenges?
- Where are the strengths?
- Am I aware of his/her style and putting that knowledge to work in my day-to-day interactions?
- What haven't I tried?
- What's stopping me?

Now that you've assessed the facts about the state of the partnership, you are ready to create an improvement plan. This plan isn't only for partnerships that are broken; every partnership can benefit from an improvement plan which results in taking it to the next level.

The Improvement Plan



The first step is to schedule the meeting. Say something along the lines of: *"I scheduled a meeting for us to talk about how we manage the office. The meeting is scheduled for 1½ hours; however, it should only take us*

45 minutes. I wanted us to have plenty of time to discuss this topic.”

Taking this action will demonstrate to your manager that you are actively engaged in creating a successful and productive partnership.

Walk through each of the steps in the Improvement Plan. Communicate professionally by discussing the facts and keep emotions in check. Talk about what is working, what could be improved upon, and together determine the next steps. Ask your manager for suggestions and offer your ideas. Keep the discussion focused on developing a highly efficient, productive environment.

“Whenever you’re in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.”

—WILLIAM JAMES

The point of the meeting is to improve the partnership and to get buy in on a new approach, not to assign blame and rehash past issues to determine who was right and who was wrong. Keep your manager’s style in mind. Don’t take things personally if your manager isn’t overly enthusiastic about the new plan and approach. Just be prepared to follow through with what is agreed upon.

If you’ve done all these steps and given it enough time to change, it might be time to seek a new partnership. If this is the case, know that:

1. The partnership failed. This doesn't mean you failed.
2. Because you took all the right steps and invested time and effort into the relationship, you can leave without regrets.
3. You stayed professional along the journey of finding a new position and didn't burn any bridges.

Now, you can find a new position and exit gracefully.

Have I done this? Yes! Several years ago, I worked for a great company. I had a great job. I was successful, had increased responsibility, a growing salary, a change in job titles, and was doing really well except in one area. The CEO and I had a difference in values. Over time, I came to realize the CEO wasn't going to change his values, so I had two choices. I could stay and buy into those values or I could leave. I chose to leave and it was absolutely the right choice for me.

POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP MEMORIES

I am so grateful for the powerful partnerships I've had throughout my career. I made a conscious decision to align my goals with my executive's goals and found ways to have our styles complement one another. It was my goal to become a united team with mutual respect and trust. I've had the opportunity to develop powerful partnerships and know without a doubt I made a difference in my executive's success.

“Our success has really been based on partnerships from the very beginning.”

—BILL GATES

I can recall times when I was the chief confidant and advisor and together we figured a way through a challenging situation. I've helped brainstorm possible solutions and talked through all the details to arrive at a path forward. I've been able to remind my executive of a message he wanted to deliver, provided information at a key moment, and quickly wrote a note and quietly passed it during a meeting to help him share the information he wanted to share with his team, which not only helped my executive but helped the entire team.

Knowing I've made a difference is what keeps me going and contributing at a high level. This is especially true when you are working for the top executive. There is an entire organization depending on your executive to deliver so each of them remains gainfully employed. What a huge responsibility, and we, as administrative assistants, are part of that equation. We are often the ones holding everything together in the middle of a crisis or chaos.

**Never doubt what a key role you
play as an administrative assistant.**

I've been an administrative assistant for long enough I've not only experienced leaving a company, and having my executive leave, I've also experienced the death of an executive. One of the most humbling and respectful moments was when a past executive's wife asked me to speak at his funeral. We were in a simple back yard filled with friends and family. There were tears and laughter. A few members of the former core team spoke and shared humorous stories as well as paid our respects. Our stories defined his character and integrity. As each of us spoke, we realized his family wasn't aware of many things he had accomplished and overcome, in his

role. We had worked together for several years and the stories were numerous. Watching his family and friends light up as the stories were told was a moment I will always cherish.

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is the knack of getting along with people.”

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT

About the Author

Peggy is an author and inspirational speaker. Her passion and personal mission statement: “To empower others to succeed” is realized by providing keynotes and workshops to audiences worldwide. Peggy works with Administrative Professionals, Managers, Human Resources, Conference Planners, and more. She provides corporate training and coaching for administrative professionals to increase their communication, partnerships, and professionalism so they can make more money, get more work done and be happier at work on a daily basis.

Peggy has provided training programs to administrative assistants at some of the world’s most recognized companies, including Amazon, Bath-Fitter, Boeing, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Vanderbilt, and many more.

For over a decade, Peggy’s focused and worked in personal development. She’s also the author of *Mean Girl No More, How to Shift from Sabotage to Support*. She shares knowledge and experience from over 30 years in the administrative profession, entertains you with humor, and inspires you through passion.

