

**CREATING ENABLING CLIMATE FOR THRIVING  
OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN NIGERIA**

**BY**

**Folorunso, Isaac Oluwole PhD**

Chief Lecturer & Ag Head

Department of Office Technology and Management

The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State

08034719313 [folounsooluwole@gmail.com](mailto:folounsooluwole@gmail.com)

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**PROTOCOLS**

**Understanding the Office Secretary:**

In the area of job classification, the word **SECRETARY** is the most misused in the entire clerical field. Almost anybody who works in an office refers to himself as ‘*Secretary*’ or almost any employer may speak of ‘my secretary’ in describing his cleric. In all these cases, the term is used for prestige – prestige to the employee for working at such a high level and to the employer for rating an employee of such importance as secretary

However, A Secretary is a higher calibre office personnel who has acquired secretarial, managerial skills and knowledge in addition to general education. A secretary as an office professional is trained and versed in the art and science of superintending an office and machineries and can effectively apply office equipment/machinery to create, collect store, manipulate and relay office information needed for accomplishing goals and objectives.

He reliable to work with and can relieve an executive of some stress including workload, solve problems, and be a reservoir of information germane to the organization. A secretary is a warm, helpful and understanding professional who is capable of using initiatives and good judgments at critical times.

The secretary is a multipurpose and multi-talented professional, who, because of training, exposure and experience, can easily adapt to changing business environment and offer professional services in any office. Secretaryship is a noble and prestigious profession and the practitioners should raise their shoulders high in the society.

### **Historical overview of secretarial profession**

The genesis of secretarial profession is age-long. One school of thought asserts that secretarial profession began five days after God created heaven and earth in the first business meeting when God said ‘let us make man in our image....’ The personality that recorded that meeting was believed to be a secretarial staff. Yet, another school of thought traces the genesis of the profession to the period when kings, prophets and other notable personalities employed scribes for writing their statements on scrolls and for carrying out other duties assigned them. Tools of the trade for scribes ranged from chisels used upon stones to stylus on clays, woods, or wax tablets. The scribes were always intelligent men, with knowledge of several languages, including Latin, Hebrew and Greek in addition to general education.

However, modern secretarial profession came to be when Henry Mill patented a printing machine in the year 1714. The profession became more popular with the introduction of Pitman Shorthand in 1837 Without any prejudice to various authors’ claims about the genesis of the secretarial profession, it is right to conclude that the profession is an old profession.

### **Women in Secretarial Profession**

Men dominated the secretarial field until the late 1800s. It was in 1881, that women began to make inroads into the profession with the invention of typewriters. . At the same period, one secretarial training school was established in New York to teach eight (8) young women to type and on graduation; they were quickly hired in business offices. This employment opportunity made the school received hundreds of requests, mostly from women, for training as typewriter operators. Later other private organisations opened their own schools. The students equally were females and curricula consisted mainly of shorthand and typewriting. With this, many women entered the office work in various secretarial and clerical roles. Additionally, with a vast number of men enlisting in the military in the World Wars, more women were entering the labour force required keyboarding skills were available than men. By 1930s, most of the number of men with the title **Secretary** dwindled significantly.

However, the women, later, realized they were not accorded the same status as the men, but cheaply remunerated. The women secretaries fought gallantly and formed the National Secretaries Association in 1942; to fight against injustices and to help the growth of the profession. This is how women firmly established their presence and image on the profession even till date.

### **Secretarial Profession: Experiences from some countries**

#### **Great Britain**

The industrial revolution and the invention of the typewriter and Pitman shorthand in Great Britain brought expansion in commercial and economic activities leading to increased demand for secretarial workers. As a result, secretaries attained status and held prominent positions. These resulted in the establishment of private secretarial schools, training in shorthand and typewriting skills. The ability to type and use shorthand gradually generated and guaranteed

employment of secretarial personnel, while recognised certification was done through bodies such as the Royal Society of Art and City and Guilds setting examinations for secretarial and technical subjects.

### **Secretarial Profession: United States of America's Experience**

In the early days of the secretarial profession in USA, the secretary was never encouraged to be ambitious. Employers took for granted essential secretarial skills and secretarial role became difficult to capture in secretarial training programmes. Secretaries were under the absolute and autocratic control of superiors. Consequently, practitioners developed very narrow perspectives of their role within the business organisation.

