

## Drowning in Work? Time for an Executive Life Preserver

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- *You now have an executive assistant.*
- *Work activities must be realigned.*
- *Where does a manager start?*

A client of mine, a real estate developer, was drowning in a sea of routine activities. He was overwhelmed and stagnated by the busy nature of his work. The result: Goal paralysis. Highly strategic work wasn't done efficiently.

To keep him from drowning, we threw him a life preserver. An executive assistant. He never used an assistant before and pushed back – costs too much, don't know how to use one, can't afford to follow that person's work.

These are normal concerns. My advice, "Catch the life preserver. We'll pull you back to success."

The first pull of the rope: Analyze the workload. He has tasks that directly contribute to revenue. His executive assistant facilitates his ability to bring in revenue – scheduling, routine phone calls, attend certain meetings (she takes notes on action items), preparing sales packets and marketing material, and information-gathering. She has an understanding of his projects and is able to answer questions, track deliverables and ensure timely execution.

Second pull of the rope: Set calendar guidelines for the assistant. There are quantitative guidelines. Examples: Thirty minutes minimum between appointments. Set drive-time between sales calls. "X" hours of closed door time weekly.

Qualitative guidelines help the executive assistant make immediate decisions. Evaluative questions guide scheduling, for instance. Who is it? Meeting purpose? Timing? The manager would mentally run this gauntlet. An executive assistant has to be the manager's alter ego and evaluate each call.

They also set aside dedicated days for tasks. Every Wednesday he is in the field on project sites. Tuesdays and Thursdays are spent in sales meetings. Monday morning is the weekly staff meeting to set and review sales goals.

Third pull of the rope: Communicate action items. My client spends a lot of time in his car and they use a Dictaphone system. He records answers to questions from his assistant and action items he conjures with his "windshield time." The tasks are off his mind and efficiency delegated to his assistant.

Fourth pull of the rope: Relinquish control of paper. Let go. Your assistant should create and maintain your filing. You are paid to sell, not file.

Fifth pull of the rope: Retrain yourself. When I showed up two weeks after my client's exec assistant started, she was sitting in her office, miserable. She did not have enough to do. He wouldn't let go and let her help him. You two are a team. Divide the responsibilities, communicate and support each other. Don't jump back in the pond.

With my client back on deck, he now is doing what he does well – sell and develop. His assistant does what she does well, keep his head above water.

**CALL TO ACTION:** Executive assistants – I want to hear the best efficiency tips that you and your manager use. E-mail me at the address below.