She is actively involved in her community, including:

- Past President of Women Helping Women
- Founder and Past President of the Administrative Professionals of Tri-Cities

- Chief Executive Assistant at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory from 2005-2020
- Certified Situational Leadership Trainer
- Certified World Class Assistant Trainer
- Athena Leadership Award Recipient 2020

When Peggy isn't working, you can find her with her family or husband on the dance floor or at the card table where she's a fierce competitor!

Her most successful accomplishment is being married to her husband, Renè, for over 30 years and raising four children and spoiling their grandchildren together.

www.peggyvasquez.net / peggy@peggyvasquez.net

MEAN GIRL NO MORE

How to Shift from Sabatoge to Support
and Build a Powerful Inner Circle



PEGGY VASQUEZ

International Speaker, Career Coach, and Best Selling Author

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Build a Powerful Inner Circle

PEGGY VASQUEZ

OTHER BOOKS BY PEGGY VASQUEZ

Not, “Just an Admin!”

*This book is dedicated to my inner circle
for without you I would still be dreaming
of becoming the woman I was meant to be.*

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Foreword

Whenever I introduce Peggy Vasquez on stage, I precede her name with the word 'inimitable'. It means unique, special, not to be imitated.

Peggy always sees things with wisdom that brings instant clarity to complex subjects. She is never scared to tackle difficult issues and anyone who has seen her keynote will testify to the life-changing nature of her message. I was beyond excited therefore, when she asked me to read this, her second book, and to write the foreword.

It didn't disappoint. This is a book that I wish someone had taken the initiative and courage to write well before now. I have a feeling that countless women, all over the world, will be spared the angst and hurt that most of us, if we are honest, have been through at one stage or another at the hands of the 'mean girls' that enter our lives--because of Peggy's determination to lift the lid on behaviors that are whispered about behind closed doors but never addressed.

These insidious, undermining, and competitive incidents that most of us encounter many times in our working lives as women are learned behaviors from the cradle. We're taught to compete for attention and to value ourselves based on how others see us. Peggy has redefined these myths and seeks to encourage us on a journey of self-exploration and discovery of our true value and worth.

Through a series of brave, relatable, real-life stories, she uncovers the truth behind these negative behaviors and shows us how to build a powerful inner circle that will raise our conviction in our own abilities and the confidence to follow our dreams.

This book is packed with practical tips and exercises as well as a huge dose of inspiration. Peggy is a role model for every woman that wants to live their best life through lifting others, not destroying them.

Like her keynote speeches, you will find this book both life-changing and life-affirming. Peggy Vasquez lives her message and is the real deal. I for one am honored to be part of her inner circle.

Lucy Brazier

CEO, Marcham Publishing, Publisher of Executive Secretary Magazine

CHAPTER **SIX**

Mean Girl Behavior— How to Survive It and How to Stop Dishing it Out

MEAN GIRLS THEN AND NOW

If you think back to middle school and high school days, you can likely remember a time when you had to deal with some level of *mean girl* behavior. Sadly, *mean girl* behavior doesn't end in grade school. I've seen this same behavior play out in the board room as much as I remember it in the class room. It can be so deceptive that the behavior isn't always noticed by everyone in the same room. However, if you pay attention, you'll notice the tone doesn't match the smile.

Typical *mean girl* behavior includes bullying, gossiping, and sabotaging, all done with intention to intimidate, undermine or degrade.

Mean girl behavior is also about belonging to an exclusive group and if you aren't in the group, you're ostracized. You're either "in" or you're "out". Sadly, women can be cruel to each other, including mocking or overly critiquing to the point of pettiness and exaggeration. Worse, we sometimes bond to another person over this cruel behavior because of our fear of being the one who is outcast from the group. We learn how to behave to fit in and go along with the pack either by joining in on the verbal attacks or by remaining a silent bystander.

When I first started writing this book, my plan was to have the focus be only on developing an inner circle.

As I began to write about what gets in the way, it became abundantly clear that I needed to address the problem of why more of us don't have an inner circle. I started hearing from women in my network about what gets in the way. Over and over again, it was *mean girl* behavior and the fear of that past behavior. I asked my network if they would share their stories to help other women learn how to navigate this negative behavior and to inspire us to change any negative behaviors we may be demonstrating.

Here's a story that showcases a typical *mean girl* office experience.

EDWINA LEE, FROM WHO'S THE REAL BOSS?

In my experience, if there's one type of mean girl (or guy!) you need to look out for, it's the one who seems to be 'in the pocket' of the boss. Strategically, this mean girl will do whatever is necessary to align herself alongside the boss as a source of protection when she finds her antics have landed her on the end of complaints to management and HR. And lucky for her, with that shield of protection, in the eyes of the boss, she can do no wrong.

