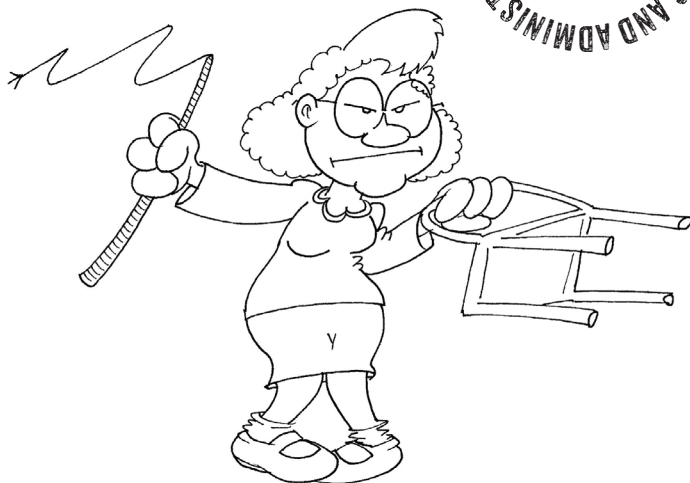


# **BRAVE PAs**

## **THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BEING OUTSTANDING IN A TOUGH JOB**

FOR PAs, EAs, SECRETARIES  
AND ADMINISTRATORS  
WORKING  
IN  
EDUCATION



FROM THE WORLD'S MOST CONNECTED PERSONAL ASSISTANT AND PA TRAINER  
**ANGELA GARRY**

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# INTRODUCTION

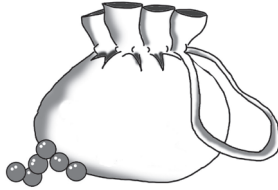


It takes a lot to be a great administrator in an educational environment – nay, it takes real bravery. It's not the same as working in a personal assistant (PA), executive assistant (EA), secretarial or administrative role in any other environment. We work to distinctly different customer groups, and ultimately the aim of our institution is not all about profit – it's about developing our pupils and students into the citizens of tomorrow. We are part of an institution that is helping to develop the next generation's rocket scientists, cleaners, doctors, bus drivers, shop workers, industrialists, firemen, inventors and parents of generations to follow – plus all those whom we will inspire to become budding PAs!

Imagine, if you will, that we all have within us a small velvet bag that is filled with a handful of little glass beads. Each bead contains the essence of one of our brave strengths, assets and skills – our internal 'Bravery SAS'. This is where our bravery comes from, based on how we use these beads: one at a time or in combination with other beads.

Some people carry their bravery bag deep inside their pocket, hidden away, and don't bring it out into the open very often, believing that there is a limit on usage and they must reserve it only for special occasions. Some people aren't even aware that they have a bravery bag, so never use it. Some open their bravery bag and look through

the beads, choosing to select just a few of them. Others wear their bravery bag on their shoulder and rummage through it on a regular basis.



Brave PAs use their bravery bag daily and will find that they use every bead within the bag at some point, sometimes using several at once to find brave solutions and methods to meet their various challenges. Each of the 48 chapters in this book looks at one or more of the different bravery skills, assets and strengths required to be successful in your role: what they are and how you can use them, how you can supplement and develop them, and how to make sure you access them on a regular basis to become a brave PA in education.

This book is based on my experiences of training to be a teacher and subsequently working in administrative, secretarial and PA roles in education. *Brave PAs* offers a selection of my tips, hints, anecdotes, time-savings, advice, knowledge and expertise to assist with your continuing professional development, and to enable you to be the best you can be in your role, bravely supporting the leadership of your school, college or university.