However, a National Conference, with the theme: **Secretarial Training and Secretarial Services**, was held by the United States Bureau of Education at the College of Secretarial Science Saturday, October 27, 1923. Before the conference, the United States Government had observed that *'books and texts on secretarial practice as well as training in schools and colleges plainly show that the objectives of secretaries in organisations are confused,* (Secretarial Report 1924 pg 2). Objectives of the conference was that **'at the conference, representatives of the several types of business organisations and commercial training schools may help through discussions in working out a better coordinated, articulated, and motivated course of study and practices relating to the subject of the conference'**. The outcome of the Conference was that: *Since the secretary is a potential manager/executive, the secretarial course and training should be organised with the future business and career growth of the student in view. In addition, secretarial staff should be given adequate recognition, remuneration and encouraged to attain managerial level,* (Secretarial Report, pg 36). This encouraged private schools to commence offering of vocational and business courses. This signalled the beginning of thriving period for the profession in USA.

### **Secretarial profession: China Experience**

For many years, modern secretarial work, job responsibilities and professional orientation remained unclear in China, (Liu, 2018). Many people lacked correct understanding of the secretarial work and even had serious prejudice and misunderstanding about the profession. According to Liu, ..... *'most people believed that 'secretarial career is only suitable for young people or just simple mental work; they did not give due professional respect'*..... As a result, there was no uniform requirement for the scope and extent of the services provided by the secretary. Because of this, the function of the secretary was vague; secretaries cannot actively serve the leadership role. This affected the quality of their work and the profession.

### **Secretarial profession: Ghana Experience**

The arrival of European in Ghana brought bookish forms of learning through Colonial schools contributing to the construction of local elites thus, neglecting commercial/vocational education. At the beginning of 2000s, private vocational/secretarial schools (e.g. Workers College and Vocational School)

were established to train students in secretaryship. Because of the lack of government intervention, many public or government administrators in Ghana misconstrued secretarial practice and never recognised the profession. Because of public poor perceptions and government policies, the career path for secretaries in Ghana had limited future success and growth as secretaries were not allowed to occupy executive positions, (Abdul-Kahar, 2015)

### **Secretarial practice in Nigeria; an Overview**

As in most former British colonial territories, Nigeria education policy makers and most Nigeria's early scholars were noted for their literary education, (Oyesode, 2019); education that could enable Nigerians read, write, understand, and interpret the English language and obey instructions of the colonials. Graduates of literary education were recognised and prized by the administrators and were respected by Nigerians. As a result, grammar schools were established for the encouragement of literary education while functional, vocational and technical education (secretarial education inclusive) was played down. Because of the obvious needs for secretarial personnel, the colonial officers in 1906, introduced elements of secretarial/business subjects into the curricula of the few trade centres then available. Between 1906 and 1918, Typewriting and Shorthand were introduced as optional subjects for boys only in the Colony of Lagos at the grammar school level.

In the early 1920s Lord Lugard, the first Nigeria colonial Governor General, introduced the profession into Nigeria by employing his wife as secretary to assist him in keeping and storing important documents. The wife thereafter engaged more female European secretaries in the discharge of her duties. Due to the expanding economy and the civil service of the National and Regional governments, there arose sharp demand for qualified secretarial staff. This made Bonny Government School and Hope Waddell Secondary school to include subjects like Shorthand, Typewriting, Economics etc into its curriculum. As the need becomes more intense, the private sector, individuals and companies like the United Africa Company (UAC) established private training/commercial institutes offering secretarial and clerical courses varying from two to five years duration. Such private institutes included - Abet Institute, Christian Secondary commercial College, Warri, St Peters Commercial College, Akenbor Stenographic Institute, Ovie Commercial Institute, all in Benin, **Arewa Commercial Institute, Maiduguri**, Christian Institute of Commerce, Mokola, Ibadan, Prospects Institute of Commerce, Ibadan, among others. Students' enrolments into these commercial schools were categorised into the following groups:

- primary school leavers who could not gain admission to the secondary grammar schools
- secondary grammar school drop outs
- the physically challenged
- those who only wanted vocational training without having to go through a five-year grammar school course



- those who wanted to complete their training in a shortest possible time
- those who wanted a brief refresher course to upgrade their skills
- and those who could not afford the cost of public grammar schools

No formal curriculum; teaching and learning were haphazard. Most of their teachers were untrained and no adequate training facilities. The subjects taught in the institutes were Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping, Economics, Commerce and English language. Graduates of these institutes enrolled for external examinations of the Pitman Institute, London and Royal Society of Arts, London, City and Guilds Examinations, and Institute of Commerce both of London at Stages I, II and III for certification, (Oyesode, 2019).

