

## **HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT THROUGH THE SECRETARIAL PROFESSION**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores how the power of technological advancement, if harnessed can bring about development in the secretarial profession and improve performance. The profession has moved from the secretarial traditional orientation to the innovative one. The paper extols the role of computer technology, for example, internet for effective business communication and the objectives of the offices as a means of communication and change for the well being of the secretaries in organizations and the society. It concludes on how competent the secretarial professionals will look after acquisition of the new technology and the tremendous improvements it has brought to the secretarial professionals with the power to function effectively.

**Keywords:** Technology, Communication, Advancement, Profession

### **Introduction**

I wish to begin by expressing my appreciation to the National Education Committee and the National Executives Council of NAPSSON for considering me worthy of presenting paper for intellectual development of our members by giving it approval. The paper start by a philosophical statement which says, "As you become more clear about who you are, you will be able to decide better what is best for you". In the light of the above then who is a secretary? According to Hornby (2005) he defines secretary as the person who works in an office, deals with communications, keeping of records and covering meeting. Nmodu (2013) says that secretary is the mirror, in which the beauty of the organization is seen, the first public relations personnel in an organization, the engine room of the organizations, the live-wire of the organization. The pillar and corner-stone upon which the organizations rest, record managers of the organizations and chief executives. The meaning or definition of secretary is numerous and inexhaustive.

It is regrettable that although many people are called secretaries today, they are actually not professional secretaries. Many are elected secretaries of their communities, committees and societies. For the fact that they are elected or appointed does not make them professional secretarial staff. No one can become a

secretarial staff without undergoing the formal training.

### **Objective Of This Paper**

At the end of this paper, participants will know and understand:

- The importance of communication to secretarial profession,
- How to improve on their communication skill in their offices
- Change from the traditional orientation to the new one.
- Harnessing the technology for the advancement of the profession and
- Good human relation in the offices after this presentation.

### **The Role Of Professional Secretary In Communication**

The ability of human beings to share ideas, knowledge and information with one another for the growth of the society has always been a primary factor in man's evolution. The history of communication therefore, is as old as the world itself. From a general perspective, communication is believed to cut across every aspect of human endeavour ranging from family, politics, to religion, education, organization development and every other social unit. In its broadest sense, communication should not be termed only as the exchange of news and messages, but also as an individual and collective activity embracing all transmission and sharing of ideas and data in any social system.

While Herman and Zelda (1973) regard communication as the blood stream of the society with high role of secretaries, Bittner (1989) emphasizes the indispensability and centrality of communication in the general scheme of things in the society, the fact that every area of human endeavour which contribute to the well being of the societies need effective network of communication system to fulfill their aims and objectives.

Communication as a vital tool in the hands of humanity is a critical factor for the successful achievement of development objectives and play tremendous role in our day to day activity. Any polity therefore, where government does not allow the communication needs, enough freedom or where communication is not given its right place to perform its traditional and central role in the scheme of things in the society, will continue to pay the price in terms of having bad governance, poor leadership, lack of development, stagnation and stunted growth of the democratic culture.

Communication channels of one form or the other exist virtually in all organizations and institutions and are used formally or informally to realize the goals of such organizations as earlier mentioned. At the organizational level, Versoza and Mitchel (2002) specifically explain that almost all ministries and agencies include producing an impressive variety of printed materials, contributing to radio

programmes, use TV adverts, having public relations activities to realize their aims and objectives. But the contention is that communication is rarely entrenched in development processes right from problem identification to programme evaluation during development intervention.

Communication use in most governmental and non-governmental agencies still follows the conventional model whereby communication direction is mostly a 'one way', upward and downward flow from government, policy makers to the generality of the people and *vice versa*. The goal of communication under this atmosphere is nothing other than to give announcement or instructions, disseminate message to encourage public support for development programmes and generally to inform and persuade people to adopt new modes of behaviour or to conform to the norms. Worse still, what appears to be the use of communication in some organizations using communication for rural change is simply to work operational communication component into programmes, project documents and budgets.

Communication, in this sense, becomes a tool used by rural planners in the implementation and articulation of their development programmes; for transfer of knowledge, for getting people to understand the “benefits” promised by development and the “sacrifices” it demands. Communication use is merely seen as a support service, not an integral aspect of change/development processes. It does not involve the stakeholders in its problem identification, planning and implementation from onset. In fact, a strong belief in the trickle-down theory is still entrenched or pervasive till today in development practice, and this chiefly explains why communication use by most development agencies has not been able to deliver lasting results and dividends of change.

In view of this, Balit (2004) strongly notes that “without communication, there can be no democracy and without democracy, there can be no liberation and development. Communication is key to development and nation building. It is a valuable and essential element that cannot be ignored. The role of secretary in writing communication is the major link between the society.

Communication is not just an art but a necessity. It is the heart of change and pillar of development. Osuala (2004) put this in proper diction:

In fact, the importance of secretarial staff to communication in the development of the society cannot be overemphasized. Based on the above assertion on communication to the society, the need to acquire the required skills and professional training to meet up with the challenges on the change that the world provided is necessary.

