

## GLOBAL PA NETWORK

### PA Case Study: Catherine Smith, NHS Wales

**Catherine Smith, PA to 3 Directors, Healthcare Innovation Agency, NHS Wales and runner up in Hays/Times Crème PA of the Year Award 2009.**

#### **Q.1 Describe your role and how many people you work for?**

I am PA to 3 Directors and their team of 35 people. All 3 Directors connect together and in my role I manage their diaries, their inboxes and take all their phone calls. I also run and approve the pay card system which is A3 yellow cards that each month need updating with sickness and holidays taken for 35 people. I also do charity work for the organisation and organise training days, invite speakers, meet with the CEO and discuss the team training days which happen every quarter. I also look after the Charities and each quarter we highlight a particular charity that we will support e.g. Wear Pink, Poverty Day, Poppy Appeal, Children in Need etc. I am also in charge of the Corporate Health Standards Programme for Employees which promotes healthy employees through healthy eating, salad days etc. I organise flyers and promotions for this event and walking routes and encourage e-mail free days and recycling in the office. I arranged for the waste bins and the water cooler to be moved so that staff would get up from their desks more regularly and interact with each other, and it has worked. I have been instructed on the new appraisal scheme for managing staff and attended a training course on this topic and its now my role to show my Directors how the new appraisal scheme works and implement it.

#### **Q.2. Describe your relationship with your boss?**

My main boss is Andy Butler for whom I do most of my work and I sit outside his office and I have worked for him for 2 years and have been 3.5 years in the NHS and prior to that I was in recruitment. My boss had not had a PA before and I have worked on building a solid relationship with him. I have learnt to love football and watch the results for Cardiff City so that when Andy arrives on a Monday morning I know the score and by doing this I feel I am working in tune with him. My other bosses are a lady and a man and on arrival in the morning they all come to my desk and they each have an in tray with messages and notes in for them which helps ensure good communication between us all.

#### **Q.3 Typical day**

No day is the same and the first I do is check their Calendars to see where they all are and check their e-mails and also their sent items to see how they responded to various issues. I answer all e-mails immediately and have a To Do list that I carry around with me - it's a hard back book – and once a job is completed I score it through with a red pen. I

commence each day with a new page in my To Do book and regularly check my bosses in trays and query what is in there. I also manage budgets and do a small amount of paper filing, but most of it is electronic filing.

Two years ago I went on a PA course in London and someone on the course had a PA network in their organisation and said how beneficial it had been. A network had been tried in the NHS Trust before and so I went to my boss and asked if I could set up a network for the PAs in our area. We then decided to go bigger and incorporate all the PAs in Wales from the other Trusts. The National Assembly in Wales already has a PA network and the PAs receive training through it. We launched ours in May 2009 and it was well received and out of 55 PAs only 4 had received training in their roles. The problem with the network is distance and we have launched a website and put the Global PA Network up there and we want to pull together training days. The challenge we have is low self esteem of the PAs who do not ask for training themselves and do not see its value. We would like to hold training on 'How to train the Director to talk to his PA'.

#### **Q.4 Major challenges in the role**

One of the biggest challenges is interruptions and e-mails and people come and ask me for help with technical issues and I find I am constantly interrupted. I have now put a Door is Shut sign on my desk and put my Ipod on when I am too busy which stops interruptions. I receive up to 60-80 e-mails a day and I am copied on a lot of e-mails and in order to keep on top of things I check my inbox regularly.

#### **Q.5. Opportunities for Promotion**

PAs in the NHS tend to start at Band 4 which is a salary of £14,000 - £18,000 and dependent on previous role and experience a PA maybe a Band 5 which is a salary of £17,000 - £25,000 and some may get increments on top. but this is the highest level they can reach. If I wanted promotion I would probably have to leave and start again, as a Project Manager for example, so its not easy to get promotion. However the pension is excellent and your job is secure in the NHS as people are not make redundant but tend to be moved around.

#### **Q.6 How often do you attend external training courses?**

In the NHS we have basic internal training which we will channel through the PA network and there are Minute Taking and Time Management courses that are free to attend. For external courses I can go on what I want to but I have to sell it to my Director first. We do not receive messages about no training budget allowed.