The effect was the production of all sorts of secretarial staff – poorly groomed, half-baked and not baked at all. This resulted into secretaries' unsatisfactory/poor job output, poor public perception, non-recognition by government. The '*Secretaries*' were merely tolerated by those who needed their services. Secretaries from such institutes also felt inferior in the midst of government and public recognised grammar school graduates who were always their bosses in the offices. This further fuelled, in the people and government circles, the apathetic spirit against the profession.

Nevertheless and without doubt, secretarial programme served a purpose and met some needs of the society. Secretarial training, through the commercial institutes, equipped students with needed secretarial/typing skills with which they were gainfully engaged. It further helped to supply the society with needed workers. Unfortunately, the chequered history of secretarial training and education in Nigeria has painted a very sharp but wrong picture of the profession. Hence, governments across Nigeria became indifferent to secretarial practitioners and adopted different and unfavourable career structures and conditions of service for secretarial practitioners.

### **Secretarial Practice during the oil boom in Nigeria of 1970s**

During the oil boom period of the 1970s, Nigeria witnessed unprecedented developments in infrastructural facilities, rapid expansion and growth in economic activities across the country. Many Federal and state governments' ministries, departments, agencies, as well as private industries, companies, were established. (LEVENTIS, LEYLAND, ANAMCO, VOLKSWAGEN, PEUGEOT RAILWAY, POST OFFICE, NIGERIA NATIONAL SUPPLY COMPANY, GBO, MDS, J. ALLEN, R. T. BRISCOE, SINGER, CMS BOOKSHOP, LEVER BROTHERS, NIGERIA SUGAR COMPANY, BACITA, NIGERIA MATCHES COMPANY, JEBBA ETC). During the period, huge employment opportunities for anyone with skills in Shorthand and Typewriting were created. Hardly will you flip through newspapers without finding advertisements for the posts of secretaries in various establishments. Oladunjoye (1990) cited in Folorunso (2012) noted that in that period "**armed with secretarial skills, the world of work is indeed in the armpit of the secretary**"

Regrettably, there was no serious attempt for the few secretaries then to stipulate a minimum formal entry qualification for would be secretaries nor fight

for the profession. The door was widely open for all comers to penetrate freely and trainees from the private owned institutes with their professional deficiencies and inadequacies, dominated the scene. As they lacked ability to assume responsibility, they were under direct supervision of their bosses/executives. This situation further advanced public neglect and low rating of the profession in Nigeria. As a result, secretaries found it difficult, to raise their heads in the midst of other professionals. These pitiable perception and treatment became infamy, which have been hunting secretarial practitioners till date, (Iredia 2015).

### **Secretarial profession in the Late 1970s**

In 1976, the Federal Military Government acquired some state owned radio and television stations to establish Radio Nigeria and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) respectively. The government also took over some privately owned newspapers from their original owners. In addition, activities were up for the inauguration of the Second Republic civilian government in 1979. Consequently, there was the need for Parliamentary Secretaries and Hansard/verbatim as well as traditional news/media reporters.

To bridge the gap, many experienced secretarial personnel heeded to government circulars and went for further training that led to conversion/change of cadre. To this effect, lots of secretaries left for the new profession. On successful completion of the training either within or outside the country, the hitherto experienced secretaries were engaged as Assistant Editors and Editors, Official/Parliamentary Reporters, in the newly acquired media houses as well as in the Second Republic National Assembly respectively. This further depleted the ranks and files of available secretaries who could have served as mentors, counsellors and promoters of the profession.

### **Modern Secretarial training and Practice**

Following the Federal and State governments' establishment of Training Centres, Polytechnics and Universities in the 1980s, secretarial training became harmonised and modernised. During this period, Secretarial Studies curriculum was introduced by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). The curriculum promoted skills, knowledge, competences and ethics to secretarial students. On graduation, students trained with the curriculum performed wonderfully well and re-defined secretarial profession. Professionalism in secretaryship was brought to bear and for many years secretarial graduates were highly sought after. Despite this achievement, the pitiful discrimination of secretaries remained unabated.