### **Effective Business Communication**

Oyeneye (2008) defines business communication as the “activity of making, buying, selling or supplying goods or services for money”. Another form of

definition says “commerce / trade – contracts/ affairs/ interest in a business investment. ***Business communication can therefore be said to be the management of relationships by exchange of ideas or information within and outside an organization. The purpose of business communication is basically to manage relationships and exchange ideas/information.***

### ***What then is communication?***

Communication is the process of exchange of message, ideas, attitudes and feelings and reaction. The exchange suggests that you are talking to about a minimum of two persons in “crossfire”. Each person plays a different role and the requirement for each is different but complementary. That is why we say communication is a two way process. It is also continuous and “cyclic”. The end of a process leads to the beginning of another (Oyeneye 2008).

### **Types Of Communication**

Basically, there are two types of COMMUNICATION – VERBAL and NON-VERBAL. Verbal communication uses words in spoken and written forms. Non-verbal communication (inaction) uses other means to express itself. Verbal communication is divided into ORAL and WRITTEN communication: Non-verbal communication can be winking of the eyes, laughter, hissing, beckoning, traffic indicator, signals, touching, charts, photographs, tables, eye contact, postures, gestures, sleep, silence, walk, cry, dressing, colors e.t.c. in the development of a human being, it is non-verbal communication that is inbuilt and transcends tribes, colors, creeds and races. It is universal (Oyeneye 2008).

### **Objectives Of Communication**

They must be **clear**; No room should be given for more than one interpretation/(Ambiguity). One should not be tired of repetition until the audience has understood. This can only be done through clarity as the objective of acting, speaking, and writing in clarity. You must put yourself in position to **understand**. You must ask questions until they have understood. The Basic **objective** in this group is to **understand**. The roles in the two groups are complementary. One completes actions of the other. Peter Oyeneye, (2008).

### **Effectiveness Of Communication**

“Effective” means “doing right things”. Communication is **effective** when it achieves the objective for which it is designed at the right time, in the right place and at the right quantity and quality. For this to happen, it must have the following attributes among others:

The message must be (i) In the right quantity and quality; (ii) Clear (iii) Understandable (iv) Timely (v) Receivable (vi) Received in the right place (vii) Relevant.

## **Reciprocity**

Before effectiveness in communication is said to be achieved, there should be effective feedback from the target audience. If this circle, that is, giving and receiving is not completed, the idea of reciprocity in communication is defeated which is the essence of communication – *giving* and *receiving*.

## **Guide to business letters.**

1. Your Address. Top right-hand corner properly punctuated with full stops and comma.
2. The name (where known), position and address of the addressee, ranged left, again, fully punctuated.
3. Date. Below your address. You may follow this style: 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2011; 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2012 or 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2013 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.
4. Salutation. Begin Dear Sir/Madam.
5. Subject of the letter. This goes beneath the salutation, and should be underlined.
6. Body of the letter. Paragraphs should be indented. The style should be appropriate for business letter (Jegade 2008).

## **The Attitude And Behaviours Of Secretaries To Change**

Attitude is a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards ideas, objects, persons or situations. Attitude can be closely related to our opinions and beliefs based upon our experience. Attitude is a concept that is associated with psychology. It is the way a person views something or tends to behave towards it, often in an evaluative way.

Guaguano et. al. (1995) argue that behaviours of people are determined not only by what they would like to do and what they think they should do, but it is also influenced by social norms, peer expectations, established habits, expected consequences and situational factors. Attitude can be cultivated. Its cultivation could take personal, corporate, structural or cultural shape. Our perceptions, values, beliefs, lifestyles, cultural and religious practices that are deep-rooted and long-standing could be tenaciously held unto and easily translated into an attitude that may either enhance or impede development.

In view of the above, we strongly argue that attitude to work, studies, money spending, time management, women and children's issues, the use of communication and human environment and attitude to the setting of priorities in life.

Over the years, Nigerians have cultivated a number of negative attitudes and

behaviours based on their personal idiosyncrasies, socio-cultural and religious practices that are antithetical to several aspects of their advancement or well-being. These negative attitudinal manifestations may cause a lot of harm to mankind and lead to a gloomy state of their underdevelopment. Negative attitudes and behaviours, if manifested, have the tendencies of causing a nation, families and individuals loss of lives, resources, health, wealth, image and property. Attitude matters a lot in human life for it could be instrumental in determining the destiny of mankind. The role that attitudes and behaviours play in our development, or the otherwise, is tremendous. Attitudinal problem, no doubt could be a serious barrier in the path of change and a setback to development. Just as a positive attitude to work is rewarding and has the potentials of delivering great economic gains into the hands of an individual, conversely, a negative attitude of imprudent management and utilization of such great gains could also erode and wither away the acquired resources and place the individual at the mercy of grinding poverty and unsound health. Such is the force of attitude and behaviour. Development therefore, is a function of attitude. It takes attitude to achieve some reasonable level of development; it also takes attitudes to miss or lose it.

