

# THE PA & EA CIRCUS

Integrating the many parts of the  
Personal and Executive Assistant



## ANGELA GARRY

The world's most connected  
Personal Assistant and PA Trainer

# CONTENTS

<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Other publications by Angela Garry.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Foreword.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1. The circus ringleader – the PA / EA .....	11
2. What skills do you need to run the show?.....	15
3. Setting up in a new role .....	21
4. Welcoming everyone to the centre of the action .....	29
5. Contacts lists.....	33
6. Being a trusted supporter to your boss.....	37
7. Keeping ‘un-wanted’ at bay.....	45
8. Multi-tasking in extremis .....	53
9. Networking with other PAs / EAs .....	59
10. Juggling priorities and scheduling.....	67
11. Stop clowning around and work ‘smarter’ .....	71
12. Getting along with others.....	77
13. Handling tasks with project management tools .....	85
14. Solving problems – just like magic! .....	91
15. Coping with the stresses and strains.....	101
16. Mind-reading and second sight .....	109
17. Organising events .....	115
18. Leading a team .....	123
19. Don’t get tied up with details .....	127
20. What went wrong there ? .....	131
21. Accepting criticism .....	137
22. Making great presentations .....	143

*The PA / EA Circus*

23.	Working with different management styles .....	147
24.	Being an ambassador.....	155
25.	Aiming for ‘well balanced’ .....	161
26.	Where are you going? .....	167
27.	It’s all a bit weird and wonderful... ..	171
28.	Annual appraisals .....	177
29.	Keeping up with your CPD & training .....	183
30.	Integrating the many aspects of the PA / EA .....	195
31.	What does the future hold? .....	201
32.	Daring to jump .....	209
33.	Preparing for a great finish.....	215
34.	Moving onwards and upwards.....	223
	<b>Resources.....</b>	<b>227</b>
	<b>About The Illustrator .....</b>	<b>239</b>
	<b>About The Author.....</b>	<b>241</b>

“WORK. LIFE. WORK. LIFE.  
KEEP IT STEADY, NOW!”



## 25. AIMING FOR ‘WELL BALANCED’

### *The Unicyclist: finding that all important “work / life balance”*

Maintaining a healthy work / life balance is crucial to being a great PA / EA. If you are permanently exhausted, think that you are at the end of your rope, feel unwell or are ‘stressed out’, you need to take time for you, to make sure that you have adequate time in your ‘real life’ outside of work to stay focused and well balanced.

Do you take all of your annual leave entitlement? Many PAs and EAs don’t.

Do you turn your phone off when you are away? Again, many don’t.

And if you are ill, do you struggle into the office because you are so indispensable that you cannot stay home for a day’s rest?

It is paramount that we pay attention to our own lives outside of work, and that we pay attention to any health issues. As detailed in another chapter, many PAs and EAs are giving away two working months of their time each year – for free – by working extra hours in the office. This means it is particularly important to make sure that you actually take time off at some point and give yourself time to breathe and to regroup.

In any busy environment it can be very tempting to leave certain tasks for ‘quieter’ times (perhaps when the boss is away on holiday), when you will have fewer interruptions. However, not only is this bad planning, because it often means that the task becomes urgent because it has been deferred for so long, but it can also lead to you staying at your desk for longer than you need to and not taking off appropriate time for you during the break.

So, make sure you schedule some time off, and then make sure that you actually take it!

Before you go on your annual leave, it is wise to create a pre-holiday checklist to make sure that you are fully prepared, and aim to finish up whatever tasks you can before you go – to a reasonable extent. Don’t work ridiculously long hours in order to clear everything from your desk before you head off for your week on the Costa Blanca or Skegness ...

**Here are some tips for your taking time-off checklist.**

**Delegate**

If you are a senior-level administrator, distribute tasks among your staff – you will already know who can handle what. If you don't supervise other staff, seek assistance from a colleague you trust, and reassure them that you will return the favour when they go on their annual leave.

Keep a note of which tasks you have delegated to whom, which tasks you have completed and which tasks you haven't, so you will know what needs immediate action on your return. There is bound to be more to add to this list when you get back, but at least this will give you a starting point and will help you plan your first week or so.

