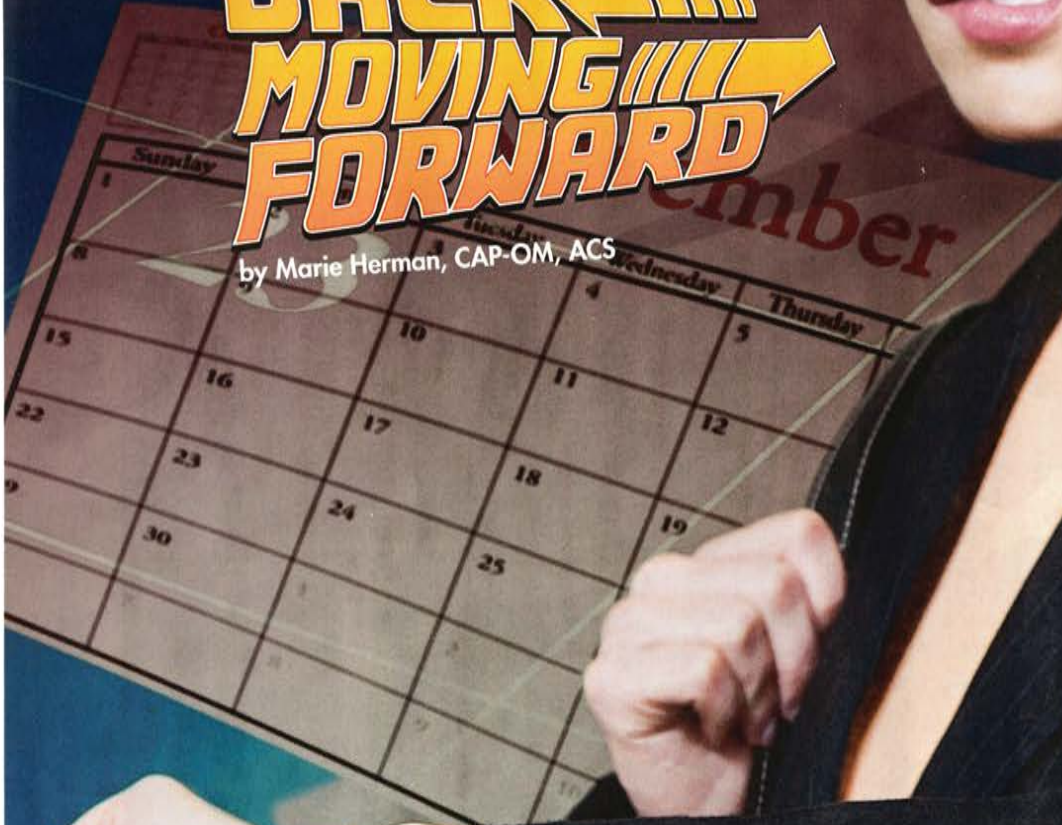



# LOOKING BACK MOVING FORWARD

by Marie Herman, CAP-OM, ACS







**I**f only we could count on scientists to figure out time travel on of these days. Just imagine all the mistakes we will be able to go back and correct in the future. In the meantime, though, you'll need to rely on the wisdom of others to help prevent you from making mistakes in the first place.

Most of us wish we had had someone to hold our hand through our first years on the job. A lucky few were blessed with mentors and patient supervisors who guided us in our journey, but most of us had to feel our way along in the dark, tripping over misplaced office supplies and bumping into open file drawers until we could finally stumble across the light switch and figure out how best to manage our careers. We gained a wealth of experience the hard way, but we would much prefer to share our knowledge with those coming behind us and give them an easier path to follow.

Several experienced administrative professionals shared their insights on what they would do differently if they could go back in time and relive the early days of their careers. These individuals touched upon many different themes, and here are a few of the highlights.

### **Follow through**

Stephanie Eastman, senior executive assistant at Baxter, wishes “she had slowed down and been more thorough in the moment. All too often, we are rushing from project to project, as administrative professionals, essentially playing ‘Whack a Mole’ to keep up with the latest fire. It’s important to take the time to perform maintenance to complete a project completely.” This would have saved a lot of time for Stephanie when she had to go back and revisit previ-

ous projects. It’s easy to let those debriefing tasks slide—to not capture notes on the event for the next year, to not go back and update the file index, etc. But a few minutes spent at the close of projects or at regular intervals can save many hours of time in the future.

