

One

1. The Essential Characteristics

A Leader Assistant has courage, persistence, and a good sense of humor. They stay on top of their game by staying on top of their education. They sharpen their axe by mentoring others. They're a mind reader, diplomat, psychologist, politician, strategic partner, and team player.

—Lauree C., Executive Assistant (San Diego, CA)

Lists of essential characteristics to embody, whether you're a new assistant or a veteran, are commonplace. Because everyone has their own ideas, I wanted to outline what I see as the essentials for assistants. Think of this as a warmup and a refresher.

As you work your way through the rest of the book, you'll notice many of these traits woven throughout.

Proactive

Being proactive is similar to being able to anticipate, but the difference is important to understand. Being proactive means you plan ahead and prepare for something you know is going to happen. However, when you make an educated guess that something could happen, and you prepare for it, you're anticipating.

Here's an example of being proactive. Your executive is speaking at a conference, and their presentation has some unusual requirements. You seek out the audio/video (A/V) team for the event weeks in advance so you can explain your executive's needs, and so the A/V team has more time to prepare.

You're expected to be multiple steps ahead of your executive, so don't wait for them to tell you what to do. Be proactive.

Responsive

Of course, it's impossible to plan for everything, so be ready to quickly tackle problems as they arise. In scenarios where something comes up that was neither planned for nor anticipated, be willing to set aside your proactive hat and put on your responsive one.

In my first year at Capacity (the artificial intelligence software company I work for), I applied for my executive to compete in a startup competition for Ashton Kutcher's venture capital firm, Sound Ventures. After a couple of interviews with them, we didn't hear anything for a few weeks, so we assumed we didn't make the cut.

But five days before the event, we found out that we made the top five and that my executive was scheduled to pitch our company to Kutcher, Matthew McConaughey, Marc Benioff (CEO of Salesforce), Gary Vaynerchuk (CEO of VaynerMedia), and Melody McCloskey (CEO of StyleSeat) at South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas. It was an amazing opportunity for a young startup, but we had only a few days to get ready.

I scrambled to cancel or move almost every meeting that week so my executive could prepare his pitch. I booked flights, hotel rooms, and rental cars for four of our team members to go with my executive. Did I mention SXSW is the busiest event of the year in Austin? Most transportation and lodging options weren't available anymore. Talk about needing to quickly respond in the moment.

We didn't win the competition, but our team got to go to the Snoop Dogg after-party. The next time you see me at an event, remind me to tell you a funny story about that.

Loyal

As a Leader Assistant, you're committed to the organization and loyal to your executive. You prioritize tasks that come from your executive over tasks that come from someone else. Your executive is your number one

priority at work, and they should not question your commitment to them. For example, if I'm meeting with another team member when my executive calls me, I always excuse myself to answer the phone.

If you have an executive who hasn't set clear expectations in this area, I recommend clarifying your job description with them as soon as possible. For example, if you're equally split between two or three executives, the dynamic will be different than if you're an assistant to one executive while supporting other executives as needed.

Trustworthy

An executive must be able to trust you and your ability to manage confidential information. You hold the keys to their kingdom, so don't lose them. No executive wants an assistant to gossip about them at a dinner party. No board wants an assistant to share private revenue numbers with assistants at other companies. Earn the trust of your executive by maintaining confidentiality at all times.

Others-Centered

The assistant role is not a glamorous one. If you've been an assistant for even a few weeks, you're well aware of this. Your job requires hours and hours of behind-the-scenes work, most of which no one—not even your executive—will see.

If you want to be the center of attention, being an assistant isn't the career for you.

Your job is to further the goals and agenda of your executive and company—not your own. (We'll talk about how your goals should align with theirs later.) In the workplace, pay more attention to your executive and other team members than you do to yourself.

I'm not saying you shouldn't take care of yourself. In fact, paying attention to self-care is critical if you want to have the energy and ability to help others. There's a reason Pillar 4 is dedicated to self-care.

I am saying try not to take it personally if your executive closes a seven-figure sales contract you played a big role in and fails to thank you when they make the big announcement in front of the entire company. Being a leader means you celebrate the success of others more than your own. Whether you need to make copies for a meeting or lead an important sales demo on behalf of your executive, be happy to help and excited to contribute. A “woe is me” attitude will not cut it.

However, be careful not to let your executive abuse their authority. An effective executive will delegate challenging and interesting projects and tasks, as well as necessary, mundane chores. They’ll pay attention to the details so they don’t have to bother you on a Sunday morning just to ask for information you sent them on Friday. They’ll leave you alone on your days off. An executive worth keeping will be grateful that you put aside your desires to help them and the team.

Sociable

This characteristic is a given for all team members, but especially assistants. Your executive and teams spend a lot of time with you. You’re often the first contact for VIP guests, board members, investors, and potential clients. It’s important to be personable, kind, and have a good sense of humor.

However, being social and friendly doesn’t mean you must be an extrovert to be a Leader Assistant. In fact, introverts make some of the best assistants. We like to sit by ourselves in a quiet office and get stuff done. Meanwhile, our extroverted team members enjoy small talk and socializing with coworkers

—even if it distracts them from getting work done. Can you tell I’m letting my introverted bias seep into this section?

I’m a high introvert with developed extroverted skills, and my current and previous executives have been high extroverts. This works well for a strong, complementary partnership. If you’re an introvert, you might work better with an extroverted executive who knows how to respect your need for space, and vice versa. But no matter your personality type, being kind to and sociable with others is a must.

Organized

Many people hire an assistant because they need help getting organized, but others are highly structured and simply spend too much time on the wrong tasks.

For example, executives have better things to do than adding details to their calendar or entering data into a spreadsheet. Their time is better spent meeting with key staff, reading books that inspire them, working on strategic

plans, and creating powerful and engaging content for the next board presentation, sales meeting, or investor update.

Synthesize everything your executive throws at you into prioritized tasks and projects, and execute those projects with little oversight. You won't make it long if you were hired because you "have a great personality" or "work really hard" but you can't keep your own car clean.

Flexible

I've seen assistants with many of the characteristics listed in this chapter, but they lack flexibility. Instead of being excited about and embracing change, they freeze and panic. Early on in my career, this was me. I hated last-minute changes and would get dejected because all the work I put into a project seemed to be all for naught. However, I now realize pivoting can be a good thing, and the process of flexing on the fly can teach us more than staying the course. Instead of seeing work thrown out the window at the last moment as pointless, I started to view "wasted" work as part of the process, helping me improve at my job. Odds are your executive loves to change things up at the last minute. I think it's a job requirement for all supervisors to frequently scrap a plan and start over, or tinker with the plan right before a deadline. Rather than panicking when this happens, assistants must be ready to adapt.

Assertive

You can't be flexible all the time, however. There are times when pushing back is an appropriate way to help your executive keep a level head. If your executive always changes things at the last minute, they might have an unhealthy pattern that needs to be addressed before everyone burns out and loses trust in them.

Leader Assistants are aware of the right time to be assertive. For example, if you know a last-minute change could mean running a team into the ground, or even losing some of your best team members, speak up! Tell your executive, "We can't change the plan this late in the game," or "It's not worth our time and energy to shift directions. We just need to move forward." These responses aren't easy, but they show you're thinking strategically for the organization, and that your response isn't just a personal preference.

Focused

In today's fast-paced society, where screens are everywhere and notifications are never-ending, staying focused on one thing at a time is more difficult than ever. Most of the high-level executives I've worked with struggle to stay engaged with a single task for a long period of time, so one of the most crucial characteristics an assistant must possess is the ability to focus. A Leader Assistant can simultaneously focus on their tasks while helping their executive stay on point.

Pay extra-close attention to chapter 9 if you struggle to focus.

Detail-Oriented

As an assistant, it's your job to notice the details. You can't wait for others to notice.

If your executive is about to present to the board of directors and they have a huge piece of spinach in between their two front teeth, tell them. If a coworker posts a picture on Instagram that inadvertently included a confidential revenue chart on the wall behind them, take care of it. Be

aware if your executive's flight was moved to a different departure gate, or if their passport expires a week before their international trip. Don't overlook the details.