**Organise minor aspects of your role**

If your Executive is going to be in the office while you are away, make sure that you fill up the paper trays on the printers, replace any low toners and order fresh supplies – and let them know where spares are stored and how to change them.

It might be second nature for you to pop the printer open, change the toners and clean the print heads, but when your boss is suddenly inkless it is important that they know how to cope on their own! You might also want to leave a list detailing where you keep office basics like staples, pens and folders.

(I say this from experience, having received 'urgent' text messages from bosses in two of my previous jobs, one asking me how to replace the photocopier toner and the other enquiring where the spare teabags were kept!)

**Calendars**

Make sure your boss's calendar is up to date, and that papers for any forthcoming meetings are in a prominent place, ready for them to take with them. Ask a colleague to keep an eye on the calendar for you – give them a paper copy of it before you go.

**In your absence**

Update your boss last thing before you go on leave to let them know what has been set up to take place in your absence. Schedule a return meeting for when you get back, so that you can catch up on what happened when you were away.

Then head for the hills (or the airport!) ...

## **Tidy up**

Neaten your desk space. While you are away things will be dumped on it by other people, so it will make it easier on your return if you have cleared your work out of the way first.

## **Reduce incoming emails**

Without doubt, you will find a very full inbox of emails when you return. There are a few things you can do to alleviate this problem:

- Unsubscribe from any email lists you are a member of, or set your account to 'no mail' on those lists.
- Send fewer emails in the last few days before your holiday – and hence get fewer responses.
- Empty your inbox before you go – file incomplete items in appropriate folders ready to be dealt with on your return.
- Set up an 'out of office' reply on your account that thanks the sender for their message and indicates that you are away and the date of your return. Include alternative contacts should they require immediate assistance.
- (Put a similar message on your voicemail on both your desk phone and your work mobile phone, if you have one.)

On your return, allocate yourself a reasonable amount of relatively quiet time to go through the messages that have piled up. Basically, take ownership of your email inbox –don't let it own you!

## **While you are at it, try to SWITCH OFF your home computer / iPhone / Blackberry while you are away**

I used to find this really difficult as I'm a sucker for technology and gadgets and the internet and Facebook and keeping in touch with my friends and reading my email and taking photos and so on...

I would take my smartphone on holiday and connect to free Wi-Fi whenever I found it to upload photos to my Facebook account.

I'd then end up checking my personal emails to see if there were any messages that needed my attention, and then I would find myself thinking, 'Oh, and while I'm doing that, I might as well check my work email account too ...'

It is an all too common story: many of us spend part of our holiday time doing more work.

Does this sound like you too? I would love to advise you, ‘Put your hands in the air, and walk away from the tablet, iPad, iPhone or Blackberry. You are on holiday!’

It is apparent, though, that this isn’t always practical or possible. You worry that the boss might need something urgently, so you just do a quick check – and before you know it, you have spent an hour or so of your holiday time on work-related emails.

So, should you or shouldn’t you check your emails while you are on leave?

These questions remain hot topics judging by recent press coverage.

Some PAs are convinced that their bosses need them constantly and that today’s 24/7 way of life means that you should be available at all times.

Others firmly believe that no one can really switch off and get the benefits of being on holiday if they are constantly online, so they wouldn’t dream of checking their work email when they are away.

### **How available do you allow yourself to be?**

The 2014 UK National PA Survey asked PAs about their holiday habits:

<b>Do you stay in touch with the office when you are on holiday?</b>	
Yes, I check in daily	14.9%
Yes, I check in occasionally	29.5%
I am available if an emergency arises	33.6%
No	22.0%

This means that nearly 45% of PAs either phone in, pop in or check their office email accounts when on holiday, whilst a further third are available for emergencies. Only a fifth of respondents said they kept their holidays completely separate from their work. So what’s the best thing for you to do?

It is not just about deciding whether you log in to your work emails when you are away. In fact, both you and your Executive need to be absolutely clear about what is reasonably expected of you.

It could be argued, for example, that you have been given a staff mobile phone expressly so that you can be reached at all times, in which case you need to leave the phone at work so another colleague can cover your role completely when you are away. Be brave. Set some boundaries.

