

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

December 2013

Merry
Christmas!

How to get the
most out of a
Seminar



Ask the PAnel:
your questions answered by
our team of experts

Say hello
to a PA...

Meet Kate
Simmons

Top 10
Tablets for
Christmas

PA Enterprise is published by

Deskdemon.com
The World's Largest Website for Executive PAs, Secretaries, Administrators & Office Managers

Getting the most out of a Seminar

by Marie Herman CAP-OM, ACS

Have you ever attended what you thought was going to be an educational seminar, but what instead ended up being an all-day sales pitch for products and longer/future classes? How frustrating to waste your time and money that way. Wouldn't it be wonderful to go to a seminar, benefit from an engaging educational speaker, learn a fantastic amount of new information and then use that information to further your professional career? You can! Just do your homework in advance and put these suggestions to good use.

About Marie Herman

Marie Herman CAP-OM, ACS operates a successful business, MRH Enterprises (www.mrhenterprises.com), whose services include online tutoring and Microsoft Office certification study groups, writing articles, and conducting workshops and other speaking engagements. She can be reached at advertising@mrhenterprises.com

Before the seminar

There are a number of steps you can take to figure out if a seminar is going to be valuable education. Start by polling your network. Ask for recommendations and referrals and specifically ask if a significant portion of the instructor's time was spent selling products. Take into account your learning style and what delivery method of training is most effective for you to learn new concepts. If you are relying on someone else to refer you to good programmes, make sure that your referrer has a similar learning style to you.

For many companies, the instructors are actually paid a very low wage and make up the bulk of the income from the sales of the products. Search online for reviews of the seminar hosts. Contact the company to review the agenda and understand better if the content is beginner, intermediate or advanced. Find out what materials, if any, are used for reference during this seminar. A close review of the proposed





Review the seminar handouts as soon as you can. Write on them or at least write separate notes for yourself as to key points you want to remember. Studies have shown that we remember better what we put into our own words, especially when we handwrite the words out. Use highlighters, underline, add stars, etc. for emphasis as needed.

topics may help you decide if you'll actually learn anything new.

Check around for multiple sources for similar seminar topics, such as local colleges or online webinars. If you found a seminar that involved travel, you might actually be able to save the company (or yourself) money by finding a similar seminar closer to home. Some topics would lend themselves to enhanced learning if they were hands on or at least demonstration mode.

During the seminar

How can you maximise the value of the time spent at the seminar? Is there an attendance list published in advance that will give you a head start on learning the names of other students and finding out where they work? You'll want to show up early to network with other attendees. Set a goal of meeting "x" number of people and think ahead about

what kind of people you want to meet, for instance people who have a certain skill or people who work in a certain industry, etc. You might want to specifically try to network to find others in the same industry as your company to discuss best practices and brainstorm ideas and new methods of doing your job. Bring plenty of your business cards.

Observe other attendees. Who seems to know their stuff? Who seems to have a personality you would like to know better? Work your way around the room to meet them. Introduce yourself and ask some relevant interesting questions. Get a better sense of who they are and what their skills are. When you have identified people that would be good to add to your network, arrange to go to lunch with them if an all-day seminar. Use every moment of networking time! Don't escape to be with your own thoughts. Exchange business cards. But don't just tuck their business cards away in your wallet and forget about it. Take a few

minutes to write down notes on the back of the card to remind you of why you have their card.

Ask questions to clarify or have the instructor expand on concepts. Make sure you have a good understanding of what is being covered. Do you understand it well enough to explain to others later?

Be sure while you are at the seminar to also get the instructor's contact information so you can follow up if you have questions. Ask if it would be allowed to share the handouts from the program with your office mates when you return to work.

After the seminar

When you get back to work, take the time to write a follow up note to the individuals you met. Thank them for their time in chatting with you. Tell them how nice it was to meet them. Include something in the note to refresh their memory about you and then think of a few follow up questions in response to your earlier conversations. Start laying the ground work of building a relationship with

the individual. Add them to your LinkedIn or other professional social media accounts, if appropriate.

There are a number of ways you can expand on what you learned in that seminar after returning to your office. Identify areas that were not covered in sufficient depth for you and create a strategy to enhance those areas with additional training or research.



Look for areas to apply your newfound knowledge. Perhaps you were shown a new method of organising your files or a new software feature. Where can you apply this knowledge in your workplace? If you don't have time to implement the idea now, write it down and add a reminder to your calendar to implement it in the future.

Look for areas to apply your newfound knowledge. Perhaps you were shown a new method of organising your files or a new software feature. Where can you apply this knowledge in your workplace? If you don't have time to implement the idea now, write it down and add a reminder to your calendar to implement it in the future. Writing down your notes without a plan to go back to that document in the future will likely result in no action occurring whatsoever. If at all possible, implement new ideas immediately while they are fresh in your mind and before you get back into the status quo of the workplace. There's an old Japanese prophecy that states, "Vision without action is a dream; Action without a vision is a nightmare."

Did you receive an attendance certificate? Make a copy for your HR file and make a note to bring this training up during your next performance review as an example of how you have taken initiative during the year. You might even consider framing the certificate and putting it up near your desk or in your office, if appropriate.

Put together a **Return on Investment (ROI)** report for your workplace. Include information about the seminar, the cost, the value received, a summary of what was covered, some of the new ideas you received and some suggestions for how and why to implement some of those suggestions in your office. Be sure to include information on those individuals you networked with that would be valuable to the firm, such as clients, for instance.

Share your knowledge with your colleagues. Consider holding a follow up meeting or a lunch and learn session with your colleagues

to share what you learned. Share your summary report and follow up suggestions with your colleagues.

Update your resume or CV to reflect your attendance at this training. Especially highlight any new skills you acquired or any certifications you earned as a result of this training.

Start laying the groundwork for future training. Make a request for money in the professional development budget for future seminars during the budget planning process. If multiple people want to attend, investigate the cost of bringing the seminar on site to your company. It's not uncommon for the breakeven point to be as few as 5-10 people, depending on the seminar.

As you can see, there are a number of steps that you can take to help maximise the value of any training you receive, to the benefit of your career and your company. Don't let your seminar education be in one ear and out the other. Make it count!

