SECRETARIES AND WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIP IN THE ERA OF CHANGE IN NIGERIA

by

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Abstract
This article will take a critical look at secretarial profession and workplace relationship in an organization. It will appraise how the secretaries cope in managing human, material, financial and information resources in an organization. The paper examines the challenges of a 21st century secretary in Nigeria vis-a-vis his or her workplace relationship. Finally, the paper will give some recommendations to secretaries on how to cope with the various workplace challenges and how to perform optimally despite the not so unfavourable working conditions.

Introduction
It is a known fact that the average worker spends approximately 40 hours per week in the workplace. However, secretaries spend more than forty hours per week attending to their bosses, subordinates and clients, visitors and any other groups of people that have dealings with other organizations. This makes secretaries to become image makers for their organization. To be good image makers, the secretary will need to manage his or her relationship within and outside the organization. In managing relationship in the workplace, Lee and Park (2012) opined that “blending workplace relationship lead to more cohesive, work groups, more satisfied and committed workers with greater productivity, greater goal attainment, and increased positive feelings about the organization.” This reveals that workplace relationship could affect workers ability to cooperate and comply with any instruction. In view of the above, it can be deduced that a good Secretary is a good conductor of human relationship in an organization. Secretaries use their professionalism to ensure that organizational goals and objectives are met. When organizational goals are met, there is a high probability for growth, progress and development in the organization. An effective and efficient Secretary is an important asset to the organization. Today's Secretaries require knowledge and skills that are beyond technical competence. They are managers, so they need to build capacity in managing resources. An effective and efficient Secretary needs to acquire the current and updated knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the profession in the twenty first century. If this
knowledge and professional ethics are put in to practice, the organization will feel the positive impact. It is important to note that new technology has transformed the workplace of the Secretaries. This advancement in technology has brought about some challenges and progress in the working space of the Secretaries. This paper will discuss some of the challenges of the secretaries as a result of interactions and advanced technology.

Managing Human Resources

Amongst all the resources needed to run an organization, humans are the most important. Materials and machines need humans to make the production of goods and services complete. It is the human resource that combines the other resources together in an appropriate combination for the production of goods and services. However, Secretaries are in the position of thinking, planning and implementing plans and decisions as directed by his/her bosses on how to carry out the organizational goals and objectives. It would be observed that while the Secretary is saddled with the responsibility of managing guests and clients, he/she will also have to manage the boss.

Employers want secretaries that are dependable, loyal, and efficient. Organizations want secretaries that are professional in their attitude to work. Organizations want secretaries that can handle confidential matters. However, the secretaries should bear in mind that the taking of any secretary into confidence by the boss is a gradual process, therefore, the rate the bosses will take his/her secretary into complete confidence will depend on the secretary.

At that point, Kohn and Connell (2005) opined that “the bosses will always note the secretary's loyalty along with their punctuality to the office and willingness to work throughout the official hours.” When Secretary willingly give the boss an adequate feedback about follow-up actions, the secretary is building a strong human relationship with the boss. While secretaries are trying to study their bosses, the bosses are also studying the secretaries. It is when the bosses and the secretaries understand each other that they can confide in each other, which brings about harmonious relationship that will help in achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. In order to facilitate the achievement of this harmonious relationship between the secretaries and the bosses, the secretaries must do the following:

- Understanding her boss's likes and dislikes.
- Accept her mistakes and apologize accordingly.
- Avoid repeating past mistakes.
- Know the names of her colleagues.
- Have a keen interest in her work and her boss.
- Wear a smile on her face at all times.
- Not be upset by any disagreement in the office.
- Strive to make her boss succeed by working hard and by being loyal to the
Onifade (2001) noted that secretaries are expected to adhere strictly to the above points in pursuit of ideal human relations. On the other hand, bosses should endeavour to notice the secretary's efforts and show appreciation. When such a relationship exists, the secretary will always strive to do better, consequently, both the bosses, subordinates and secretaries will find their work interesting. The basic understanding of relationships is the foundation that holds the power for creative production or counterproductive environments.

Managing Material Resources

Onifade (2001) further remarked that the office manager should possess a deep knowledge of various motivational skills, good use of interpersonal communication, appropriate leadership styles and provision of suitable working environment in managing the office materials. Reporting to the boss about materials needed for office use, such as stationery, furniture and fittings, repairs and imprest. The Secretaries will regularly be required to exercise sound judgment, use time and task management techniques and communicate effectively to the boss. In managing materials, the secretaries coordinate administrative office operations in gathering required materials in a timely manner. The secretary as office manager professionally input, edit, manage data and produce routine correspondences following established procedures from the management information system. Secretaries also manage hard and software copies of files and records. They prepare materials for meetings and special events, calendar and request from management as directed. In managing the material resources in the organization, secretaries are also expected to carry out some purchases.