Never Assumes Anything

As I recall the many times I missed a detail because I assumed someone else was on it, I'm reminded of a former coworker's advice: "Never assume anything, Jeremy."

In other words, anytime you find yourself thinking, "I'm sure someone else took care of that," or "I'm positive she understood what I was asking," or in the case of the million-dollar typo I'll tell you about later, "I'm sure the other two team members would've caught something major if there was anything wrong," double-check your work and pay extra-close attention to the details. When we assume, we miss details.

Positive Attitude

This is pretty straightforward, but a Leader Assistant is someone who has a positive attitude. It isn't always easy, but staying positive no matter what is thrown your way is a characteristic any executive would want in their assistant.

Strong Communication Skills

Assistants communicate with coworkers, board members, executives, other assistants, vendors, clients, potential clients, and more. Having strong verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills is a necessity if you want to thrive as an assistant. We'll discuss tactics for communication in chapter 18.

Curious

You don't have to be an expert in every single topic under the sun, but effective assistants are curious. When you hear a term you don't know, look it up. When someone shows you how to do something, ask them why it's done that way. Be eager to learn and explore. Curiosity not

only helps you execute tasks as they come, but also helps you expand your overall knowledge.

Resourceful

One way to be a resourceful assistant is to figure things out on your own. But if you find yourself stuck on a problem, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Leaders aren't afraid to admit they're struggling to solve a problem.

Sometimes outsourcing is the quickest and best way to overcome a glacier. When a project requires expertise in a certain skill set, hire a specialist. For example, I've outsourced projects to human resources experts, lawyers, event planners, graphic designers, even carpenters.

Efficient

I'm always noticing how inefficient things are. I'll be in line at a fast food restaurant, and I'll tell my boys how I'd change things. I'll walk them through which systems are slowing things down, and how I would make them better.

Look for ways to cut seconds out of your work processes. Always ask yourself the question, "How can I minimize wasted time and maximize productivity?" Leader Assistants work quickly and efficiently.

Context-Aware

The last essential characteristic is the ability to understand the environment you're in, and adjust accordingly. In other words, Leader Assistants are

context-aware.

When you learned how to drive a car, you thought the hard part was simply controlling the vehicle. As you mastered the art of avoiding curbs, however, you learned the real challenge of driving is making decisions based on the many variables surrounding you. Is the road slick from rain or ice? Does the semi-truck see you passing? Is that pedestrian going to step out in front of you? Decisions shouldn't be made in a vacuum.

Do You Embody the Essentials?

One of my former executives went through several assistants before he hired me. The longest any of them lasted was eighteen months. One assistant was loyal but not organized; he was willing to drop anything for his executive, but he also frequently dropped the ball. Another was organized but wasn't proactive; he could keep track of all his tasks, but he would sit around waiting for things to do. It's no wonder they didn't last long.

Making a positive and powerful impact as an assistant requires embodying more than just a few of the essential characteristics. Take a look at the list again, make an honest self-evaluation about which are strengths and which are weaknesses, and pick a few "trouble spots" to work on in the coming weeks.

Proactive

Response

Loyal

Trustworthy

Others-centred

Sociable

Organized

Flexible

Assertive

Focused

Detail-Oriented

Never
Assumes
Anything
Positive Attitude
Strong Communication
Skills Curious
Resourceful
and Efficient
Context-Awa

Use questions like “What would it mean for me to be curious this week?” or “How can I embody assertiveness today?” to get you thinking.

OK. Now that you’re caught up on the essentials of your assistant role, let’s look at the characteristics that will help you change the game.

Two

2. The Game-Changing Characteristics

A Leader Assistant has integrity, drive, resilience, compassion, focus, never-ending learning, vision, and the flexibility to start/stop/start/stop a project (patience at its best).

—Shari K., Executive Assistant (Omaha, NE)

Being a die-hard Kansas City Royals baseball fan has taught me a lot about what it means to be a game-changing assistant.

The Royals won the World Series in 1985, but I was only one year old, so I don't remember it. Unfortunately, I do remember the decades of losing that followed; it took twenty-nine years for them to return to the playoffs.

The Royals had a handful of good teams in between, including the 1994 squad. In August of that year, ten-year-old me sat in the car on the way to baseball practice as giddy as ever. I was looking forward to talking to my fellow teammates about how good the Royals were doing. They had just won fourteen games in a row and were (in my mind) on their way to making the playoffs. In fact, being the ultimate optimist, I knew they were destined to win the World Series.

As soon as we pulled up to the park, I jumped out of the car, raced up the hill, and started praising the Royals to my teammates. "Guys, the Royals are so good right now! They're the best team in baseball!"

They rolled their eyes at me. "Dude, it doesn't matter how good they are," one of them replied. "Baseball is going to have a strike. The season is almost over, and they aren't even going to have the playoffs. Chill out."

"No way!" I quickly shot back. "They won't cancel the season! They'll work it out and keep playing and the Royals are going to win it all. You watch!"

I can't remember what their responses were exactly, but I got the message: none of my teammates had hope. Yet I remained hopeful that a strike

would not be happening. How could they take baseball away from me?

The Royals' win streak ended that day, and in fact, they ended up losing four out of their next five games. But I just knew they would break out for another winning streak soon. Unfortunately, I was wrong. On Thursday, August 11, 1994, the big bad world (aka MLB owners) took baseball away from me. The players went on strike, and they wouldn't end up playing again until the following season. My tall, skinny, three-sizes-too-big Royals T-shirt-wearing, Wiffle ball-pitching self was heartbroken. My Little League teammates were right, and I was devastated.

I experienced twenty more years of heartbreak after that awful childhood moment. When the Royals finally made the playoffs in 2014 and 2015, I took advantage of the opportunity and attended every home playoff game.

But loyalty and perseverance aren't the only lessons I've gleaned from my fandom.

My favorite player during the Royals' amazing run of back-to-back World Series appearances was their center fielder, Lorenzo Cain. He was fast, athletic, and exciting to watch. He had the essentials down, but there was something extra special about Cain. He could change a game with one play, and did so many times. When Cain was playing, I didn't look away, afraid I'd miss an impossible diving catch or a home-run-robbing grab against the wall.

In one of those thrilling playoff games, Cain made a couple of diving catches back-to-back. Meg, my brother Kyle, my dad Bill, and I were sitting in the front row, up against the fence in left-center field. We had an

up-close-and- personal view of Cain's amazing plays from our great seats.

Meg pointing to Lorenzo Cain from our seats.

“Game changing” is the best descriptor of Cain during those two years. In fact, 2015 was Cain's best year by Wins Above Replacement (WAR): a stat that measures a player's total contribution to his team.

What made Cain a game changer? Was it his speed? There are plenty of fast athletes who aren't elite. How about his work ethic? That sure helped, but even many subpar athletes work hard.

Here are some game-changing characteristics Cain embodied:

His ability to discern where the ball would end up as a hitter made contact so he could take the appropriate first step.

His steadiness in high-pressure situations.

His confidence that he had what it took to make the catch.

Are You a Game Changer?

Do you exhibit the game-changing characteristics Cain had? The best baseball players in the world embody some of the same characteristics as the best assistants in the world. Executives don't just want a solid team member—they want a risk-taking game changer.

These are the five game-changing characteristics of a Leader Assistant:

Discerning
Steady
Confident
Humble
Future-Proof

In the following chapters, we'll delve into what each of these characteristics is, and how to embody them.

Three

3. Discerning

Leader Assistants possess the confidence to make considerate and informed decisions that lead to fruitful actions—in the absence of executive presence.

—Kristi D., Executive Assistant (San Jose, CA)

Game-changing Leader Assistants are discerning. As Oxford defines it, discerning means “having or showing good judgment.” There are many ways this characteristic can play out in your role, but I’m going to focus on two: anticipating the needs of your executive, and making decisions on their behalf.

Anticipate the Needs of Your Executive

“What’s one thing you wish your assistant could do?” I’ve asked dozens of executives this question. And every single one of them said they wish their assistant could read their mind. In other words, they want an assistant who anticipates what’s needed, long before it’s needed.

Thinking five or six steps ahead is critical for assistants. Why? Because our executives are always thinking ahead. So plan for what’s coming next week, next month, even next year.

