

08 OCTOBER 2019 - 12:41 PM

MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Harnessing the full potential of your EA

How well do you leverage the talent, energy and capacity of your EA? Do you work in partnership to optimise your own performance and that of your team?



By Karen Gately



Karen Gately is a people-management specialist who works with leaders and HR teams to drive business results through people.



🗨️ [Leave Comment](#) >



Contemplate for a moment the extent to which your EA supports your ability to be at your best. What influence do they have on your reputation, relationships and ultimately effectiveness? Is your EA instrumental in enabling your own success and that of your organisation? Do you work in partnership with your EA to drive the key outcomes of your role? If not, why not?

EAs often complain of feeling underutilised and disempowered, and yet the CEOs they support are working beyond capacity. Failing to tap into the talent and energy of the person dedicated to enabling productivity in their own day is a common mistake busy CEOs make. Many leaders fail to recognise that investing in building a close working partnership with their EA can have a substantial impact on not only their ability to deliver, but also maintain healthy balance in life.

Leveraging the full potential of your EA starts with ensuring their role is clear to both of you. The job description for an EA can vary widely, so don't assume because someone has held that title before, they are aware of the expectations you hold. Take, for example, the EA who believes maintaining accurate records is top priority, when in fact what you need them to do is manage the constant flow of demands on your time. While they may be diligently working away on minutes, agendas and records management, do they know they also need to help manage your day?

Like any other partnership, success demands trust and respect. To what extent do you trust your EA's character and competence? It's difficult to effectively empower someone you doubt has the knowledge or skills to deliver on the standard of output you need. It's equally difficult to delegate responsibility when you are wary of trusting your EA's attitude, emotional intelligence or behaviours.

Do you respect your EA's role and empower them to do their job when they are able? A common obstacle EAs face is their boss's reluctance to let go and allow them to take the lead on tasks well within their capability. One CEO I coached struggled with the concept of giving his EA access to his emails. While he trusted both her character and competence, he simply felt more comfortable being in control. His primary concern was she would delete an email he needed to see or respond in a way he wouldn't. This same CEO was struggling to keep up with the overwhelming volume of emails he received every day.

Work with your EA to identify ways in which they can have greater impact on your success or that of the leadership team. Reflect on more than just the role they can play and consider also the skills, experience, mindsets and behaviours they need to be at their best.

Often EAs are provided with training in how to leverage processes, systems and technology to optimise effectiveness in their roles. Many, for example, have done Microsoft office, time management, and management or board reporting courses. Far fewer are given the opportunity to develop the strength of character and interpersonal engagement skills needed to influence people and outcomes.

Great EAs are able to step into a leadership role and drive results. They are emotionally intelligent with strong communication skills. Critically, they are able to say no, while maintaining rapport. EAs who make the biggest difference take ownership of their role and are skilled at managing up. How well does your EA influence your approach or decision making? To what extent do you allow them?

It's important to understand that the EA profession is rapidly evolving. Attracting and retaining the best EAs takes a willingness to invest in their development and support their career. More and more EAs are assuming management responsibility and driving major projects. Long gone are the days when the average EA will see their role as simply typing your letters or fetching your coffee. The modern high performing EA wants to contribute far more - and CEOs are wise to let them.