I was witness to this type of mean girl in one organization, where a mean girl manager considered herself to be the 'second in charge' by her strategic alignment alongside the boss. She did everything in her power to bully and harass every member of the team attempting to pull rank and show her level of power over others. It became obvious to me that I was dealing with a mean girl on one of my first interactions with this manager when she introduced me to a new member of the team, saying "This is Edwina, she's the executive assistant to Mr. X, so her role is basically just doing whatever Mr. X asks her to!" Fully aware of my efforts in the industry to re-value the position

of the executive assistant/personal assistant and move past the submissive stereotypes, she made this remark fully knowing it would get a rise out of me. More to the point though, she was adamant from the get-go to position herself as being more senior than me, and to demonstrate she was closer to our boss than I would ever be. Unfortunately, the mean girl streak did not end there, and it wasn't just me that was on the receiving end of it. From tracking the whereabouts (and toilet breaks!) of the entire team to getting close to individuals so they'd divulge sensitive personal information on themselves and others to her and constant social media stalking - she would then bring all the pieces of information she'd received on others to the boss to use it against them to help free them up, get them "unstuck" and move them out of the company. So why did she do this? And why would she want to terrorize her entire team and essentially be left with no one who wanted to work with her? Well, it was nothing more than a demonstration of power by a power-hungry individual, trying to claw her way higher and higher, no matter who she had to stomp on to get there. A young manager by any standards, she had worked her way through the company from a very young age with no formal education or formal business training. With only a long tenure in the one company under her belt, it was a high risk for her to ever try and get another job on the outside. So, anyone who seemed to be a threat to her personally and professionally within this organization was going to be sabotaged in true mean girl fashion.

To me though, this behavior was beyond just being a mean girl, but rather being a fully-fledged bully, which appeared to be tolerated by management and wasn't only detrimental to those on the receiving end, but also to the department and company. At any opportunity, this mean girl manager was in the

boss's office painting the hideous pictures of others and sharing her thoughts on how to performance manage them 'out', and all the while promoting herself as being the angelic, wholesome and good employee delivering on this information responsibly.

My first piece of advice to others who find themselves on the end of these behaviors is to try and ignore the individual without adding fuel to the fire. Never display any sort of reaction to mean girls, no matter what they do to you. Displays of emotion, rage, or even hurt, will give them the power they're looking for, and ultimately the information on you that will then be used against you, such as you 'broke down' in the middle of the office, or you had a 'freak out' and started yelling out of nowhere. They will use your reactions to their advantage, so give them nothing and always remain calm and professional. Whilst emotional intelligence and a thick skin will go a long way in helping to deal with these types, even the most resilient can be brought down by their attacks, and whilst we can't control how others behave, we can choose how we behave and as such we should try and set an example for the better. Keep your own behavior at a level you can be proud of and that represents your own brand and reputation. Remember also, keep your commentary on these bully's contained, and don't allow further gossip to stem from your frustrations. It's difficult to contain your emotions and frustrations when you're on the receiving end of this sort of behavior, but only entrust a confidant to confide in outside of the workplace. Speaking to those in the workplace (other than HR and management) will only fuel the situation and contribute to subsequent attacks.

The second course of action against these bullies is to stand up for yourself, or others, and challenge them in their disrespect. Set a standard of what is acceptable and what isn't. Be prepared to call them out when that line is crossed. You don't have to be confrontational or rude, but a quiet remark or a tap on the shoulder is well within your rights. If you don't have the courage to raise concerns with the way you're treated, then seek the support and advice from HR or management. Document the events that have happened and collate any relevant evidence to support your case. You want to avoid accusations and criticism when taking issues like this above, so focus instead on the behaviors, events and consequences for yourself and those around you. It can be difficult to reveal a mean girl, especially one who has put steps in place to protect themselves by siding with the boss. But, if you work in numbers, you can sometimes reveal what's really been going on and expose them for the mean girls they are.

Mean girl antics and bullying should never be tolerated, and if your prior efforts to ignore them, call them out and escalate the events to HR, don't have any penetration, then you're well within your rights to pack up your desk and leave. Leaving an organization for reasons of a bullying culture is accepted and respected, so don't ever believe that not tolerating these behaviors is a sign of weakness. Quite the opposite, in fact. And, don't ever think you're giving power to the bully by leaving. If a situation has become so serious that it's impacting your mental health, then that needs to be the priority. When you spend nearly half your waking week in the workplace, you need to ensure you're not in a toxic environment, so don't be afraid to take whatever steps are necessary to protect your workplace utopia.