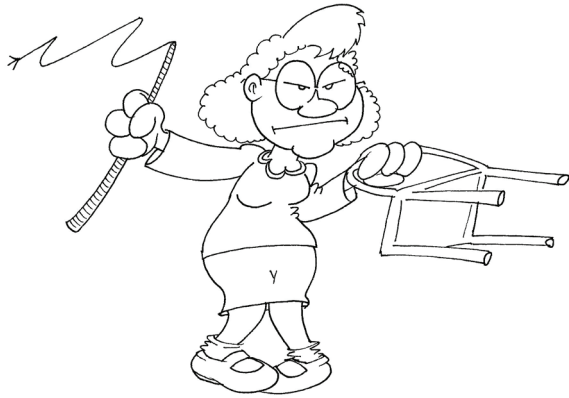
You might choose to read just one chapter of this book per week, and think of this book as a guide for use throughout an academic year in your role, or you might prefer to dip in and out of it at random. Alternatively, you may like to pick out chapters on a particular topic (see the topic list at the back of the book). Whatever you do with it, I hope that it helps you in your role as a PA in education. There are so many more chapters I could have included (I started out with a list of more than 70!) on so many more aspects of working in an educational environment – but this seemed enough for starters.

## INTRODUCTION

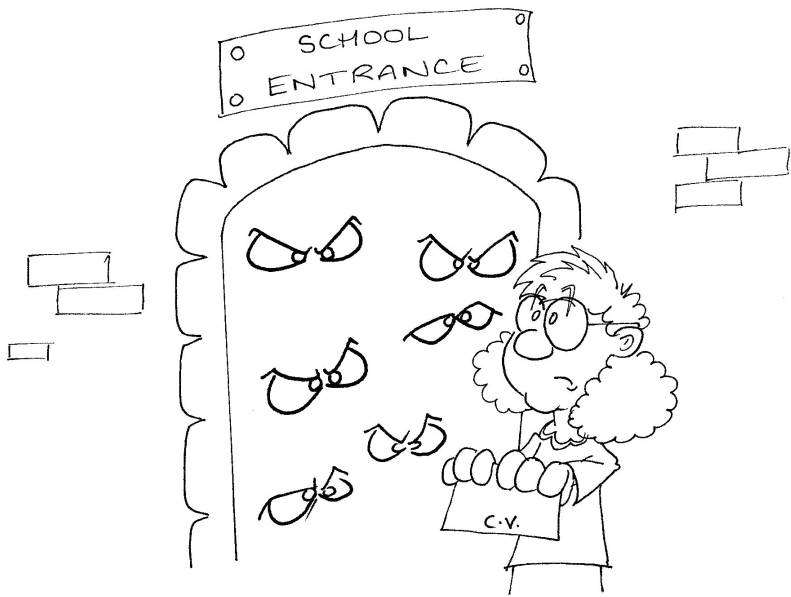
Note: *Brave PAs* has been written specifically for PAs, EAs, secretaries and administrative staff working in schools, colleges and universities. Throughout the book, the terms 'PA', 'head teacher' and 'school' are used as shortcuts for all administrative staff and their head teachers/principals/college leaders/university heads/leaders in other educational institutions.

All anecdotal evidence within this book is true – but names have been changed to preserve anonymity where requested.

**BRAVERY IS ...**







# **BRAVERY IS ... STEPPING INTO YOUR FIRST ROLE IN AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

Your first experiences of working in an educational environment may well be scary, whether you are arriving straight from school or college or from working in a role in a different industry. Many people believe that a job in education will be 'easier' than elsewhere, that they will enjoy long holidays and short hours, but this generally does not prove to be the case!

With increasingly smaller budgets and tighter controls on spending, educational institutions are becoming pressurised into becoming 'lean', which means reducing staff numbers and overheads whilst still maintaining standards and delivering excellent teaching for the students. The role of PA, EA or secretary in a school, college or university is often therefore a hugely responsible position, which will require you to have lots of fingers in lots of different pies throughout the organisation, regardless of whether your job is to support just one individual or many staff members. You will become involved in the whole organisation for the good of all – and so you should! The better acquainted you can become with the workings and machinations of your school or college, the better you will be able to support its leadership.

