

The rise of the male PA

Today male PAs and secretaries may be in the minority, but that hasn't always been the case **SAYS TIM STACKPOOL**



Australian filmmaker and TV content producer Gary Jarjoura launched his career in Hollywood, firstly as an assistant to action film hero Steven Seagal, then as personal assistant to Stephen Ujlaki while producing the 1996 film *Loch Ness* starring Ted Danson. Gary went on to produce material for US sports giant ESPN. "There are tremendous numbers of male PAs in show business. For me, it was a way to make contacts and get a grip on the whole Hollywood culture.

"In many ways, it was a very thankless task, but the rewards in terms of contacts and education were tremendous."

Being an Australian, Gary felt that his ex-pat status probably cost him a few dollars in his pay packet, especially considering he was expected to be on-call

24/7. Telephone calls at 2am were not uncommon: "Actors and studio execs seem to be very good at forgetting

things they need first thing tomorrow, so a frantic call in the wee small hours would almost be a nightly occurrence" says Gary.

In some parts of the world, it's almost impossible to employ anyone but a male secretary. In Saudi Arabia for example, it's virtually impractical for women to conduct business for reasons of both belief and culture. Male personal assistants are in high demand, and a quick perusal of Middle East-based recruitment websites indicates a significant number of opportunities.

On the up

Further afield, the trend in the United States is for high-powered female executives to employ male PAs as a status symbol and males PAs in Australia are catching on. Roxanne Calder, Director of recruiters PKL, reports that male secretaries and personal assistants are becoming more popular as the role has evolved: "The role has changed dramatically in the last five years. They no longer make tea, pick up the dry cleaning and take messages. The role nowadays entails sophisticated research, advanced people handling and communication skills, as well as being extremely well-versed in technology."

According to one survey, 27.8 per cent of those in the finance industry revealed they have male assistants in their ranks. The media, advertising and entertainment industry is next with 17.8 per cent, closely followed by the IT and HR sectors. Given those figures, perhaps the era of the male PA has already arrived. **E**

It was commonplace in the 1920s to see men in the role of 'personal secretary' to industry leaders and heads of state. In fact, it wasn't until the male shortage caused by World War II, that women finally crossed the great office workforce partition. Even royal families around the world have historically retained male assistants as members of their royal court. Admittedly, they are often referred to by a variety of titles, including Personal Manager, and the almost politically incorrect 'Butler', however the job descriptions virtually match that of any PA attached to a corporate high flyer.

The recent rise of the male PA, and the potential business and employment opportunities, are not lost on leading recruiters around the country. Alison Watts, General Manager of Hoban Recruitment hears good things about male PAs: "Often we receive comments that male PAs are highly professional, calm and well organised. Many become easily renowned within their own corporation as unique and talented individuals" she says.

Men at work

While there is no doubt that female PAs continue to dominate this sector, in recent years Alison has noticed a steady increase in the number of male PAs who are choosing this role as their career. "Men are attracted to the seniority and influence of the position", says Alison. "It is also fair to say that employers are becoming less 'surprised' at the concept of the male PA than they would have been some years ago."