Remember what I said before: Being proactive means planning for something that’s scheduled to happen. Anticipating means planning for something that might never happen. For example, booking a flight for a planned trip six months from now is proactive. That’s essential, but it’s not game changing.

Anticipating your executive's needs means you book a backup flight for the next morning because (a) the weather is typically awful in January, (b) your executive has a critical board meeting they can't miss, or (c) their primary flight departs toward the end of rush hour, so there's a high likelihood they'll get stuck in traffic and miss the flight.

Anticipation is a game-changing characteristic because it requires you to consider and analyze unlikely scenarios your executive still might need you to handle. If you struggle to anticipate, ask your executive to share their long-term goals and ideas with you. If you know what their "big picture" is, you can better shape their "little picture" to match.

The best mind readers are in the same room as the mind they're trying to read. Sit down with your executive on a regular basis to go over their top three goals for the next week, month, and quarter. Discuss what needs to happen to accomplish these goals, and write out action items for each.

Another way to better anticipate your executive's needs is to spend time every week looking ahead a few weeks, months, even a year, then working your way back. Your executive doesn't have time to look at every detail of a trip four months from now. That's why they have you.

If you've tried to anticipate in the above ways but still seem to be a few steps behind, consider seeking help from outside training and coaching. If that still doesn't help, you might need a new executive. Or, perhaps the administrative profession is not the right fit for you.

Make Good Decisions

Your executive makes decisions all day, every day, so any time you can make a decision for them, do it. Be decisive to protect your executive from getting a serious case of decision fatigue.

Game-changing assistants are always ready to make decisions. You can start by making several small choices throughout the day, like what to get them for lunch, which conference room to book for their upcoming brainstorming meeting, or whether to reply to that random LinkedIn message.

Once you've proven capable of handling small decisions, your executive will trust your judgment on more critical matters. I've influenced key decisions during my career as an assistant, affecting things such as product updates, a company rebrand, and hiring and firing. Twice, my company faced a tough decision on which office to move the team to. In both instances, my executive looked at me and asked, "Which office do you think we should choose?" I quickly gave my answer, as well as my justifications for it. Each time, he said, "OK, let's do it."

Unfortunately, I didn't always speak up when I had a gut feeling. I didn't feel good about several employee hires that, down the road, turned into awful situations I could've helped us avoid. We interviewed a candidate for a

major leadership role at my previous organization. He gave off a bad vibe when we interacted. I thought he was inauthentic and putting on a show to land the job. However, I didn't say anything—partly because I knew how important it was for us to fill the role, but also because I didn't trust my gut.

We ended up hiring the guy and it went OK for a few months. But it quickly went downhill when it turned out he wasn't the kind of person he made himself out to be. He was supposed to be leading a team, but everyone eventually saw right through his façade. He was lazy and failed to keep his promises. We fired him, but it took years for that team to recover.

If you have a bad feeling about something or someone, don't dismiss it. Your insight is valuable.

How can you improve your decision-making skills? Start by making suggestions to your executive. It could be as simple as recommending a template for the board slides. Get your executive's feedback to determine whether your views on the template align. Rinse and repeat with other suggestions until your decisions match theirs more often than not.

Your job is to free up your executive so they have more bandwidth to focus on decisions only they can make. With practice, the number of decisions only they can handle will decrease, and your value to the company will increase.

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on your ability to anticipate and make good decisions by considering these questions:

What are some upcoming situations I could think through for my executive? What unlikely scenarios do I need to plan for?

In what areas do I struggle to read my executive's mind? What steps

can I make this week to better anticipate their needs?

When was the last time I made the wrong decision? What did I miss in that situation?

What's a decision I can make for my executive this week?

Have I ever allowed something negative to happen to my company because I stayed quiet about my concerns? Why did I doubt myself?

Four

4. Steady

Have you ever seen a professional juggler juggling knives? They never drop them, and they never stop smiling. Assistants are similar to knife jugglers.

They have the ability to juggle multiple projects and never let others see the stress they may be under. Assistants are leaders not because of their ability to do a lot at once, but because of their posture while doing those tasks.

—David B., Executive Assistant and Interim HR Director (Indian Wells, CA)

One of my coworkers repeatedly asks me how I'm so calm during stressful times at work. For the longest time, I had no idea how to respond. I've always been a fairly steady person. Meg even calls me "Steady Slim" (I have a tall and skinny physique, in case you didn't know). But my coworker's question got me thinking: "How do I

remain so steady in the storms around me?”

After some reflection, I unlocked three keys to my steadiness: I enjoy the process, I entertain the worst-case scenario, and I embrace the tension.

Before we dive into these attributes, however, I want to make a quick distinction.

I was going to call this game-changing characteristic “calm in the chaos,” but I like the word steady better. Why? Because sometimes you have to get a little upset in the midst of the madness to get something done. Sometimes you need to raise your intensity to move the needle.

If you’re a parent, you know what it’s like for a kid to not pay attention unless you use a certain tone. If your three-year-old steps onto a busy street with oncoming traffic, you can’t afford to remain calm. You have to be fierce and push everything aside as you race to snag your child out of harm’s way. But your lack of calm in those moments doesn’t mean you’re unsteady. In fact, your steady intensity is what allows you to perform your super-parent mission.

The following three keys help me remain steady in the stressful storms of the workplace.

Enjoy the Process

I happen to like the crazy. It keeps me interested and engaged. I enjoy solving problems when it’s hard to think straight. I enjoy the occasional late-night work session to get a new feature out for a client. The highs and lows of startup life are tough to handle, but one thing is true: there’s never a dull moment—especially as an executive assistant.

If you don’t learn to enjoy the process, you’ll struggle to remain steady. You’ll always be dreaming of the future, which will leave you stressed out by a present that doesn’t match it. If enjoying the process doesn’t come naturally to you, stay connected to the big picture.

Setting your sights on your

company's mission can help you roll with the complex process required to achieve it.

You can also think critically about common processes and identify ways to make them more efficient. You'll always face unexpected changes, but if you can streamline things as much as possible, the process won't be nearly as stressful.

Entertain the Worst-Case Scenario

This might seem a bit morbid, but another tactic that helps me remain steady is to remind myself that I'm not dead.

No matter how stressful things are at work, things could be worse. If I lose my job, life will be difficult, but I can find new work. Life is too short to make my career the most important part of my life, or to let a stressful situation cause me to freak out. Instead, I do my best to entertain the worst-case scenario.

If I'm not dead, then I have every reason to be grateful.

I'm not perfect, of course, and neither are you. We all freak out at times. But when we do, it's because we see our circumstances through the lens of ungratefulness. We think to ourselves, "This is the worst," when in reality, it's not. Entertaining the worst-case scenario helps us step back and look at life from a healthier perspective.

Embrace the Tension

The assistant role is fluid. It's unclear. It's ever-changing. It's not clean-cut and orderly. It's full of tension. You'll constantly be pulled in different directions by executives or team members. Heck, I've

received two completely opposite requests from the same executive within a five-minute window. This is the tension all assistants face. Don't run from it. Don't let it shake you. Instead, feed off of the tension. Lean into it.

Being hire number one at a software-as-a-service (SaaS) startup with a CEO who sold his last company for almost a billion dollars presents a lot of opportunities for me to embrace (or run from) tension. My executive approached me with one such opportunity about a month after launching the company. He asked me to oversee accounting, human resources, and operations for the company—not forever, but until we could hire an accountant, director of HR, etc.

I'm an introvert who hates math, yet my new role was going to include working with numbers and people. What could go wrong, right? Of course, I was also expected to fulfill my duties as the CEO's assistant on top of these new responsibilities. In other words, I was going to be working in constant tension.

Instead of running or losing my cool, I replied to his overwhelming request with a hesitant, but honest, response. I let him know I didn't enjoy accounting and that I was bad at math. I also said I didn't like paperwork and that I

wasn't the best people person. But I told him I'd run the company—as long as it wasn't a long-term solution.

Thankfully, we now have a much larger team, so I'm able to focus on being an assistant. But during that season of wearing multiple hats, I discovered the more I leaned into the tension, the more confident and steady I became. The more I embraced the stress and anxiety, the more successful I was.

