PLA Essay – Administrative Services

Since November 2010, I have been employed by Hotel Pennsylvania – a historic New York hotel that combines “unique historic character and modern day luxury.” The hotel was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and operated by Ellsworth Statler nearly a century ago. It is currently owned by Vornado Trust Realty and operates as a standalone property.

Presently, I am the executive assistant/senior group billing and commissions specialist in the finance department. I was also the customer service specialist in the finance department for three years before being promoted to my current position. My primary responsibility as assistant to the CFP is to provide high-level administrative support that includes complex calendar management, domestic and international travel management, preparing meeting briefings and daily office operations such as conference room scheduling, ordering supplies, filing and guest relations and answering a multi-line phone. Additionally, I am the liaison to the accounting office where I have many responsibilities such as:

* complex calendar and domestic and international travel management
* preparing briefings and managing the briefing process for the finance department
* managing daily operations such as expense reporting, vendor management, and special projects
* managing email inquiries and/or redirecting inquiries to the appropriate area for resolution,
* processing monthly travel and business expenses using Excel,
* processing commission payments for agencies; creating commission checks, reconciling accounts, and updating commissionable company profiles,
* resolving all client issues and complaints within an established time period such as award reservations, redemptions, profile updates, missed stays, and program content issues,
* updating receivables records by totaling unpaid invoices and verifying validity of account discrepancies by obtaining and investigating information from sales, trade promotions, customer service, and sometimes, customers,
* coordinate monthly transfers to receivables accounts
* attending weekly staff meeting to discuss upcoming week and report on accounts - Orbitz, Travelocity, Priceline, National Railroad Billing, and Groupon, and
* processing reconciliations for refund-by-check, disputes, commissions, group accounts, and e-commerce payment distribution.

Previously, I was a bank teller at Chase Bank in Ohio then transferred to New York. There, I learned how to balance and convert currencies, make deposits, open and close bank accounts, and cross-sell Chase’s products. I received on the job training with both companies. For all of the positions that I’ve had, I received most of my training on the job. I took a couple of outside classes to learn advanced Excel and the rest was learned in real life or at school.

A common task at my job is monthly reconciling of group billing accounts. The work can be tedious and time-consuming. The process is as follows:

1. Collect checked out group folders from the front desk

2. Review group folio on Opera and compare to invoice

3. Match and verify the name of group members checked into the correct rooms

3. Verify rates are correct. If rates are not, proceed to correcting them

4. Create invoice in excel

5. Verify that amount being billed and the payment match

6. Combine all documents and send off for billing is payment hasn't been collected

My work is tactical, sometimes monotonous and repetitive so it is difficult to create a hypothetical situation. Using one of the examples offered, I’ll give my take on how to manage subordinates about the over-use of break time. If there were a situation like this where I work, I’d call a general meeting with the department and give a refresher course to the group about adhering to company policies. I would stress the importance of punctuality, tardiness, timing for breaks, respect for others’ time and the cost to the company of not managing time well.

I’ve developed a system of how to accomplish daily/weekly tasks so that I can always stay a step ahead of frequent and often common requests that I receive. I check my email throughout the day so that it doesn’t get backed up. I answer all customer inquiries first then stop at 3:00pm to focus on other tasks. Throughout the day, I field phone calls for the executives, manage some of their emails, and work on any other requests or projects that are given to me. After 3pm, I focus on data management. Each morning, the executives like to look at a real-time audit report to review sales from the previous day and compare that to previous weeks or years. We also have a weekly reporting meeting where I need to give an update on my accounts and any issues with them. There is no delegation in my department. Each employee is assigned a specific job. The only shared task would be to answer the phones but that is mostly done by a receptionist. I mainly use Excel to keep track of the work that I do. It allows me to sort and prioritize outstanding items.

My role in relation to my manager and the larger organization is to handle all of the detailed work so that my manager can focus on business development. I manage complex calendar and domestic and international travel arrangement, prepare briefings and reports. I work with guest services to resolve customer complaints and financial questions. In relation to the larger organization, since we are a standalone property, it is important that executive management have all of the most up to date account details available whenever needed. It’s my job to ensure that they do.

As an administrative professional, I am often privy to information other employees are not. If I were aware of upcoming layoffs that would include a family member and were asked directly if he/she would be affected by the layoffs, I’d advise him schedule a meeting with human resources to address his concerns. However, in most companies, relatives are not allowed to work in the same department for this reason as well as others. Discretion is probably one of the most important aspects of my role as an executive assistant. I am often trusted with personal and proprietary information. My manager trusts me not to jeopardize relationships by divulging confidential information even when it becomes a personal matter for me.

Part of the role of an administrative professional is to stay on top of new technologies that can help make the job easier. For instance, when planning a large meeting where I need to check the availability of multiple people, I use a Doodle poll. Doodle allows me to provide all the information that needs to be shared with the group, allows me to add dates and times for the meeting (and change them as well), and provides an easy-to-use link for the participants to add their availability. I have a company-sponsored iPad and cell phone to use for emergencies or for when I work from home or am away from the office so that I can check and respond to email. My company uses a VoIP phone service called RingCentral. RingCentral allows the user to customize how he/she wants to use their phone. There is an application that I can download to my cell phone and iPad so that, if I choose, I can take calls from anywhere. My voicemail is sent to me in an email with a recorded attachment and it is also transcribed. I am able to customize when I’d like to receive calls and from which numbers. This helps me to focus more on the tactical tasks I have at work since my job is not customer-service oriented. We also have an intranet page that allows me to access information that used to be available only while at work.

If I were asked to train a new administrative professional, I’d advise the new person to really focus on the following:

1. Time management
2. Office technologies: RingCentral, PC/Mac platforms,
3. Excel – For the work done in the accounting office, this is essential, and
4. Opera – This is important to know when dealing with vendors and clients and discussing bookings/reservations.