When new furniture is to be purchased for the office, the secretaries are likely to be consulted regarding her preferences for her own desk, chair, and computer. However, since these basic items of equipment influence her output and general efficiency, selecting them is an important responsibility and should be done with care. The secretaries may also be asked for suggestions concerning other office furniture and equipment. According to May (1981), a well-organized desk is not only pleasing to see, but it also makes a skillful secretary even more valued. With her tools positioned for efficient use, and her supplies easily accessible, secretaries save hours of time and untold fatigue and annoyance in searching for stationeries. To effectively manage the material resources in the organization, a good secretary must learn the art of proper handling of office supplies.

Checking the supply cabinet regularly is an important secretarial task. A good trick is to place a reminder next to a needed item. The procedure for ordering and storing supplies will vary with size of the organization and storage facilities. In a large organization, supplies are kept in storage with the storage personnel. For the office to have enough supplies for a week or two, secretaries may withdraw what is
needed by filling a requisition form to obtain necessary office stationeries. The secretaries' responsibility for ordering and maintaining supplies for the entire office should follow these guidelines:

1. Place the most used items nearest at hand.
2. Paper, envelopes, and other expensive stationery should be kept in packages or boxes for protection against dust. Stack them in orderly fashion and label clearly.
3. Band or wrap a particular item and mark reorder, to serve as a reminder to the person breaking the band.

Take an inventory of supplies at regular intervals. To know how long supplies will last, record the date of each order and the quantity. At the end of six months or a year you can easily find the average number of items used in a month and anticipate the date of items used in a month.

**Managing Financial Resources**

According to Gregg (1968), Secretaries who can manage their boss's financial matters and relieve him of detail work are making a vital contribution. Important documents such as insurance policies, stocks and bonds, legal papers and valuable personal papers, should always be kept in a safe place. Banks make safe-deposit boxes available for this purpose. The boss may rent safe-deposit boxes, the fee charged depends upon the size of the box and only authorized person may enter. Bosses may also give secretaries access to his safe-deposit box for the purpose of depositing or withdrawing papers. It is wise to keep a perpetual inventory of the contents, leaving one copy in the box and another under lock in the office. If the bosses wish to know the contents of the box he has to merely look over the list. Obeki (2012) opined that the bosses and the secretaries prepare the bosses monthly expense account together to make sure that all items are accounted for.

Many bosses are allowed to draw money from organization fund for such purposes as entertaining guests, buying of petrol for official vehicle, and other authorized expenditures. To obtain cash for these, the bosses fill out a form. The Secretaries will have to type two copies of the request form, the bosses sign the original and someone in higher authority in bursary unit approves it. The secretaries present the signed request to the institution cashier for payment. The cashier keeps the original of the request form and the secretaries retain a copy for the office records. Nearly every day, there are small expenses that are more convenient to pay by cash, such as cost for mails, toiletries, entertainment and tea, water, credit cards and newspapers. The funds set aside for this purpose is called the petty cash fund. Secretaries manage this fund for the day to day regular running of the office.
Managing Information Resources

Today's secretaries should be highly versatile in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and ICT equipment. In the 21st century, more offices are fully automated. Therefore, Secretaries need to update their knowledge with regards to the new technology in the office. These updates should include the use of the various software packages and the Internet. Updating their knowledge on information and communications technology will bring about more efficient and effective ways of carrying out their duties. Secretaries with a proficient knowledge of ICT will make the work in the office less cumbersome. It will also bring about accelerated processing of documents in the organization. Despite these responsibilities on the secretaries, it is important to note that the work of the secretary is not stress free. There are various challenges that the secretary must combat in the office work space.

Challenges of The Work Place

Secretaries as the engine room of any organization suffer some wear and tear (stress) just like the engine of an overused vehicle. While secretaries are trying to achieve the organizational goals, they must not lose sight of the possible adverse effect of the workplace activities on their physical, mental and emotional well-being. According to Obeki (2012), stress is “mental, emotional, or physical strain caused by anxiety or overwork. It may cause such symptoms as raised blood pressure or depression.” Secretaries experience stress in the work place. While some bosses are considerate, some are totally inhuman. They treat their secretaries like machines that do not require rest. In some organizations guests and other members of staff look down on secretaries. This could also be a work place challenge that can affect productivity. This is so, because every human wants to be respected and treated with some level of dignity. Another challenge secretaries face is the problem of being blamed for everything that goes wrong in an office. This is more painful, when the mistake or error was not caused by the secretary's action or inaction. This attitude of some bosses can also pose a challenge in the work place.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Companies, organizations and institutions cannot do without the position of secretaries. Therefore, this article recommends that secretaries should not give up in their hard work in achieving the goals and objectives of any organization they find themselves. Secretaries should also do their best to ensure that they are professional in discharging their duties and responsibilities in their various organizations. Above all, every secretary should endeavor to improve and update their knowledge of information and communication technology. This is fundamental because we live in an information and communication era. It is also valuable that secretaries maintain the right type of interpersonal relationship between them and their bosses, colleagues,
subordinates and clients of the organization.

References