To embrace tension, be aware of it and be ready to discern which

characteristic to embody in a given moment. The ability to readily set aside one characteristic for its opposite, depending on the situation, will set you apart from the pack.

For example, there's tension in the constant battle between planning ahead but also being ready to respond on the fly. One minute, you're planning an itinerary for four months out. The next minute, you drop everything to head to your executive's house, grab his new driver's license, and drive it to him at the airport because they won't let him through security with an expired ID. (In case you're wondering, I got my executive his ID with time to spare.)

In these moments, you can't say, "Sorry, boss, I'm working on being proactive and planning ahead right now; I can't help you get through security. I operate better when things are less chaotic and on my calendar ahead of time." Good luck with that response.

What if you catch your longtime executive doing something unethical, immoral, or illegal? There's certainly tension there. Suddenly, you're faced

with the choice of being loyal to an executive you've supported for years—and who has supported you—or doing the right thing.

Deep down, you know reporting your executive's behavior is the right thing to do, but you get paid well, have great benefits, and enjoy your

schedule.

You didn't do anything wrong, so why should you lose your job?

Plenty of assistants push things under the rug for these or other reasons, claiming loyalty as their justification. But a Leader Assistant gives up their loyalty to do the right thing.

Take time to identify specific tension builders that are difficult for you to navigate, then work through them. For example, if being proactive is tough because you like to fly by the seat of your pants, develop your proactive muscles by scheduling an hour each week to look ahead at your executive's calendar.

When the tension makes you uneasy, remind yourself of the parts of your life that feel more certain, more comfortable, more settled. Close your eyes and gain some composure by letting your mind go there for a moment. Think of the sense of accomplishment you'll feel when you successfully navigate a difficult situation to reach your goals.

Stick a quote on your desk to think about when you're stuck. I like this one by former UCLA men's basketball coach John Wooden: "Flexibility is the key to stability." Or this anonymous quote: "Be stubborn about your goals, and flexible about your methods."

Will you let the tension hold you back or cause you to stumble? Or will you be steady when it's time to face your own glacier?

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on your ability to be steady in the storms by considering these questions:

When was the last time I lost my cool? What triggered it?
What helps me be steady when things around me fall apart?

What parts of the process do I enjoy? What parts do I dislike? How can I remedy those problem areas?

What's a tension holding me back right now that I could embrace instead?

Five

5. Confident

An assistant becomes a leader by building confidence in him/herself. Confidence is built by will and determination to be the best (personally and professionally), a willingness to work with and learn from others, and the support of others in and outside of your organization (networking).

—Rebecca S., Executive Administrative Assistant (Greenville, SC)

As an assistant, you're in contact with the most confident and powerful people in your company, city, industry—for some of you, even the world. How can you expect to lead if you lack confidence in your ability to get the job done?

Game-changing Leader Assistants are confident.

I'm not talking about a Lifetime-movie, music-pumping, "I am awesome! I am strong! I am brave!" confidence. What if you're not strong? What if you aren't feeling brave in a given moment? What if you fail today, tomorrow, and the next day?

I'm also not talking about an arrogant, narcissistic, "I do what I want,

and don't care what you think!" confidence, like when I'm driving. (Hey, leaders should own their dirt, right?). Or like that time I was at a grocery store with a

girl I was trying to impress and I ate a strawberry off the shelf, claiming, "Hey, free strawberry samples!" (They were not free samples, and I did not impress the girl.)

What I'm talking about is a deep-rooted, humble confidence. An unwavering belief that you have what it takes to figure things out, and a forgiving grace for yourself if you don't figure things out.

Your confidence naturally will take a hit when you face an unexpected glacier. If you doubt your ability in those moments, you're not alone. The most confident people in the world have doubts, whether they admit it or not.

I've spent more than half my working life as an EA. I've worked with celebrities, professional athletes, billionaires, and C-suite executives at Fortune 100 companies. You'd think I'd be extremely confident anytime I meet a high-level executive. But there are days I question whether I've got what it takes to ask for extra sauce at Chick-fil-A.

There are times I'm confident in my skills, but I'm not confident in my ability to communicate well. Other days I doubt my talent, but not my

worth as a person. Some days I'm confident and assertive at work, but when I get home and have to manage my boys' bedtime routine, I lose all confidence.

So, how do we strengthen our self-assurance?

Develop a Deep-Rooted, Humble Confidence

Experience is one way to start. No matter how old or new you are to the assistant role, find someone with more experience (and more confidence), and ask them to help you grow. It can be as simple as grabbing lunch with a fellow assistant to share tips and tricks, as well as trade horror and success stories.

You could also reach out to one of the many amazing assistant coaches on LinkedIn for professional development to help you gain confidence. Conferences and online courses can help you become more assured in your role as well.

But experience, coaching, and training will only get you so far. The key to unlocking a deep-rooted confidence is to remember this:

You are a valuable human being—no matter how good or bad you perform at work.

Until you latch onto this powerful truth, you will lack confidence. If you don't remind yourself of this fact on a regular basis, your confidence will fade as you let the ups and downs at work affect you on a deep, personal level.

“But Jeremy, I don't feel valuable.” I get it. I don't feel valuable all the time either. So what destroys our confidence? The lies we've been told, and the lies we tell ourselves.

Don't Believe the Lies

What lies have you been told that you've held on to as truths?

Maybe a teacher in high school said you'd never amount to anything. Maybe a coworker said you were incompetent. Maybe your dad didn't encourage or believe in you. These statements can be tough to shake, but they don't define you.

The lies you tell yourself are another confidence destroyer. Lies like “I don’t have what it takes,” or “I can’t do it as well as Susan can,” or “They won’t listen to me.” These lies wreck your confidence. In fact, they’re so powerful, you might not recognize the truth when you hear it. Think about the last time you received a compliment. Did you respond with gratitude, or dismiss it, telling yourself it was undeserved?

Almost every day, my son Silas says I’m “the best daddy ever.” I know I’m likely not the best dad ever, so at first I would respond with something like “I doubt it, but I do my best.” Then I thought about how he means it. To him, I really am the best daddy ever. But I was unwilling to hear it. Even worse, my response was teaching him to reject compliments or kind words from others. So now I simply say, “Thank you, sweetie.”

When someone says something nice about you, own it and say thanks. Don’t let the negative lies in your head drown out the positive truth.

Another example of a lie in my life was the seemingly small but powerful thought that I’d never be able to enjoy dining at nice restaurants because I’d always be worried about paying my bills.

This lie I told myself was heavily influenced by my family of origin. I grew up in a family of six, and my parents never made much money. Sure, we had food on the table, clothes on our back, and a roof over our heads. But we rarely went out to eat, we shopped at Aldi and Payless Shoes, and we only went on vacation if we had a cheap or

free place to stay somewhere within driving distance. The pro was I learned a ton about saving money, keeping a budget, and not buying things I can't afford. The con was it took me a long time to learn that it's OK to splurge every now and then.

Eleanor Roosevelt said it well: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." This goes for the lies you tell yourself too.

Counseling has helped me process the many ways my family of origin impacts my confidence to this day. Some people attach a stigma to counseling. "Oh, you must be really messed up if you're seeing a therapist." But that's simply not true. Mature people who want to grow and improve seek help in many forms. I highly recommend seeing a good therapist or counselor if you've never seen one. You can't fight back against the lies in your mind, or the lies from others, without outside help.

A Leader Assistant's confidence is not fueled by pride. It's fueled by humility.

Serve the Work

Dorothy Sayers, an English crime writer and poet, wrote an essay called “Why Work?” I find her ideas in this essay fascinating to think about as they relate to how we can be confident in our role.¹ In “Why Work?” Sayers says a worker must “serve the work.” This sounds like a recipe for burnout, but hear her out:

“The moment you think of serving other people, you begin to have a notion that other people owe you something for your pains; you begin to think that you have a claim on the community. You will begin to bargain for reward, to angle for applause, and to harbor a grievance if you are not appreciated. But if your mind is set upon serving the work, then you know you have nothing to look for; the only reward the work can give you is the satisfaction of beholding its perfection. The work takes all and gives nothing but itself; and to serve the work is a labor of pure love.... It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work.”