In view of the above, it is strongly argued that attitude to work, studies, money spending, time management, women and children's issues, the use of communication and human environment, the setting of priorities in life, sanitation and health issues and attitude to life generally are basic crucial themes to be considered critically in the school of development for they help define and determine the fate of man. In fact, attitude is a strong factor in this research and is located in the context of change with the use of effective communication (Guaguano 1995).

### **What is Information and Communication Technology?**

This refers to the application of computers and telecommunications equipment to store, retrieve, transmit and manipulate data. Today's Information Technology can help an office to be more responsive, efficient and flexible in the face of continuous and rapid changes. Properly used information technology will allow your organization to streamline its processes and focus on its core skills and abilities.

### **The Traditional Secretary**

It will shock you to know that most of us are still traditional secretaries; traditional secretaries do basic Computer works, processing of mails, answering of telephone calls, Shorthand dictations and typewriting. They are not ready for change. Some will tell you that he will soon retire from service. They still hold on to their traditional orientation. Technologies provide faster ways for our official task performance.

### **The Modern office and Today's Secretary**

Due to technological advancement our offices are equipped with those gadgets that will enhance the duty of the secretary. Such machines take the form of



electronic typewriters that have replaced the manual ones, word processing with multi-purpose facilities, computer and other sophisticated office machines and equipment are now provided for today's secretary e.g. Laptop & Notebook, Tablet Computers, Smart Phones, iPhones and The Duplex Scanner.

### **Necessary IT skills to develop as Secretary**

For us to be able to harness our profession to meet up with the technological advancement of today, we need skills in the following Information Technology areas.

Application Software handling.

Desktop Publishing.

Effective use of Web tools.

Graphic Designing.

Database Management System (MS Access).

Presentation Development (Power Point).

Spread Sheets (MS Excel).

Word Processing (MS Word).

Understanding Windows Environments.

Google-Docs (Web-based office suite)

Use of Voiceover IP (e.g. Viber, Skype, Google talk)

Web surfing and social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogging, podcasts, wikis).

Cloud Computing.

**Desktop Publishing** is the use of the computer and software to create visual displays of ideas and information. Desktop publishing documents may be for desktop or commercial printing or electronic distribution including PDF, slide shows, e-mail newsletters, and the internet facilities.

### **Challenges of Secretaries in Harnessing their Profession**

The following are some of the challenges facing secretaries;

- **Mind Set:** we are not ready to learn from the new and fast changes taking place in our profession.
- **Lack of Awareness:** we are not having adequate information and lack the abilities of getting the required understanding of how the technology will improve our performance.
- **Lack of training:** we are not given the training of the new technology and most of us do not want to make use of their income to train

- themselves on the new technology.
- Little or no continuing Education: we refused to further our education to have additional qualification which will enable us to gain promotion and make us efficient on our work.
  - Lack of functional equipment: some of our organizations do not have the office machine that they will use to perform their duties. According to (Wole, 2013).

### **Good Human Relation in the Offices**

As secretaries, we must maintain good reception to the visitors to our offices, as we are the image maker of the organization. Image can be described as the impression feeling or opinion, which somebody has about an organization, product, service or individual as a result of his contact with any of them. The attention you give to the visitors will tell the type of secretary you are. Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help to become what they are capable of being. Ignorance and illiteracy coupled with lack of exposure and proper experience could also be another reason why many secretaries do not relate well in their offices. Some also transfer aggression from the trouble they may have before coming to the office. After this conference and paper presentation, it is envisaged that you are expected to be very kind to your office client (Dike 2008).

### **Conclusion**

In offices in the past, memo and letter are dictated to secretaries to type but due to office automation that continues to evolve, retraining and continuing education will remain integral parts of secretarial jobs. Changes in the office environment have increased the demand for secretaries and secretarial assistant and computer operators who are adaptable and versatile. Secretaries, secretarial assistants and computer operators may have to attend classes or participate in conferences/workshops and learn how to operate new office technologies, such as Information storage systems, new equipments to the office, the Internet, and new updated software packages. The use of computers and internet for communication makes the role of the secretaries faster and more responsibilities are now being assigned to them in the office. The change in the role of secretaries as a result of the technological gadgets has caused increase in the productivity and effectiveness of the secretary. Therefore, harnessing the power of technological advancement through the secretarial profession is coming to us at the right time. Secretaries are not drop-outs, they are intelligent people with very good knowledge of human relation, trained to dictate the pace of success around them, and they are trained to change the World.

### **Recommendations**



1. Organizations should procure modern office equipment for the use of secretaries.
2. Management should make provision of good office accommodation equipped with desk computers, internet connectivity and other modern office equipment that will enhance the secretarial staff of this great Profession the opportunity to move from traditional secretarial practice to modern secretarial practices.
3. Secretaries should strive to ensure continual self-development in order to improve themselves in effective communication, conflicts resolutions, and human relations to enable them promote good working environment.

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