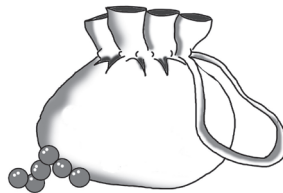
PAs who make the move from a corporate role will be used to working in busy, pressurised situations, but many will be unprepared for the sheer number of interruptions that will occur during the working day in education, as pupils, parents, teachers, teaching assistants, governors, professors, college sponsors, community members and many more compete for their attention. I've spent my career working in corporate, charity and educational institutions, and I've seen the huge gulf between what people think of as a 'cushy number' working in education in comparison with what actually happens.

Please don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that working in education is an awful experience, too hard, too difficult or too pressurised. I have loved each and every one of my roles as an administrator in education – as, I am sure, will you – and I have felt challenged to push myself to reach high standards throughout. It's always been a role where I have felt valued and where I have known that what I was doing was working towards an overall goal that is sincerely worthwhile – educating the adults of the next generation. I love the PA role and working in the educational sphere with equal passion. And, with each job, I have developed different skills and new methods of working.

Education is a very different experience than working anywhere else. There are very few other organisations where you would be required to deal with huge numbers of children, teenagers and young adults every day in your workplace, as well as 'already grown' adults. For those who have spent their career working solely with adults, it can be a daunting or scary experience to make the switch to working in education. It takes bravery.



My experiences of working in educational environments have required bravery throughout, to adapt to the various demands required of me as a PA, an adult, a tutor, a coach, a mentor, a member of the local community; bravery which I'm going to share with you over the coming pages, and which I hope can help you in your future as a brave PA in education.



# **BRAVERY IS ... ENLIGHTENING**

## **– SOME LIGHT-HEARTED ADVICE FOR A NEW PA**



If you are brand new to being a PA, then welcome to this really exciting profession!

Being a new PA or administrative assistant is no easy task. Your head teacher or principal will quite often expect things of you that you are unfamiliar with – they may presume that you already know what to do without being told. They will probably also expect that you automatically know their preferences and will be able to organise logistics successfully on their behalf.

If you want to be great at your job, the following enlightenments should be useful to you.

## **BE FRIENDLY AND EARN THE RESPECT OF YOUR COLLEAGUES**

When you arrive in a new role, your colleagues need to know who you are and what you do. If you need something from them, you need them to respond accordingly. A major element of the PA role is chasing people to get them to produce reports and papers to deadline, to agree to attend meetings, to turn up on time and to take on extra responsibility, so you need your colleagues to know that you are there as the head's or principal's 'third arm'. You are there to ensure that whatever needs doing gets done.

You will need to get to know about the people your boss will meet with on a regular basis – this might be the school or college's governors, or the university's council. If they are familiar with who you are and what your role is, a good working relationship with them should develop much easier than if they have no idea who you are or what you are doing. You may not be directly involved with their schedule or time management, but getting acquainted with their assistants will help assure their cooperation when you need something from them.

## **MOST LIKELY, YOUR COLLEAGUES KNOW NOTHING ABOUT WHAT A PA DOES**

You will find that many of the people you work with have little idea about the role of a PA so your task should be to educate them! They may think of you as a diary-keeper, a chaser-of-deadlines or the 'go to' person for everything under the sun, so they will often come to you with questions or tasks that aren't your responsibility to fulfil, but they have no idea who else to go to with them, so they come to you. Of course, these are things that you will take in your stride in time – it is usually a case of 'If you don't know who to ask about something, ask the PA – they will be able to find out for you'. For example, many of your colleagues will be under the impression that

## **BRAVERY IS ... ENLIGHTENING**

you are (apparently) the only person in the entire world who knows where anything is. Without you, nobody would know who to call, when the meeting is or who it is with – and the list keeps going.

Being a PA (and a brave one at that!) requires certain skills including organising meetings, handling travel itineraries, having good (or preferably great) computing skills and typing speeds, as well as being flexible and adaptable to working with last minute changes. But, because of their lack of knowledge about the role, a lot of people assume that the role of PA is easy, which is rather hilarious. I have never met (nor heard of) a PA who has described their job as easy.