If you’re “serving the work,” as opposed to “angling for applause” from your executive, you won’t feel as defeated or be as negatively influenced when your executive doesn’t appreciate your amazing work. Your confidence will have deeper roots. You’ll no longer do what you do to be recognized.

Instead, you’ll simply seek to do great work.

Are you placing your professional confidence in what your executive says, or the quality of your work? When you ask for a compensation increase, will you base your business case on your executive’s

subjective opinion, or on the objective data showing the quality of your work?

Be confident in your ability to figure things out (and be kind to yourself if you can't), your value as a human being (no matter what happens at work), and the quality of your work (not the amount of accolades you receive).

Let's shift our focus to humility—the deepest and strongest root of your confidence as a game-changing Leader Assistant.

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on your confidence by considering these questions:

Where do I lack confidence?

In what environments do I feel most confident?

Am I confident in some areas, but not others? Why?

Do I work to receive recognition, or because I enjoy the work?

1 I was made aware of this wonderful thought from Sayers in Timothy Keller's book, *Every Good Endeavor*.

]>

Six

6. Humble

An assistant leads in the trenches, working confidently yet humbly, side by side with their executive and peers, not exerting power or control, but influence and diplomacy.

—James S., Executive Assistant (Chicago, IL)

I like to think I'm a humble person. Then I remember the times I fail to be humble, or the times I'm humbled by my mistakes. Or how I much I like to pretend I'm right—even when I'm wrong. Did I mention how hard it is for me to listen to the feedback I receive from coworkers or podcast listeners?

Maybe I'm not so humble after all.

In fact, to keep my pride in check, let's kick off this chapter on humility with a humbling story of a time I made a mistake.

The Million-Dollar Typo

My executive and his business partner were looking to purchase a large office building. When they found one, I was one of four people responsible for editing the offer letter. We made several changes to it, reviewed it a few times, then sent it to the building owners. Our intent was to offer \$2.5 million, but thanks to a single typo, we offered \$3.5 million for the building.

There's nothing like the feeling of discovering you missed a million-dollar typo. I wasn't the only one to miss the error, but I still felt awful and completely responsible for missing it. After all, I'm the detail-oriented assistant who's supposed to catch these things.

After we corrected the error, I apologized to the parties involved, including my very upset executive. I had to be honest and admit I did not review the letter thoroughly, because I assumed the other parties involved would. It turned out OK in the end (the owners didn't want to sell the building), but I learned there's nothing more humbling than having to admit when you've made a mistake.

The truth is, it doesn't matter how confident or capable you are at doing your job—you will screw up. The question is, will you let your mistakes humble you so you can learn from them? Or will your pride get in the way of you becoming a humble leader?

Don't be afraid to admit when you make mistakes.

How Do You Receive Criticism?

Another way to gauge how humble you are—or aren't—is how you

receive criticism from others. Do you get defensive as soon as someone suggests you make a change? When was the last time you applied even a small piece of constructive criticism you received? Humble assistants embrace vulnerability by laying down their defenses in the face of criticism.

Criticism stings. But there are things you can do to ease the pain. The next time someone criticizes you, tell them you appreciate their feedback. Let them know you're going to take some time to consider their thoughts. Then remove yourself from the situation. Take a walk, do something you feel confident in, or sleep on it before you come back to it. Remember: It's OK to be wrong or make mistakes, as long as you learn from it.

In new-teacher training, you learn that kids need to hear criticism sandwiched between positive reinforcement. Your critic might not do this, so do it for yourself. Tell yourself something positive you did, think about the criticism, and follow it with another positive.

When you're ready, engage in a thoughtful conversation with the other person. Of course, sometimes the criticism is unhelpful and not worth your time; a simple "Thanks for your note" is more than sufficient in these situations.

You can also head off the discomfort of negative feedback by asking for it. Our pride can't be bruised when we've already acknowledged

our need to learn. Try asking, “What could I have done better?” to encourage constructive feedback, not just complaints.

Being humble means asking for, accepting, and applying feedback from others.

Think of Yourself Less

As you can see, criticism goes better when you start from a place of humility. So don't sit around waiting until you make a mistake or receive feedback to be humbled. Leaders actively pursue humility. As C. S. Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity*, the first step toward humility is acknowledging your pride:

“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

Here's a more succinct version of the above from Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Life:

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

Devaluing yourself by seeing yourself as not worthy of recognition is not humility. It's false humility, also known as pride. When you're truly humble, you're driven by the work you do for others, not the recognition you receive from them. When recognition does come, you don't well up with pride—you well up with gratefulness.

Be grateful for any opportunity to help others. A Leader Assistant doesn't think, “How can this help me?” A Leader Assistant thinks, “How can I help?”

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on your humility and pride by considering these questions:

What am I grateful for?

Where has my pride caused ungratefulness and slowed me down? Where have I been prideful in the workplace?

How can I work to be more humble instead?

]>

Seven

7. Future-Proof

A Leader Assistant is calm, confident, astute, and uses their emotional intelligence to great effect.

—Alison K., Personal Assistant (London, United Kingdom)

Are you prepared for the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution? Should you be scared your job is going to be replaced by AI someday? Yes, and no.

Have a healthy fear (i.e., reverence and respect) of AI and other technology, but don't let it keep you up at night.

More and more tasks are handled by machine learning algorithms and automated software. If you ignore this reality, you might not survive the AI revolution. We're a long way from being fully replaced by robots, but AI is infiltrating a growing number of industries and rapidly changing the way many of us work.

For example, I'm an assistant at Capacity—a SaaS company in St. Louis. Our secure, AI-native platform helps teams do their best work by automating key processes and reducing support ticket load. Our chatbot sits on top of the platform with state-of-the-art natural language processing so you don't have to know the precise way to ask for what you need—you just ask. If a coworker wants to know when my executive (our CEO) is free next, they can ask Capacity. If I'm on vacation and my executive is traveling, he can ask

Capacity for his airline rewards information, or he can ask for his plumber's phone number if a pipe bursts at his home.

Did you notice something? The tasks Capacity handles aren't ones that typically bring us joy and excitement. Imagine if you could spend more time solving real problems and creating amazing products instead of answering the same mundane questions over and over.

If you want to be a game-changing assistant, you can't let the fear of being replaced by AI paralyze you. Instead, explore how you can use the AI revolution to make yourself more valuable. Seek out tools that give you more time at work to do what you love and what really drives results.

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Assistants

I literally watch the AI revolution unfold at the desk across from me, and it can get overwhelming at times. You probably feel the same way when you read the latest article about artificial intelligence automating jobs. My executive puts it bluntly, "Automate before you're automated."

But there's good news: AI will never replace humans. In fact, the future of work is not AI versus humans; it's AI plus humans. It will continue to increase our capabilities and productivity.

However, though AI might not replace you, it could make your specific job obsolete. So be on the lookout for ways to reskill and upskill throughout your

career if you want to be a Leader Assistant. (I know a longtime assistant who became a knowledge management expert at her company during a major reorg. It was a perfect example of embracing the need to reskill.)

The following four tactics will help you automate and prepare for the future of work.

1. Be an Early Adopter

The first way to future-proof your career is to learn about and use new technology as it becomes available—or even better, before it becomes available to the rest of the world. Be an early adopter. Get your hands on the latest software and tools that could help you with some aspect of your job.

How? Sign up for free trials, join beta tests, or apply to be a guinea pig for your friend's new project.

Maybe it's exploring an AI platform like Capacity that can schedule meetings, automate onboarding processes, mine policy documents, and answer FAQs. Maybe it's testing an automation tool that can help you quickly audit your executive's time, so you can be more strategic with their schedule. (In chapter 10, we'll look at tracking your executive's time). Or maybe it's something as simple as using Google Assistant, Alexa, or Siri to set reminders. Whatever it is, be on the hunt for opportunities to use technology that's shaping the future.

If you aren't sure where to look for opportunities to be an early adopter, start by educating yourself. Take a course on artificial intelligence. Listen to a podcast dedicated to machine learning. Read books and articles about the

future of work. If you'd like some guidance, I put together a guide at leaderassistantbook.com/bonus to help you kick off your AI learning adventure.

2. Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

Keeping your human-only skills sharp is another way to future-proof your career. You might be up to speed on all the latest and greatest software, hip to modern business tactics, and crushing it with your leadership skills. But how emotionally aware are you? Can you control the way you express your emotions? Are you able to process the varying emotions you feel? Can you handle relationships empathetically? What have you done to develop your emotional intelligence?

Here are some game-changing tactics you can employ to cultivate your emotional intelligence.

Respond, Don't React, to Conflict

To react is to let your emotions get the best of you. When you react to conflict, you say something you'll regret.

To respond is to control your emotions, consider the situation, and think about what you're going to say before you say it. When you respond to

conflict, you put yourself in the other person's shoes, and thoughtfully share your opinions or suggest a solution.

My dad and I like to face conflict head-on. Growing up, we would yell at each other, talk things through, work things out, and by the end of our heated conversation, the conflict typically would be resolved. One of my former executives dealt with conflict in this way too. If we had a disagreement, we'd react to it ASAP—sometimes loudly—work through it, and move on.

One day, Meg and I were in the middle of a disagreement with her parents. Instead of responding to that specific conflict in a calm and collected manner, I did what I had grown up doing. I let my emotions get the best of me and lashed out at my father-in-law with my opinion and a few choice words. As you can imagine, my reaction did not invite my in-laws to engage in further discussion. I didn't resolve the conflict—I escalated it.

A blowup like this would've sparked a genuine conversation with my dad or former executive. With my father-in-law, it built a wall between us. In other words, I was not emotionally intelligent in that moment. I was quite the opposite.

Game-changing, confident Leader Assistants learn to respond to conflict at work, not react.

Be Intentional with Your Vocabulary

Do you think about what you're going to say before you say it? Do you

consider whether your words are constructive or destructive? Is your vocabulary vague and full of complaining, or are you specific and helpful?

For example, there's a difference between saying your coworker Jeff is "a bad team member" and saying, "When Jeff shows up late to most meetings, it communicates to the rest of the team that he doesn't value us or respect our time."

Be intentional and thoughtful with your vocabulary. One way to practice this is to write out what you're going to say before you say it. Then read it out loud to hear how your tone comes across.

Process Your Emotions

The ability to process your feelings is critical to developing emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, I'm terrible at this. I have a tendency to bury my emotions instead of questioning why I'm feeling them. If I'm sad, I shrug it off and tell myself to get over it. If I'm angry, I lash out without exploring why I felt the need to lash out.

Meg and our counselor have helped me become more self-aware by encouraging me to question the motives behind what I say and do.

Why did I gossip about my coworker at lunch or send that scathing email? Was it because I wanted attention? If so, why did I want attention? Or was I afraid to talk to them directly because I have a fear of conflict?

Processing my own emotions is still a battle for me. But discovering and naming the motives behind my emotions has helped me develop self-awareness.

Be Empathetic

Processing your emotions will help you practice empathy toward others. If a coworker is struggling to produce, put yourself in their shoes. Did they recently experience a difficult personal event? Did they just get a new supervisor? Are they simply having a bad day? Empathize with others.

Robots will never know what it's like to be human. They'll never be able to feel your pain, experience your joy, or know how badly you miss a loved one. They'll never be as intuitive as an emotionally aware human being.

AI won't ask how your elderly father is holding up after his hip replacement. A chatbot won't be sensitive to the fact that you were crying in the break room because your cat died. A robot can't offer you a ride when your car breaks down. (OK, maybe in some places it

can, but you get the idea.)

Treat humans like they're people who matter, because they are people, and they do matter. When companies look to trim their head count during a recession, they'll first look at productivity and business impact. But when they're forced to choose between two equally productive team members, they'll pick the more empathetic employee nine times out of ten.

3. Look for (the Right) Problems and Suggest Solutions

The next way to prepare for the future of work is to look for problems others have yet to solve. As an assistant, you see the good, the bad, and the ugly in your organization. You can complain about what's wrong and let other people figure things out. Or you can use the unique vantage point you have to identify problems and suggest solutions. If you're a self-motivated problem solver who constantly brings solutions to the table, you won't be replaced by AI someday.

But being future-proof is not just about solving problems. It's about identifying the right problems. In fact, it's more valuable to suggest the wrong solution to the right problem than it is to provide an amazing solution to the wrong problem.

“But how can I identify the right problems, Jeremy?” I’m glad you asked.

Start with what keeps your executive up at night. What are they concerned about? Look for ways you can alleviate those concerns. Shift your focus toward the issues on their mind. In chapter 21, I share several questions to ask your executive that will help you pinpoint problems worth solving.

Time spent addressing the wrong problem is a waste of time. But repeatedly failing to conquer the right problem is sometimes the only path to progress. Thomas Edison famously said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found ten thousand ways that won’t work.” You might as well find the solutions that won’t work

to help your executive more quickly discover the right solution for the right problem.

4. Be a Revenue Generator

If you want to be future-proof, be one of the best salespeople in your company. Always be on the lookout for ways to impact the bottom line. If your company fails to increase revenue or raise enough money,

you and your coworkers will be out of work, so don't sit around waiting for tasks to hit your inbox.

If you've never seen yourself as a revenue generator, it's time to change your perspective. (This still applies to you if you work at a nonprofit, by the way, so don't skip ahead.) Future-proof assistants lead by example and get those around them excited to help their company grow. If you're not excited to help your organization grow, and don't believe in what they're doing, figure out why quick.

There are a few ways to step up your sales game.

First, know your company's mission, vision, and sales pitch like the back of your hand. If you don't know it, invite yourself to sales meetings so you can soak up the info. Learn how to give the pitch yourself by reading all the onboarding guides for account executives. Read the fundraising prospectus your executive just asked you to send to potential donors. The goal is to confidently and succinctly describe your organization's mission and/or product to a stranger on an elevator, or to that business-owner friend who could be a future customer.

Speaking of friends who run a business, I sourced and helped close our young startup's first multiyear contract—with a company run by a friend of mine. I'm not sharing this to gloat. I'm sharing this as a challenge to you.

Who do you know that could benefit from your company's product or service? Take them to lunch and see what happens. If you believe in what your organization is doing, why not share it with your network?

Second, grow your influence to increase your company's brand awareness. One of Capacity's sales team members sent me an email from an assistant in my network. This assistant was going to delete a sales email she received from Capacity, but because she follows me on LinkedIn and appreciates what I do for the assistant community, she forwarded the email to her executive.

My influence directly helped our sales team. In chapter 20, we'll look at ways you can grow your influence and, in turn, build trust and credibility for your organization's brand.

Another way to step up your sales game is to study the psychology of sales. Learn to listen to and understand a potential customer's pain points. Be ready and able to clearly articulate how your company's product is uniquely designed to solve their problem. Learn why people buy, not just what they buy. To begin your quest to become the best salesperson in your organization, read top sales resources like my friend Mike Weinberg's amazing books.

If you want to be future-proof, start seeing yourself as a revenue-generating member of the sales team. It's always nice to have sourced, or even closed, a few deals when it comes time to ask for a raise. There's nothing like directly impacting a revenue increase to improve your fellow team members' job security and support your case for a salary increase. Not to mention, when a recession hits and your company is forced to cut costs, they're going to think twice before

letting go of a revenue generator.

To recap, here are four ways to future-proof your career:

Be an Early Adopter

Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

Look for (the Right) Problems and Suggest
Solutions Be a Revenue Generator

Your future is in your hands. You can wait until your company automates most of your job. Or you can creatively figure out how to use AI to automate the repetitive, manual processes you manage day in and day out. You can then gather real data on how much time and money you're saving your executive and company. Not to mention, you'll be freed up to focus on higher-value work.

Don't sit on your hands while the world moves forward. Embrace the future of work.

Five Things a Robot Assistant Can't Do

I'm a practical guy who likes examples, so I thought I'd close this chapter with a list of five things robots will never be able to do for you—at least not at the same nuanced, intuitive level that you can.

Run a meeting on your executive's behalf.

