

## **Executive assistants get paid like a boss**

### **Jamie First**

Forget law or medicine, why not become a top level secretary?

Being an executive assistant is a lucrative business, with some EAs earning more than \$120,000.

Leading recruitment firm Hays interviewed 536 high end EAs to determine what qualities were needed to succeed in the role.

Regional director Alex Jones said more than ever, today's secretaries are balancing an increasing list of responsibilities, of which making coffee and picking up dry-cleaning are no longer a part.

"A top EA is a professional and collaborative gatekeeper who has their executive's confidence and trust," Mr Jones said.

"They hold a certificate or higher qualification, have advanced computer software skills and quickly grasp the latest technology.

"They possess advanced written and verbal communication skills, and accountancy knowledge."

Among other traits they have are organisational skills, calmness under pressure, flexibility, resilience and efficiency at problem solving.

In the Hays' study, 67 per cent said communication skills were crucial to being a top EA, 42 per cent identified prioritising deadlines as most important and 35 per cent said relationship building was key.

"They do all this almost invisibly and that's the final piece of their DNA; they make their executive as efficient as possible by offering support and not craving the spotlight for themselves," Mr Jones said.

"That's why the top EAs can earn up to, and in senior positions can exceed, \$120,000 and why, despite mobile devices and online calendars, they remain essential to an executive's success."

Assistant to the Australasian CEO at Willis insurance company, Maria Hamilton, has been in the business for 15 years and does everything from paperwork and making appointments to booking holidays.

Ms Hamilton, who worked her way up from a junior, said there's never a dull moment in the office.

"It's definitely not mundane. It's very full on ... I wish I had an EA myself sometimes.

"You're the right-hand man, a wing person, and you have to ensure you are on the ball and not letting anything fall through the cracks," she said.

Ms Hamilton said it is a high pressure position.

“The buck stops with the CEO. When you make a mistake, you make a mistake with them, so you have to be confident in what you do.

“You are basically seen and not heard. You have to be the person that pats yourself on the back because not many people probably notice that you’re doing a good job.”

She said while she finds it a rewarding career, many people don’t understand her value in the corporate environment.