

Great Expectations (Get it in Writing!)

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It is crystal clear to me that many of the problems between employers and assistants in our workplace could be prevented by a clear set of written expectations. It surprises me to learn that many assistants begin Day #1 of their jobs without anything in writing regarding a job description or compensation package. This scenario is a set-up for miscommunications, resentments and, ultimately, failure. Most often it is the assistant who ends up quitting her job which is a lose/lose situation.

The Wharton School of Business recently issued an interesting report regarding the reasons why women earn 80% of what men earn. It said that only 7% of women will negotiate their compensation offers compared with 57% of men who decide to negotiate a better deal. The report explained that 93% of women accepted what they were offered without questioning it, mainly because of their fear of not being liked. Women view negotiation as an uncomfortable confrontation to be avoided. Men, on the other hand, (or at least 57% of them) view negotiation as “fun” and “a game” resulting in increased compensation.

Given that the profession of being an assistant is 95% women in the United States and 98% women in the United Kingdom, we need to look at realistic solutions to the issues facing us regarding not only successfully negotiating compensation but also job expectations.

Assistants need their deal in writing as an important place to begin their work. Job descriptions do not have to be written in stone

but they do need to be written. The document is subject to change by mutual agreement. Inevitably, assistants report “Scope Creep”, a term which means the scope of work starts growing... and growing and growing... unless it is controlled and anticipated. Documentation enables the assistant to factually and calmly negotiate an adjusted package based on the revised job description.

There is too much suffering in silence and fear in today’s workplace. This is the case with both assistants and managers, and the consequences are bullying and destructive behaviors which lower morale and productivity. Given this reality, we need to put our minds on positive and reasonable ways to speak to one another to handle the inevitable problematic situations.

As one tool, I created the following Code of Ethics and Conduct for Employers and Assistants. It is a place to start as you begin what I hope will be a long and mutually satisfying term of work with your employer and company.

Assistants and employers alike have challenging and demanding jobs. Let us help one another by clearly discussing our expectations upfront and in writing. Doing this at the beginning will pay off in the long run and fewer staffers will feel the need to quit.

CODE OF ETHICS and CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYERS and ASSISTANTS

This is a mutually agreed upon list of fundamental givens for our work relationship designed to enable each of us to do superior work as a team and in collaboration in a positive, productive and supportive atmosphere.

I, the employer, commit to the following:

- 1 Every employee will be treated with respect, dignity and kindness.
- 2 Every employee will have a mutually agreed upon compensation and benefits package to be reviewed at designated times.

- 3 Expectations will be made clear either verbally or in writing.
- 4 Verbal and written feedback and acknowledgement will be given to staff.
- 5 Frequent and clear two-way communications will be the norm in order to make best use of time and energy.
- 6 Staff are encouraged and expected to speak their mind regarding any issues that are deemed important to achieving our goals.
- 7 Verbal, sexual or physical abuse is not permitted by anyone working for or doing business in my company.
- 8 No staff will be asked to engage in illegal activity.

Signature

Date

I, the employee, commit to the following:

- 1 Commitment to excellent work in accordance with expectations that will be in constant flow and subject to change.
- 2 Diligence in communications in concert with the customized structures designed for our particular workplace and style.
- 3 Exhibit professional behavior at all times and expect to be held accountable for my actions.
- 4 Exhibit good judgment and discretion regarding sensitive matters.
- 5 Assist employer in every way possible to achieve his/her goals.
- 6 Act as eyes and ears for my employer and am encouraged to bring matters to his/her attention.
- 7 Work towards a positive, co-operative workplace and will not engage in negative, counter-productive encounters with anyone without employer’s consent.
- 8 Will not participate in verbal or physical abuse, nor be involved in any illegal activity on behalf of the company.

Signature

Date

about the author



Bonnie Low-Kramen worked for 25 years as the Personal Assistant to actress Olympia Dukakis. She is a speaker and the author of *Be The Ultimate Assistant* which is a popular desk-side reference. Bonnie teaches workshops for Assistants in major US cities and virtually. Her goal is to affect positive change in the American workplace. Please check out her website: www.bonnielowkramen.com

Bonnie will be speaking at Executive Secretary LIVE in London from 22-24 March www.executivesecretarylives.eventbrite.co.uk.