Recognize that your executive is running out of steam and needs a few days off.

Call a client, kindly explain to them how your company screwed up, and answer any questions they have.

Give a genuine hug to a coworker who just lost their dog to cancer.

Make an intuitive decision about which applicant to hire based on a five-minute, in-person interaction.

Do you want to position yourself amid the AI revolution? Be more human.

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on how future-proof you are by considering these questions:

What problems have I identified at work that I could propose solutions for in the coming days?

How have I developed my emotional intelligence?
When was the last time I reacted instead of responding?

Do I see myself as someone who can directly impact the bottom line? If not, why?

Which manual processes can I automate in my work?

1. The Essential Characteristics

A Leader Assistant has courage, persistence, and a good sense of humor. They stay on top of their game by staying on top of their education. They sharpen their axe by mentoring others. They're a mind reader, diplomat, psychologist, politician, strategic partner, and team player.

—Lauree C., Executive Assistant (San Diego, CA)

Lists of essential characteristics to embody, whether you're a new assistant or a veteran, are commonplace. Because everyone has their own ideas, I wanted to outline what I see as the essentials for assistants. Think of this as a warmup and a refresher.

As you work your way through the rest of the book, you'll notice many of these traits woven throughout.

Proactive

Being proactive is similar to being able to anticipate, but the difference is important to understand. Being proactive means you plan ahead and prepare for something you know is going to happen. However, when you make an educated guess that something could happen, and you prepare for it, you're anticipating.

Here's an example of being proactive. Your executive is speaking at a conference, and their presentation has some unusual requirements. You seek out the audio/video (A/V) team for the event weeks in advance so you can explain your executive's needs, and so the A/V team has more time to prepare.

You're expected to be multiple steps ahead of your executive, so don't wait for them to tell you what to do. Be proactive.

Responsive

Of course, it's impossible to plan for everything, so be ready to quickly tackle problems as they arise. In scenarios where something comes up that was neither planned for nor anticipated, be willing to set aside your proactive hat and put on your responsive one.

In my first year at Capacity (the artificial intelligence software company I work for), I applied for my executive to compete in a startup competition for Ashton Kutcher's venture capital firm, Sound Ventures. After a couple of interviews with them, we didn't hear anything for a few weeks, so we assumed we didn't make the cut.

But five days before the event, we found out that we made the top five and that my executive was scheduled to pitch our company to Kutcher, Matthew McConaughey, Marc Benioff (CEO of Salesforce), Gary Vaynerchuk (CEO of VaynerMedia), and Melody McCloskey (CEO of StyleSeat) at South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas. It was an amazing opportunity for a young startup, but we had only a few days to get ready.

I scrambled to cancel or move almost every meeting that week so my executive could prepare his pitch. I booked flights, hotel rooms, and rental cars for four of our team members to go with my executive. Did I mention SXSW is the busiest event of the year in Austin? Most transportation and lodging options weren't available anymore. Talk about needing to quickly respond in the moment.

We didn't win the competition, but our team got to go to the Snoop Dogg after-party. The next time you see me at an event, remind me to tell you a funny story about that.

Loyal

As a Leader Assistant, you're committed to the organization and loyal to your executive. You prioritize tasks that come from your executive over tasks that come from someone else. Your executive is your number one priority at work, and they should not question your commitment to them. For example, if I'm meeting with another team member when my executive calls me, I always excuse myself to answer the phone.

If you have an executive who hasn't set clear expectations in this area, I recommend clarifying your job description with them as soon as possible. For example, if you're equally split between two or three executives, the dynamic will be different than if you're an assistant to one executive while supporting other executives as needed.

Trustworthy

An executive must be able to trust you and your ability to manage confidential information. You hold the keys to their kingdom, so don't lose them. No executive wants an assistant to gossip about them at a dinner party. No board wants an assistant to share private revenue numbers with assistants at other companies. Earn the trust of your executive by maintaining confidentiality at all times.

Others-Centered

The assistant role is not a glamorous one. If you've been an assistant for even a few weeks, you're well aware of this. Your job requires hours and hours of behind-the-scenes work, most of which no one—not even your executive— will see.

If you want to be the center of attention, being an assistant isn't the career for you.

Your job is to further the goals and agenda of your executive and company— not your own. (We'll talk about how your goals should align with theirs later.) In the workplace, pay more attention to your executive and other team members than you do to yourself.

I'm not saying you shouldn't take care of yourself. In fact, paying attention to self-care is critical if you want to have the energy and ability to help others. There's a reason Pillar 4 is dedicated to self-care.

I am saying try not to take it personally if your executive closes a seven-figure sales contract you played a big role in and fails to thank you when they make the big announcement in front of the entire company. Being a leader means you celebrate the success of others more than your own. Whether you need to make copies for a meeting or lead an important sales demo on behalf of your executive, be happy to help and excited to contribute. A "woe is me" attitude will not cut it.

However, be careful not to let your executive abuse their authority. An effective executive will delegate challenging and interesting projects and tasks, as well as necessary, mundane chores. They'll pay attention to the details so they don't have to bother you on a Sunday morning just to ask for information you sent them on Friday. They'll leave you alone on your days off. An executive worth keeping will be grateful that you put aside your desires to help them and the team.

Sociable

This characteristic is a given for all team members, but especially assistants. Your executive and teams spend a lot of time with you. You're often the first contact for VIP guests, board members, investors, and potential clients. It's important to be personable, kind, and have a good sense of humor.

However, being social and friendly doesn't mean you must be an extrovert to be a Leader Assistant. In fact, introverts make some of the best assistants. We like to sit by ourselves in a quiet office and get stuff done. Meanwhile, our extroverted team members enjoy small talk and socializing with coworkers

—even if it distracts them from getting work done. Can you tell I'm letting my introverted bias seep into this section?

I'm a high introvert with developed extroverted skills, and my current and previous executives have been high extroverts. This works well for a strong, complementary partnership. If you're an introvert, you might work better with an extroverted executive who knows how to respect your need for space, and vice versa. But no matter your personality type, being kind to and sociable with others is a must.

Organized

Many people hire an assistant because they need help getting organized, but others are highly structured and simply spend too much time on the wrong tasks.

For example, executives have better things to do than adding details to their calendar or entering data into a spreadsheet. Their time is better spent meeting with key staff, reading books that inspire them, working on strategic

plans, and creating powerful and engaging content for the next board presentation, sales meeting, or investor update.

Synthesize everything your executive throws at you into prioritized tasks and projects, and execute those projects with little oversight. You won't make it long if you were hired because you "have a great personality" or "work really hard" but you can't keep your own car clean.

Flexible

I've seen assistants with many of the characteristics listed in this chapter, but they lack flexibility. Instead of being excited about and embracing change, they freeze and panic. Early on in my career, this was me. I hated last-minute changes and would get dejected because all the work I put into a project seemed to be all for naught. However, I now realize pivoting can be a good thing, and the process of flexing on the fly can teach us more than staying the course. Instead of seeing work thrown out the window at the last moment as pointless, I started to view "wasted" work as part of the process, helping me improve at my job.

Odds are your executive loves to change things up at the last minute. I think it's a job requirement for all supervisors to frequently scrap a plan and start over, or tinker with the plan right before a deadline. Rather than panicking when this happens, assistants must be ready to adapt.

Assertive

You can't be flexible all the time, however. There are times when pushing back is an appropriate way to help your executive keep a level head. If your executive always changes things at the last minute, they might have an unhealthy pattern that needs to be addressed before everyone burns out and loses trust in them.

Leader Assistants are aware of the right time to be assertive. For example, if you know a last-minute change could mean running a team into the ground, or even losing some of your best team members, speak up! Tell your executive, "We can't change the plan this late in the game," or "It's not worth our time and energy to shift directions. We just need to move forward." These responses aren't easy, but they show you're thinking strategically for the organization, and that your response isn't just a personal preference.

Focused

In today's fast-paced society, where screens are everywhere and notifications are never-ending, staying focused on one thing at a time is more difficult than ever. Most of the high-level executives I've worked with struggle to stay engaged with a single task for a long period of time, so one of the most crucial characteristics an assistant must possess is the ability to focus. A Leader Assistant can simultaneously focus on their tasks while helping their executive stay on point.