HOW TO HANDLE *MEAN GIRL* BEHAVIOR:

If you come across *mean girl* behavior, first and foremost, this isn't about you and this isn't your fault. This is about that person's insecurities and comfort zones. Chances are she's suffering from the same feelings of fear, anger and lack of confidence that she fosters in others. Your best line of defense is to be:

- **Confident:** Avoid looking nervous or insecure. *Mean girls* are looking for weakness to exploit. Do your best to ignore them.
- **Professional:** Remain professional, no matter what a *mean girl* says or does, do not react as they'll use your reactions to their advantage. If you can't, then walk away.
- **Seek out a mentor:** Entrust a confidant to confide in and that can give you advice so that you'll be ready the next time. Learn how to stand up for yourself and set a standard of what is and what isn't acceptable.
- **Authentic:** Stay true to who you are, don't morph into a *mean girl* yourself in order to be accepted by a *mean girl*. Stand up for yourself.

And remember, leaving an organization for reasons of toxic *mean girl* culture is accepted and respected. Don't ever believe that not tolerating these behaviors is a sign of weakness.

Be Honest With Yourself About Your Own Actions (I'm guilty of being a *mean girl*, too.)

I'm sharing from experience that if you practice these behaviors, you'll spare yourself, and probably others, a great deal of heartache.

I'm ashamed to admit I've demonstrated *mean girl* behavior, too, even as an adult. I remember belonging to a powerful group of women. We came together quickly and were openly sharing our thoughts and dreams with each other. Some even felt safe enough to share past experiences with which they were still struggling. Together, we created a fair amount of transparency and vulnerability with each other.

Except for one. There was one woman in the group who wasn't as vulnerable and self-disclosing. She wasn't as connected to the rest of the group as others and the relationship wasn't as strong. Sadly, some of the group started to take on these negative *mean girl* behaviors to outcast her from the group. Looking back, I don't know why I went along with it. What drove me to act as a child? Why did I revert back to these outdated behaviors and tendencies?

I know now it happened because I didn't see it coming. I wasn't self-aware. I wasn't strong enough. I let fear get in the way.

- Fear of someone not being like the rest of us and causing us to be uncomfortable.
- Fear of not being accepted by the one person who was saying the woman didn't belong with the rest of us and listening to her instead of listening to my own heart and head.

I still feel horrible. It hurts my heart because now some of the relationships that were once beautiful barely exist. This is what the end state looks like when we behave like a *mean girl* – ultimately, it hurts everyone involved.

My friend, Wendy, shares her story which really hits home on this behavior.

WENDY VANARSDALE STORY

I believe the real value in what I have to share isn't in telling about the individual incidents of where I was a mean girl, or experienced mean girl behavior, mainly because I think we all have the same stories and there would be no real enlightenment in me sharing mine. The value I have to give is to share my journey of how I was able leave that behind.

At the heart of this behavior, I believe, lies a deep-rooted fear of not being "in the pack". For me, this started very early in life as I was raised in a religious sect that would honestly be classified as a cult. This religion taught that Armageddon was going to happen at any time and to survive you must be one of the accepted and embraced members of the religious sect. This isn't an excuse for my behavior. Giving an excuse is giving away your power to that excuse. I own my actions, but I share it as it helps to lay the foundation of why I was susceptible to this fear of not being "in the pack".

At the age of 20, I was excommunicated from "the pack" and left the religious sect. While at the time this was the toughest and scariest time in my life, I now recognize it as the biggest gift I was ever given. I was forced to pick up the pieces and rebuild my life with an entirely new pack - and through this I learned two very important foundational lessons that have blessed me.

First: Take back your power

When you base your own self-worth on the opinion of others, you're essentially giving them your pen and letting them to write your story. In this state, you'll always be at the mercy of others for your happiness. Take back that pen! You set your value, and the

moment you realize this you'll be on the path to a much happier life. I learned through my experience that I was in charge of my life, nobody else, and **I could choose my "pack"**. That was the big lesson for me – I didn't have to try to fit into any prescribed "pack", but was free to choose the friends that helped me be the person I wanted to be. By not feeling like I had to fit into any certain group, the trigger to be a mean girl was gone.

I recently experienced mean girl behavior at my class reunion. I was first really surprised that at our age, our class mean girl was still trying to fit into the old high school pack. Then immediately, I felt very sad for her, I remembered how desperate and afraid I was to fit in, and all I could think was "what a horrible way to live". I hope she takes back her pen and her power..

Second: You create your experiences

The times when I behaved like a mean girl, I felt a little bit safe in the moment because I was protecting my status quo in the pack. But I also felt bad about the way I acted and what I had done. That bad feeling lasted much longer than the immediate bump of security I received. The energy I put out to that other person, I also experienced.

In the Bible, Jesus is quoted as saying "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". I believe his intent is much deeper and is lost in this translation. I think the real message is "What you do to others you do to yourself." When you're mean to others, you feel bad. When you're good to others, you feel good. It really is that simple, and just like the first lesson, this one made me realize that I have the power to change my circumstances and I am not a victim to anyone.

Your circle should want you to win.
Your circle should clap the loudest
when you have good news.
If they don't, get a new circle.