### **Pursue lifelong learning**

Education and lifelong learning featured heavily in the thoughts of these administrative professionals.

As Beverly Carter, masters in business education states, “After early years of secretarial experience, which I really loved, I wish I had made the opportunity to actually work as a secretary/administrative assistant in the real world in later years. My love of this career led me to seek my professional degrees in business education, which enabled me to train secretaries, administrative assistants, and others for the past 30 years. I have attended and been a part of my administrative and educational professional organizations for many years and this has allowed me to stay current in the business, legal, and medical fields. I have used my knowledge and skills to train many, many successful admins who I have re-encountered throughout the years. However, I really miss ‘working’ in this field using the modern procedures, technologies, etc. that make up the duties of today’s admins. Therefore, I will continue to use my knowledge and skills in my



personal organizations. My advice, 'Be sure to find a way to participate wholeheartedly in any activity or career you value.'"

Patti Hansen, CAP-OM, executive assistant at CompTIA, adds, "Keep learning. Keep getting educated. Try it even if you are not sure you'll like it. Knowledge is power and no one can take it away from you."

In addition to enhancing your own career opportunities, by pursuing lifelong learning, you'll be setting an example for your children and grandchildren to see that learning doesn't stop when you graduate.

### Adapt to change quickly

While the need to pursue lifelong education was a theme of many of the administrative professionals interviewed, there were also suggestions to help newer employees hit the ground running faster.

Lisa Olson, facilities coordinator at Office Depot, shares these suggestions: "Spend time learning about the company hierarchy, what products and services they offer, and who their customers are. Become familiar with their processes and procedures."

Taking the time to learn as much as you can about your position, your company, and your industry will make you a better informed employee who is able to see the big picture. This will make your

company take your opinions and views more seriously.

we put ourselves last on the list.

As Ann McKeve, CAP-OM, executive assistant at Andersen Tax states,

"Be kind to yourself and others. Be curious. Be brave. Learn even if it is not part of your job. Do it to help you understand better what you are doing."

Setting aside time to recharge your batteries and regain your energy and perspective will pay off in many ways, leading to improved relationships with your coworkers and family, as well as delay of burn-out and increase in motivation to complete challenging tasks. You'll be better able to let daily annoyances roll off your back and you'll be more even keeled emotionally.

By following the guidance of these experienced administrative professionals who have "been there, done that," you'll leap-

frog ahead of your less experienced colleagues.

Unless time travel becomes a reality, following these hard-learned suggestions will expose you to a career of opportunities and satisfaction.

## FIVE TIPS TO ACCELERATE YOUR CAREER

1

**Be observant.** Watch everything that goes on around you. Observe the behaviors and motivations of coworkers, identify unwritten rules in the workplace and watch for opportunities that might have gone unnoticed with less attention.

2

**Trust your instincts.** Be willing to take calculated risks, especially when it comes to pursuing options that stretch your boundaries. Don't be too quick to talk yourself out of taking a leap of faith because you are living your life from a place of fear, rather than knowledge.

3

**Say yes to opportunity.** Always be preparing yourself for the next opportunity. Keep your skills cutting edge, your mind open to ideas, and your resumé up to date. Be willing to explore new responsibilities that are presented to you on the job and always be willing to participate in committees or tasks that have you interacting with coworkers you haven't worked with previously.

4

**Avoid complacency.** Don't allow yourself to get too comfortable on the job. A touch of nervousness about your future encourages you to always be considering alternatives and putting your best foot forward.

5

**Surround yourself with positive energy.** Don't allow negative people a foothold in your life—either personally or professionally. They will suck the energy and motivation right out of you. Be vigilant in maintaining a positive attitude and seeking out the best-case scenarios and most constructive outcomes.

### Take care of yourself

Finally, several of the administrative professionals would have reminded themselves how important it is to take care of yourself along the line. All too often, administrative professionals spend our time taking care of our executive and our coworkers (as well as our family and friends) and

#### About the author:

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