If you or your boss are really convinced that something might occur that is so urgent that you need to be contacted when you are away, and you truly believe

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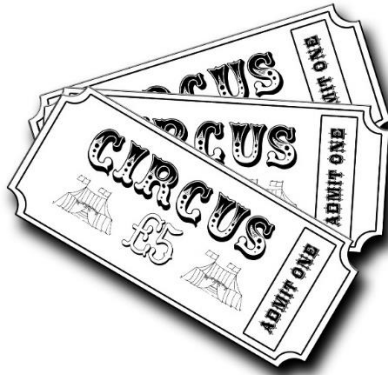
that you cannot say, 'No, I will definitely not be available when I'm away,' then go for the middle ground.

Set up a system with your boss before you go, whereby you give your personal email address to your Executive and tell them that it can be used in cases of emergency or extreme urgency only.

So, for anyone who emails your work email address you will be unavailable, but your boss can reach you if absolutely necessary.

However, if you have followed the various tips outlined in this chapter, then there shouldn't be any emergencies because you will have fully briefed your boss and a trusted colleague to take on tasks in your absence.

Have a great holiday!



ANGELA GARRY



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANGELA GARRY

With over 22,000 first-level contacts on business networking site LinkedIn – and a three-level network extending to more than 38 million – Angela Garry is the most connected person in the world with the job titles of ‘personal assistant’ and ‘PA trainer’.

Angela qualified as a Secondary School Mathematics teacher in 1991 with a BSc(Ed) and QTS from the University of Exeter.

Since then she has worked in administrative roles in England and Ireland, with 18 years of this in Personal Assistant roles. She has worked in two global banks, three universities, a sixth-form college, a water and sewerage utility, an engineering consultancy, an international seaport, a government-sponsored employment training company and an executive search company, plus her most recent role for over five years as the principal’s PA at a brand new academy for 11–19 year olds in Nottingham, England.

Angela received her PostGraduate Certificate in Integrative Psychotherapy from the University of Coventry in 2013.

Having been shortlisted for both the UK Headteachers’ PA of the Year and The Times/Hays PA of the Year awards in 2011, Angela has combined her teaching and PA skills to quickly become a renowned trainer, and is now a leading expert in educational administration training.

She has delivered highly successful training and networking events and seminars for PAs since 2010 around the world – including the UK and Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Russia, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and China – offering training courses to a variety of audiences from both corporate / industry and educational institutions.

Since 2012, she has also been a leading educational administration trainer, creating and delivering training programmes specifically designed for educational PAs, and has worked with more than 350 executives’ PAs and administrative staff from over 250 international schools and independent schools worldwide.

## *The PA / EA Circus*

In total, Angela has trained, coached, mentored, presented to and worked with more than 3,000 PAs, EAs, secretaries and administrators to date.

In April 2012, Angela created her training company, Pica Aurum, with the aim of helping everybody find and reach their potential. Through Pica Aurum she offers training and mentoring worldwide, together with career coaching, life coaching, counselling and psychotherapy in her local area.

During her role in a new school, Angela was interviewed by NAHPA, the National Association of Headteachers' PAs magazine, in 2010. Writing subsequent articles resulted in her being invited to take over as the magazine's Editor in 2012 – and, when the publishers decided to close the magazine, she took over its ownership in April 2015. The magazine is the UK's leading publication for PAs and administrators working in schools – and she is looking to launch a sister magazine for University PAs in 2016.

In addition, Angela has been a regular contributor since 2009 to several other leading PA magazines, including Executive Secretary, PA Enterprise, PA Life and Executive PA.

Angela Garry is currently available for bookings worldwide – as a trainer, motivational speaker, conference chair, for book signings and readings, and as a mentor or coach.

Her first book “Brave PAs”, for assistants working in education, was published in Spring 2015.

“The PA / EA Circus” is her second book for assistants, this time in a corporate / industry setting.

Being a PA for many years, Angela is well used to multi-tasking – and is now concentrating on continuing to build her training business, publishing NAHPA magazine and launching the new UNIPA sister magazine, as well as her new venture in writing books for children and young adults.

For more information, resources, dates of courses, subscriptions to NAHPA magazine, etc., please visit:

[www.angelagarry.com](http://www.angelagarry.com) – portal linking to all her websites.

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