Your role at this point is to enlighten your colleagues. Become an ambassador for the profession and demonstrate to them the true power of the PA – that we essentially control the head teacher's time. We decide if and when someone may see our boss or speak to them by phone. We keep the head teacher or principal supported in a safety net that allows them to walk the tightrope of running the organisation, secure in the knowledge that we've 'got their back'.

Here are some of the key skills that you will need to succeed as a brave PA.

## **YOU NEED TO BE AN ELEPHANT**

You know the saying, 'Elephants never forget'? PAs must not forget anything because there is nobody to back you up. People will come to you looking for a piece of paper they had in their hand six weeks ago or for the contact details of someone who visited the school last term, and even if you had nothing to do with the original details you will be expected to find out.

Your head teacher or principal will ask you to 'dig out' an email they received from John or Bob, (or was it Phil?), three or four weeks ago, which mentioned something about X or Y. Undoubtedly, it will turn out to have been a message from Simon, which mentioned that Tim might be involved in a project (to which the head had thought, 'No,

that's Bob's responsibility'), but you will have to work this out by remembering the conversation you had with the head that day when he mentioned something about Bob ...

To become great PAs, we need to develop an almost ESP-type connection with our bosses to work out what it is they mean, because quite often they do not tell us or give us the wrong information. Great detective skills also help to piece together the fragments of information that we gather every day.

## **YOU NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYONE**

It will also be expected that you know everyone's needs, wants, quirks, habits, demands and eccentricities, because you will, of course, have developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of the staff within the first few moments of having arrived in your new role!

## **YOU NEED TO BE THE BEST TRAVEL ORGANISER**

As well as organising meetings you will quite often be the travel arranger. Anyone who has booked a business trip for six people, all flying from different airports at different times, and all having different personal preferences about the type of place where they want to stay, will be able to tell you that booking travel can be unbelievably complicated – and you will be expected to be the person who can magically make it all happen.

**THE COMMON IMAGE OF THE SECRETARY OR PERSONAL ASSISTANT IS THAT OF A QUIET "MISS JONES" TYPE – NOT USUALLY EXPECTED TO HAVE THE COURAGE (OR THE RIGHT) TO SPEAK OUT ON SOMETHING THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT.**

**HOWEVER, PAs HAVE A VITAL ROLE TO PLAY IN AN EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT – A ROLE THAT REQUIRES REAL BRAVERY.**

Written by the former PA to the principal of an innovative new academy in the UK, who now delivers training courses for secretaries and PAs in schools globally, *Brave PAs* offers tips, hints, anecdotes, time-saving advice, knowledge and expertise for PAs, secretaries and administrators to follow throughout the year. Each individual bravery-themed section is packed with advice and insights to assist with continuing professional development, and help PAs cope with the challenging situations they will inevitably face.

The title, *Brave PAs*, says it all. Angela Garry uses every bit of her years of experience in education to drill down to the essence of what it means to be an outstanding PA. Facing the fears that confront PAs every day does indeed take bravery. Angela shows the way with humour and in glowing detail. By the end of the book, you will know with absolute certainty if this is the career for you and, if the answer is yes, you will have your guide.

Bonnie Low-Kramen, author of *Be the Ultimate Assistant*

I would seriously recommend that every PA (no matter where they work or what stage they are in their career) invest in a copy of *Brave PAs*. They should also keep this magnificent gemstone polished and uppermost in their bravery bag – this is certainly my aim.

The book is an education in itself – you learn something new on every page. It is inspiring, encouraging, resourceful and emotional, it makes you smile and, above all, it is a fantastic reference guide to being a first class PA in today's world. Thank you, Angela, for sharing your words of wisdom through your own personal PA journey.

Gail Welsh, Scottish PA of the Year 2014



**ANGELA GARRY** has 24 years' experience in administrative roles, including working in three universities, a training company and, for five years, a new academy in the UK. Globally the most connected personal assistant and PA trainer on LinkedIn, Angela has delivered seminars, training events and CPD workshops for more than 2500

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