Following the development, introduction and application of modern office technologies coupled with global changes in office and business environments, the NBTE introduced Office Technology and Management Curriculum to replace the earlier one. The new curriculum, full of ICT based courses, allows modern secretaries to be thoroughly trained in ICT office application subjects to meet the emerging needs contemporary world of work. It is also designed to equip students with secretarial skills and in-depth knowledge of office administration and management on for employment in various fields of endeavour. OTM graduates

are to fit properly into the office of any computerised organisation and perform professionally, the functions of a secretary. On the whole, with better training over the years, there have been remarkable improvements in the delivery of secretarial services in Nigeria. Freed from some of the routine tasks by the introduction of modern office devices, the modern secretary's role and influence have expanded to meet the new challenges and responsibilities of today's office

### **Expansion of secretarial scope: From Secretaries to Managers**

A secretary is a manager in his own right. Secretaries are managers of all office resources, personnel, machines, materials, time and information (Buseni, 2013). They manage the myriad of assigned and non-assigned duties; they are decision makers and provide the links between the different parts of the organization, (Folorunso & Ajani, 2020). The following are some managerial roles frequently filled by secretaries:

<b>Type of Manager</b>	<b>Responsibilities attached</b>
Information Manager-	Handles organization's paper and electronic files, databases; develops methods for organizing and retrieving records
Communications Manager	writes and edits
Inventory Manager	Monitors Office inventory levels and condition of equipment and develops specifications for purchase of products
Planning Manager	-Keeps tabs on details relating to office activities
Logistics Manager- Policy	Handles travel, meeting schedules, and agendas
Documentation /Information Manager	Maintains company manual and interprets policies and procedures to employees
Finance Manager,	Manages Office budgets and expenditures
Community /Public Relations Manager-	Solves customer/visitors needs and problems
Training Manager-	Provides guidance on workplace skills
Action Manager-	Organizes the boss's workload.
Supervising Manager	Motivates, supervises, directs other staff and Mentors newly employed secretaries
Conflict resolution manager	Manages conflicts between members

Not only are modern secretaries taking on these and more responsibilities, they are doing so with effectiveness and trademark efficiency and without direct supervision by the executive. Therefore, the modern secretary must be accorded due respect. He must be availed every available means to perform, excel and the profession to thrive.

## **ENABLING CLIMATE AND SECRETARIAL PROFESSION IN NIGERIA**

Enabling climate involves an environment that is warm, welcoming, nurturing and facilitates a sense of belonging. Enabling climate implies the removal of barriers to the progress and growth with which an individual, societies or professions operate. Thriving is to expand, to flourish, and be accorded respect and recognition. Therefore, enabling climate for secretarial profession to thrive is that environment that is favourable, conducive and toxic free enough for secretaries to practice the profession and deliver services without hindrances. This type of climate entails the friendly sets of policies, institutional, regulatory, infrastructure and other conditions that govern the practice of secretarial profession in Nigeria. The importance of enabling climate for secretarial profession cannot be over emphasised. It could lead to success and happiness for the professionals. It could lead to more productive and job efficiency. It could encourage old members to stay put. It could promote interest of others to venture into the profession, thus expanding the scope and territory of the profession, among others.

### **Toxic/Unfavourable Climate and Secretarial Profession in Nigeria**

Viewing what is happening critically to secretarial personnel in Nigeria today; it is no gainsaying that the profession is being practiced in unfavourable climate, grappling with many challenges and toxicants. This we must admit. The areas of toxicity must be critically identified and dealt with by secretaries, governments, secretarial trainers, institutions, the general public and indeed all stakeholders. This is the essence and crux of this gathering. This paper, in line with the theme of this workshop has identified some components of toxic climate in which secretaries currently ply their trade.

