Abstract

The effectiveness of a professional secretary in an organization cannot be over emphasized. A professional secretary co-ordinates the daily routine and activities of an office, also organizes office schedules and paper work. This paper examines ways in which a professional secretary can bring about the basic skills, thinking skills and personal skills required in a modern office. The paper suggests that a professional secretary should go further for training, this will go a long way to increase competencies. Therefore, a professional secretary should be aligned with modern day realities in their working place which will make them to be competence in their daily works.

Introduction

Professional secretaries are an important part of any administrative team. They are often the first point of contact for customers and also play a key role in keeping an office organized. An effective professional secretary needs initial and ongoing training both of which can be obtained through a variety of sources. Professionalism in the workplace is not only beneficial for the company, but for the employees who
must work together daily. Being professional includes the way you talk among other employees, the attire you wear, your attitude towards your job and the way you conduct business. Unprofessional behaviour can hold the company and team back from becoming successful.

What is Professionalism?

The American Dictionary (1980) defines professionalism as the “professional status, methods, character or standards”. A profession is also defined as an “occupation or vocation requiring training in the liberal arts or the sciences and the advances study in a specialized field or the body of qualified person of one specified occupation or field. A professional is “one engaged in a specific activity as source of livelihood”. Professionalism indicates that each person perform their tasks with genuine earnest and honesty. It refers to a person doing his/her job with sincerity, and maintaining professional etiquette and ethics in the workplace.

In view of Titus (2011) opines that professionalism is the competence or skill expected of a professional. Professionalism is the key to quality and efficiency often associated with a true professional.

Who is a Secretary?

Dantsoho (2007) maintains that a secretary is an assistant to the executive who possesses a mastery of the office skills, who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibilities without supervision, who makes decision, within the scope of assigned authority.

Abiola (2002) sees a secretary as a kind of all purposes sentry, a diplomat, a psychologist, a business lawyer, a researcher, a writer and shock absorber, having administrative ability to keep an office running smoothly, to assign priorities and judgement to know when to issue orders, conserve the boss time by screening telephone calls, visitors and mail.

Who is a Professional Secretary?

A professional secretary coordinates the daily routine of an office and organizes office schedules and paperwork. A professional secretary, more commonly known as an administrative or executive assistant, acts as a gateway between clients and employees of a business, he or she might screen visitors and phone calls and arrange call backs or appointments. Additionally, a professional secretary might conduct phone surveys or make inquiries on behalf of his or her employer.
A professional secretary also must handle written communications, including mail
and inter-office communications. He or she generally sorts the mail, prioritizing it and throwing out junk mail. Sometimes he or she will prepare responses for the boss' signature. A professional secretary also prioritizes work based on deadlines and communicates with others in the office.

**Appointments and Meetings**

A professional secretary keeps a calendar of his or her boss' appointments as well as all meetings within the office and determines what events the boss needs to attend. He or she arranges the employer's commitments to avoid overlap and to make sure that the boss has enough time to prepare for such commitments. Often times, a professional secretary prepares an agenda for meetings, arranges for the facilities and amenities, and records the discourse in the meeting.

**Other Responsibilities**

In addition to those discussed above, responsibilities of a professional secretary might include: Supervising other clerical staff, keeping an updated mail and phone directory, ordering office supplies when needed, organizing files and other data.

**Competencies Required Of A Professional Secretary**

Gambari (2013) listed out the following as competencies and skills needed by secretaries in workplace.

- Personal competencies
- Communication competencies
- Organizational competencies
- Internal/intercultural competencies
- Domain competencies
- Human relation competencies

**Personal Competencies**

- Positive attitude
- Self motivation: Self motivation refers to an internal drive to get things done
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Integrity: honesty, especially as it applies to interpersonal dealings active learner
- Problem solving: identify solutions to problems
- Decision making ability fact based decision making
- Analytical/cognitive ability: the skill to thinking analytical
Communication Competencies

- Communication, written and oral
- Public speaking
- Listening skills
- Social skills: getting along with others

Organizational Competencies

- Organization skills: managing tasks and projects, and files well
- Leadership/management skills to manage other people to get results and taking the initiative
- Meeting skills to successfully run meetings and participate in meetings system perspective
- Economics/statistics: Business courses in economics and/or statistics
- Quality approach knowledge: The understanding of work as a process work experience
- Customer orientation: the skill related to both social skills and problem solving 
- Extra-curricular activities

International/Intercultural Competency

- Cross-cultural competency.
- International knowledge: A basic understanding of international business workings.
- Second language: some employers are seeking candidates with skills in other languages.
- International management: Business course in management or international management.
- International marketing: Business course in marketing or international marketing.
- International trade theory: Business course in trade theory or international trade theory.
- International human resources: Business course in human resources or international human resources.
- Basic business courses.
- Domain knowledge: domain knowledge is the one area of concentrated skills/ability gained through college education.
- Accounting: Business or management course in accounting.
Human Relation Skills (Competencies)

- The secretary as a public figure must endeavour to show good working relationship with other members of staff respective of their position or ranks.
- It is largely waved that human relations should be two way affairs, but to a large extent the secretary has the major role to play. This is because human beings are unique in nature and are difficult to manage.

In order for the secretary to man over he/she needs the secretary and total environment (internal human relation)

Understanding the co-workers

Challenges Faced By Professional Secretaries

A professional secretary faces a lot of challenges in the discharge of his/her duties. Some of these challenges as cited by Rita (2012) are:

1. Lack of managerial skills
   It has been generally observed that management involves strategy, innovation initiating, and bringing about change, creating problem solving and decision making, reforming, resolving conflicts, actively seeking out alternative and opportunities, dynamic or active leadership, diplomacy, statesmanship and a high degree of risk and entrepreneurship.

2. Poor conditions of service
   The problem of poor condition of service is centred on the money required to secure the basic necessities of life. Without contentment secretaries cannot put in their best.

3. Lack of Proper Information and Data
   Lack of proper information and data constitute a serious challenge to the efficient and effective disposal of duties by the secretary in an organization.

4. Inadequate Staff Training and Development
   Most of the secretary's lack training on how to perform their duties as efficiently as possible. The most common are lack of interest in one's job, negative attitudes to work, lack of productivity, tardiness, excessive absenteeism rate, low quality output etc.

Conclusion

The context and purpose of professionalism in secretarial profession is the accusation of skills and a desirable work attitude, these prepares the secretary for the world of work.
Recommendations

Against the foregoing background, the following recommendations are suggested:

- It is recommended that professional secretaries should go for training provided by their employers.

- Secretaries are required to be proficient in a range of software program such as word processing, spreadsheets and database applications.

- Secretaries can join the National and International Association of Administrative professionals.

- Professional secretaries should be actively in pursuit of continuity education in order to get more awareness about advanced software and innovative technologies.

- Demonstrate the core values of professionalism appropriate attire, etiquette, punctuality, organization and dedication to your job, just to mention a few.

- Adequate knowledge of managerial skills are a necessity for every professional secretary to enable him/her to interact motivates and communicate effectively with those in the work place.

References


American Dictionary (1980)


Gambari (2013). Who is a Professional Secretary.