- **Unfriendly government policies:** Most of government policies, which are domesticated by the private sector, discriminate against the profession. For instance, pegging secretaries perpetually to middle level manpower, non/irregular payment of certain allowances, inadequacy/non availability of imprest to maintain the office, poor quality of stationery items, inadequacy or no functional modern office equipment etc. They are toxic conditions in the workplace environment of secretarial professionals.
- **Poor workplace environment:** In most public organizations, secretaries carry out their chores in unpleasant and toxic work environment. The toxic offices of many secretaries are, small in size,, poor lighting and inappropriate office furniture. **(NO MORE L-SHAPE TABLES, NO SWING CHAIRS WE WERE USED TO)**, no air-conditioners etc Other workers share the secretary's office, which is supposed to be a confidential place, hence, overcrowded, noisy; privacy and security are, occasionally compromised. A toxic office environment, like this, causes delay, interruption and inefficiency. It also takes toll on health as secretaries experience stress and anxiety. It also undermines secretaries' morale, confidence and motivation. Closely related is that managements of various establishments do not involve members of the

profession on issues affecting work, work environments and the profession; such as in the purchase of office equipment, office furniture, stationery items and deployment of clerical personnel. In the area of social behavior in offices, social behaviors of some bosses are toxic in nature. They encourage the combination of official and private works for the secretary to do. Similarly, secretaries may not be the decision makers, but when things go wrong in the office, all fingers mostly point to the secretary. These practices are toxicants, capable of killing secretaries' morale and hinder the growth and development of the secretarial profession.

- **Salary scheme:** No matter how qualified, productive efficient, how competent and how dedicated the secretary is, it is an unpalatable situation to see secretaries career terminating GL 14, as against other professionals. Limiting the secretary to this grade level is a disservice and an aberration to the profession. It, suggests that secretaries are poorly regarded in their profession. This affects their morale and later in life, makes the secretary feel cheated and discouraged.
- **Secretary and Toxic relationships:** Secretaries, because of their training in human relations, accommodate people who, ordinarily, should be jettisoned or avoided. As a result, secretaries are susceptible to toxic relationships among friends, families and colleagues. A relationship is toxic when the other person(s) speaks ill, utter negative, abusive, disrespect comments about secretary and the honorable profession. . A relationship is toxic where our wellbeing/welfare is threatened emotionally psychologically and even physically through offensive and scandalous comments, just because we are secretaries. Toxic relationship devalues, depletes the profession and constantly makes secretary inferior, demeaned and looks worse.
- There are the ubiquitous computer operators who now claim they can perform the duties of secretaries. Unfortunately, some secretaries patronize them for their secretarial jobs. and regrettably, some organizations employ such as secretaries. Similarly, some executives/bosses erroneously believe that their own fair knowledge of keyboarding is tantamount to acquisition of secretarial skills; as if the only duty we carry out is to manipulate the keyboards.
- **Ill-equipped Secretarial graduates:** The main objective of OTM programme is to provide high quality, skilled and employable secretarial graduates, properly fit into office of any computerized modern organization; as well to effectively and professionally perform the functions of a secretary in various fields of endeavor. Regrettably, the implementation of the curriculum is meshed with myriad of challenges which include: underfunding, disconnect between the institutions, the industries and the professional body, lack of steady poor supply, infrastructure gap for the large number of students, students' poor attitudes to study and insincerity on the part of management during accreditation programmes etc. Students now learn to pass examinations with goods grades, but lack the needed skills and competencies. Experience has shown, and painfully too, that many OTM graduates/potential secretaries



cannot format, do simple and technically perfect office tasks, they cannot recall the formats for simple office documents and cannot produce error-free documents. When engaged/employed as secretaries, their poor performances at workplaces further dent and damage the name, image and future of secretarial profession.

- **Dealing with difficult personalities:** Today's society is erratic; a number of people are hungry and angry. The tension in the society is high, and people's actions are uncertain. Also, human beings are not equally endowed. Some people are even tempered; some easily satisfied, some cooperative and some take things for granted. Some are very inquisitive, hot tempered, and difficult to satisfy, even some behave very unreasonably just because they believe that they are always right. Not all visitors who found their way to the secretary's office are necessarily in good frame of mind. They may have been loaded with bundles of one problem or the other. Some may be tired due to long distance of travel; some missed their way, some due to traffic hold up, *Okada/Maruwa palava* and the likes. Some visitors are difficult and would never have a **NO** for an answer. They would intimidate the secretary if just to bulldoze their ways into achieving their aims. All these categories of people interface with the secretary regularly and this could make the secretary's day at work toxic.
- **Technology advancement and its health challenges:** Modern office technologies with the unending innovations, are tools of trade secretaries' daily use. The duos are inseparable. Secretaries, at all levels make use of ICTs to achieve organizational objectives. However, prolonged use of ICTs comes with numerous health challenges to the secretary. Computers, mobile phones, internet, copiers and other similar gadgets contain *lead, cadmium, mercury* etc., which are toxicants. The World Health Organization (WHO) cited in Mahburbu (2011) showed the following as possible risks associated with the of continuous exposure to and application of ICTs

- damage nerves,
- blood cells to leak hemoglobin,
- memory loss,
- mental confusion,
- headaches,
- joint pain
- muscle spasms,
- rash on the skin,
- brain electrical activity during sleep,
- ringing in the ears, impair sense of smell,
- retina damage and eye cancer,
- open the blood brain barrier to viruses and toxins,
- reduction of efficiency of white blood cell, sleeplessness, daytime sleepiness,
- nervous and connective tissue pains,
- raise bad cholesterol levels,
- learning and behavioral disorders, extreme fluctuations in blood pressure,
- Heart rhythm disorders, heart attacks, stroke, cancerous afflictions, leukemia, brain tumor and repetitive strain injuries.

**Development of Sedentary lifestyle:** Ethically, secretaries are required to be physically and visibly present on their tables at all time. In the office, a contemporary secretary spent eight to nine hours each day sitting. At the home front, secretaries manipulate various technologies while trying to put final touches to home works that must be submitted to meet deadlines. Thus, secretaries remained seated for extended long periods during their working life. They do develop physical inactivity/sedentary or prolonged sitting lifestyle. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that prolonged sitting is a predictor to a higher risk of

- **Metabolic risk factors:** (obesity, heart attack, coronary artery disease, stroke higher blood levels of sugar, bad posture),
- **Musculoskeletal disorder:** pains in the upper limbs, neck, shoulders, and low back,
- **Cancer:** colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and an overall higher risk of hospitalization.
- Other health challenges associated with prolonged sitting lifestyle include: **Hypertension, Diabetes, Mental health and premature or sudden death.** Yet, hazard allowances are barely made available to secretaries.

The current unfavourable and toxic workplace climate is laced with grave harmfulness and must be completely wiped out. If not nipped on the bud, will definitely have adverse effects on the profession; it will erode the profession by diminishing productivity, stifling innovations and make thriving impossible.

### **Creating Enabling Climate for Thriving of Secretarial Profession in Nigeria: The Way Out**

Having carefully x-rayed the toxic climate where secretarial professionals in Nigeria perform their functions and its effects on the practitioners and the profession, the question to ask now is: how do we reverse the situation and create enabling climate for the profession to thrive in the context of Nigeria workplace environment? The following tips are provided:

**1 Secretaries' contributions to the problem:** If, during colonial days through to the development stage of the profession, secretaries were ashamed of themselves and felt inferior to other professions; today's modern secretaries should not be trapped in the same inferiority complex. Unfortunately, some secretaries feel so inferior that they dare not speak outside the office, let alone participate in public discussions or similar activities. Not that they cannot speak or perform well, but they do not want to be identified as secretaries. Moreover, on ascendance to high secretarial cadres, some secretaries choose to give themselves new high-sounding nomenclatures. The more we realize our potentials and relevance in modern office situations, the more proud we should be, the more public recognition we will be creating for our profession and the more thriving the profession shall be. We cannot afford to remain as underdogs even if others would want us to. Secretaries should be prepared to be first among

equals in academic breakthroughs, union, associations, societies, educational/institutional as well as community leaderships.

**2** If you find yourself in a toxic relationship, re-evaluate such relationship before real damages to self-esteem, mental health and psychological well being emerged. Maintain assertive communication against unsavory comments, talk to others on what you are witnessing, discuss with the superior/boss , limit the time you spend together. If all failed, quit the relationship

**3 Provision of conducive and pleasant office environment:** Conducive office environment, in part, ensures comfortable physical space. The air quality, lightning, landscaping, should be adequate for the secretary. Pleasant office environment allows secretaries to increase productive and job satisfaction, which has direct impact on the status of any organization. Secretaries should be involved in the acquisition of workplace tools, tools, printers, toners, stationery items etc and be paid adequate remunerations/allowances.

**4 Mounting of relevant Postgraduate programmes:** One reason secretaries change to other professions is that holders of HND/Bsc. degree secretarial related programmes cannot pursue the programme at postgraduate levels compared with other professions. The vicious circle of taunted educational advancement deserves to be broken. Relevant postgraduate studies such as Masters Degree in Office Technology and Management, Office Information Management, Office Information and Security Management, Communication Arts etc be mounted by tertiary institutions in Nigeria for secretarial staff and the certificates obtained be used for upgrading and promotion

**5 Re-designation of Secretarial cadre:** The terminal point of secretarial practitioners is GL. 14 or its equivalent. . This toxic situation is unacceptable. Therefore, I am strongly appealing to the Federal Government of Nigeria, National Council on Establishments, all stakeholders to remove the block that is causing career stagnation for secretarial practitioners in the country. Let the federal government of Nigeria take a cue from the Government of Kenya, that approved the *Revised Scheme of Service for Secretarial Personnel in public services in 2008 which created the position of Director of Secretarial/Office Services.*

<b>Former Designation (Pre- 2008)</b>	<b>New Designation (2008)</b>
Shorthand Typist II	Personal Secretary II
Shorthand Typist I	Personal Secretary I
Personal Secretary II	Personal Secretary I
Personal Secretary I	Senior Personal Secretary
Senior Personal Secretary	Executive Secretary
Executive Secretary	Senior Executive Secretary
Senior Executive Secretary	Assist. Principal Executive Secretarial Services
Assistant Principal Executive	Principal Secretarial

Secretarial Services	Services
Principal Secretarial Services	Assistant Director (Secretarial Services)
Assistant Director (Secretarial Services)	Deputy Director (Secretarial Services)
Deputy Director (Secretarial Services)	Director (Secretarial Services)

NOTE: *Serving officers will adopt and convert as appropriate to the new grading structure and designations though they may not be in possession of the requisite minimum qualifications and/or experience stipulated in the Scheme of Service. However, for advancement to higher grades, officers must possess the requisite minimum qualifications.*

*Source: Republic Of Kenya Revised Scheme of Service for Secretarial Personnel issued by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of State for Public Service, Office of the Prime Minister.*

#### **Enforcement of Secretarial Work Ethics and Codes of Conducts:**

While APSSON and CIPSSON intensify efforts at ensuring proper recognition, placement and protection of members, the bodies equally must set academic and professional reference points, which should qualify one to answer a secretary. They should review work ethics/codes of conducts for secretaries in line with global standards as well devise means of enforcement. To achieve these, APSSON/CIPSSON executives themselves must remain above board; exhibit utmost professionalism and diligence in their dealings with the public and members. Allegation(s) against any secretarial staff must be thoroughly investigated and culpable members brought to book. This would go a long way to portray the profession's image in good light and promote the thriving of the secretaryship.

**6 Attendance of workshops:** For secretarial practice to thrive in Nigeria, attendance of regular workshops, conferences and seminars that allows secretaries to rub minds and learn more from one another and from superiors, is germane. In this respect, employers should encourage and sponsor their secretarial staff for training and development programmes. The benefit of work force development accrues to both the organization and the secretary. As such, investments on secretarial staff development can never be too much.

**7 Secretaryship, A female job:** In this part of the world, the myth that goes on the people's mind is that Secretarial job is suitable only for women. Hence, male counterparts always look down the profession. This naïve attitude makes the profession uninteresting as well hinders its development, This perception has to desist from people's mind since the pragmatic work of a Secretary demands both sexes at all levels.

**8 Developing the right technological proficiency:** The global workplace has been revolutionised by new technology. The information age has increased the rate of globalization like never before, as the rapid expansion of the internet creates an irreversibly networked work environment for secretaries t thrive. The

adoption of technology by organizations has fundamentally redefined office activities. The office environment has changed from analogue to digital, from uni-media to multi-media, from copper-wire communication system to fiber optics, from mono-component to hybrid component of telephone, reprographic machines and computer as well as change from manual to electronic technology. For secretarial personnel, our jobs now replaced by skills require the acquisition of a new set of skills. Consequently, to promote the thriving of secretarial profession and secretarial services globally secretaries must adopt and adapt. Secretaries' strong background in digital tools, (computer technology applications, internet and webpage/database management, PowerPoint, Excel, and cyber security management) and as they are rolled out must be relevant and up to date to meet the challenge. These could be achieved by combination of self and sponsored training and re-training programmes.

**9 Encourage and involve younger secretaries in your role:** This involves the adoption of supervised practical experience/mentorship programmes: Experienced secretaries are expected to discuss the value of joining the professional association with the new and younger colleagues. Take and invite them to APSSON meeting, seminar or conference. In other words, become a mentor. The non-preparedness of many secretarial graduates and their unsuitability for real work situations, must never be overlooked. Doing so has several negative impacts not only on the individuals but also on the profession. When CIPSSON becomes operational, all the newly engaged or graduated secretaries must undergo at least six months mentoring/supervised practical experience scheme under skilled, knowledgeable and experienced secretaries. Under the scheme, the new graduated secretary (mentee) is under the watch or tutelage of an experienced secretary (mentor) to support the development of the inexperienced secretarial graduate in order to foster the mentee's professional, personal and career development. Mentorship helps to enhance the mentee's confidence, promotes the image, allows for the execution of effective succession plans and above all, ensures the continuous thriving of the profession.

**10 Collaboration with other International Professional bodies:** APSSON must devise means and vigorously pursue increase in members' collaboration with other secretarial professional bodies across the world. This will enhance exchange of professional knowledge, make the association globally recognized, relevant and members, individually and collectively respected.

**11 Collaboration with employers of labour:** There is no functional, effective and concerted effort to cement firm relationships between the generators of secretarial skills and knowledge, (Polytechnics and Universities), the users of the skills and secretarial professional bodies. The Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and the Industrial Attachment (IT) are skill based training programmes designed by the Federal Government to bridge the gap between the theoretical classroom work and practical situation for secretarial students in tertiary institutions. It is to enhance their technical prowess and competences in real work situations. However, the programmes have been



discovered to be grossly inadequate in scope and do not provide enough interface between formal training institutions. Additionally, most students do not participate actively or seek for work placement not relevant to their field of study. This creates a missing link between the quality of graduates produced and the expectations of employers and the professional body. Therefore, with the coming on board of CIPSSON, APSSON, the schools and industries should form a kind of synergy to see that products of all secretarial training institutions fit into the 21<sup>st</sup> century work environment without problems. APSSON should be included in the accreditation team for secretarial courses. When appropriately trained secretaries are graduated, the capabilities and outputs of such graduate secretaries will promote the profession and make secretarial services thrive in the labour market.

**12** To further promote the thriving of the profession, NBTE should, as a matter of urgency, beam their search light into the area of implementation of OTM curriculum in all institutions. This will enable institutions to graduate employable secretaries as well promote secretarial graduates' entrepreneurial skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

Secretarial profession had been an age long one. This old profession and its practitioners have weathered the various hazardous professional storms yet remain relevant and indispensable. Toxic workplace climate is destructive; it could erode the profession, diminishing productivity, and stifling innovations and make flourishing difficult.

For secretarial profession to thrive is possible, and let us do everything possible for it. Therefore, all hands must be on deck. Individually and collectively, we must do everything possible to be on the winning side of history. Our professional colleagues who have retired should not be left out in the successful takeoff and operation of CIPSSON activities. At least if the profession was not favourable during their service years, they would be living witnesses and active participants to it that at last a professional body created through an Act of the National Assembly that will further promote the thriving of the profession perform optimally. All men and women of goodwill should cooperate and collaborate to ensure that Secretarial Profession continue to thrive in Nigeria. It is my earnest prayer and conviction that if the suggested ways are put into secretarial profession, the sky won't just be the limit but a springboard to higher pedestal of thriving in the Nigeria workplace environment.

FINALLY, dear professional colleagues, there is no doubt; things are tough in Nigeria today and secretarial profession is tasking and demanding. Nevertheless, **Health is Wealth**. Our health should be very important, give it a priority. There are only two ways to live. You are either living or just existing. Always do you best but never ever forget to give adequate attention to your health. Having struggled over the years to reach the peak of secretarial career, with its attendance success and benefits, but to be knocked down by illnesses or premature death, as a result of lack of adequate attention to our health, would be

a tragedy. Thanks for listening. See you in 2023 under a new democratic dispensation, in favourable socio economic and perfect health conditions.

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