Pay extra-close attention to chapter 9 if you struggle to focus.

Detail-Oriented

As an assistant, it's your job to notice the details. You can't wait for others to notice.

If your executive is about to present to the board of directors and they have a huge piece of spinach in between their two front teeth, tell them. If a coworker posts a picture on Instagram that inadvertently included a confidential revenue chart on the wall behind them, take care of it. Be aware if your executive's flight was moved to a different departure gate, or if their passport expires a week before their international trip. Don't overlook the details.

Never Assumes Anything

As I recall the many times I missed a detail because I assumed someone else was on it, I'm reminded of a former coworker's advice: "Never assume anything, Jeremy."

In other words, anytime you find yourself thinking, "I'm sure someone else took care of that," or "I'm positive she understood what I was asking," or in the case of the million-dollar typo I'll tell you about later, "I'm sure the other two team members would've caught something major if there was anything wrong," double-check your work and pay extra-close attention to the details. When we assume, we miss details.

Positive Attitude

This is pretty straightforward, but a Leader Assistant is someone who has a positive attitude. It isn't always easy, but staying positive no matter what is thrown your way is a characteristic any executive would want in their assistant.

Strong Communication Skills

Assistants communicate with coworkers, board members, executives, other assistants, vendors, clients, potential clients, and more. Having strong verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills is a necessity if you want to thrive as an assistant. We'll discuss tactics for communication in chapter 18.

Curious

You don't have to be an expert in every single topic under the sun, but effective assistants are curious. When you hear a term you don't know, look it up. When someone shows you how to do something, ask them why it's done that way. Be eager to learn and explore. Curiosity not only helps you execute tasks as they come, but also helps you expand your overall knowledge.

Resourceful

One way to be a resourceful assistant is to figure things out on your own. But if you find yourself stuck on a problem, don't be afraid to ask for help. Leaders aren't afraid to admit they're struggling to solve a problem.

Sometimes outsourcing is the quickest and best way to overcome a glacier. When a project requires expertise in a certain skill set, hire a specialist. For example, I've outsourced projects to human resources experts, lawyers, event planners, graphic designers, even carpenters.

Efficient

I'm always noticing how inefficient things are. I'll be in line at a fast food restaurant, and I'll tell my boys how I'd change things. I'll walk them through which systems are slowing things down, and how I would make them better.

Look for ways to cut seconds out of your work processes. Always ask yourself the question, "How can I minimize wasted time and maximize productivity?" Leader Assistants work quickly and efficiently.

Context-Aware

The last essential characteristic is the ability to understand the environment you're in, and adjust accordingly. In other words, Leader Assistants are

context-aware.

When you learned how to drive a car, you thought the hard part was simply controlling the vehicle. As you mastered the art of avoiding curbs, however, you learned the real challenge of driving is making decisions based on the many variables surrounding you. Is the road slick from rain or ice? Does the semi-truck see you passing? Is that pedestrian going to step out in front of you? Decisions shouldn't be made in a vacuum.

Do You Embody the Essentials?

One of my former executives went through several assistants before he hired me. The longest any of them lasted was eighteen months. One assistant was loyal but not organized; he was willing to drop anything for his executive, but he also frequently dropped the ball. Another was organized but wasn't proactive; he could keep track of all his tasks, but he would sit around waiting for things to do. It's no wonder they didn't last long.

Making a positive and powerful impact as an assistant requires embodying more than just a few of the essential characteristics. Take a look at the list again, make an honest self-evaluation about which are strengths and which are weaknesses, and pick a few "trouble spots" to work on in the coming weeks.

Proactive
Responsive

Loyal
Trustworthy
Others-Centered
Sociable
Organized
Flexible
Assertive
Focused
Detail-Oriented

Never Assumes
Anything Positive
Attitude
Strong Communication
Skills Curious
Resourceful
Efficient
Context-Aware
e

Use questions like “What would it mean for me to be curious this week?” or “How can I embody assertiveness today?” to get you thinking.

OK. Now that you're caught up on the essentials of your assistant role, let's look at the characteristics that will help you change the game.

] >

Two

2. The Game-Changing Characteristics

A Leader Assistant has integrity, drive, resilience, compassion, focus, never-ending learning, vision, and the flexibility to start/stop/start/stop a project (patience at its best).

—Shari K., Executive Assistant (Omaha, NE)

Being a die-hard Kansas City Royals baseball fan has taught me a lot about what it means to be a game-changing assistant.

The Royals won the World Series in 1985, but I was only one year old, so I don't remember it. Unfortunately, I do remember the decades of losing that followed; it took twenty-nine years for them to return to the playoffs.

The Royals had a handful of good teams in between, including the 1994 squad. In August of that year, ten-year-old me sat in the car on the way to baseball practice as giddy as ever. I was looking forward to talking to my fellow teammates about how good the Royals were doing. They had just won fourteen games in a row and were (in my mind) on their way to making the playoffs. In fact, being the ultimate optimist, I knew they were destined to win the World Series.

As soon as we pulled up to the park, I jumped out of the car, raced up the hill, and started praising the Royals to my teammates. “Guys, the Royals are so good right now! They’re the best team in baseball!”

They rolled their eyes at me. “Dude, it doesn’t matter how good they are,” one of them replied. “Baseball is going to have a strike. The season is almost over, and they aren’t even going to have the playoffs. Chill out.”

“No way!” I quickly shot back. “They won’t cancel the season! They’ll work it out and keep playing and the Royals are going to win it all. You watch!”

I can’t remember what their responses were exactly, but I got the message: none of my teammates had hope. Yet I remained hopeful that a strike would not be happening. How could they take baseball away from me?

The Royals’ win streak ended that day, and in fact, they ended up losing four out of their next five games. But I just knew they would break out for another winning streak soon. Unfortunately, I was wrong. On Thursday, August 11, 1994, the big bad world (aka MLB owners) took baseball away from me. The players went on strike, and they wouldn’t end up playing again until the following season. My tall, skinny, three-sizes-too-big Royals T-shirt-wearing, Wiffle ball-pitching self was heartbroken. My Little League teammates were right, and I was devastated.

I experienced twenty more years of heartbreak after that awful childhood moment. When the Royals finally made the playoffs in 2014 and 2015, I took advantage of the opportunity and attended every home playoff game.

But loyalty and perseverance aren't the only lessons I've gleaned from my fandom.

My favorite player during the Royals' amazing run of back-to-back World Series appearances was their center fielder, Lorenzo Cain. He was fast, athletic, and exciting to watch. He had the essentials down, but there was something extra special about Cain. He could change a game with one play, and did so many times. When Cain was playing, I didn't look away, afraid I'd miss an impossible diving catch or a home-run-robbing grab against the wall.

In one of those thrilling playoff games, Cain made a couple of diving catches back-to-back. Meg, my brother Kyle, my dad Bill, and I were sitting in the front row, up against the fence in left-center field. We had an up-close-and- personal view of Cain's amazing plays from our great seats.



Meg pointing to Lorenzo Cain from our seats.

“Game changing” is the best descriptor of Cain during those two years. In fact, 2015 was Cain’s best year by Wins Above Replacement (WAR): a stat that measures a player’s total contribution to his team.

What made Cain a game changer? Was it his speed? There are plenty of fast athletes who aren’t elite. How about his work ethic? That sure helped, but even many subpar athletes work hard.

Here are some game-changing characteristics Cain embodied:

His ability to discern where the ball would end up as a hitter made contact so he could take the appropriate first step.

His steadiness in high-pressure situations.

His confidence that he had what it took to make the catch.

Are You a Game Changer?

Do you exhibit the game-changing characteristics Cain had? The best baseball players in the world embody some of the same characteristics as the best assistants in the world. Executives don't just want a solid team member—they want a risk-taking game changer.

These are the five game-changing characteristics of a Leader Assistant:

Discerning
Steady
Confident
Humble
Future-Proof

In the following chapters, we'll delve into what each of these characteristics is, and how to embody them.

] >

Three

3. Discerning

Leader Assistants possess the confidence to make considerate and informed decisions that lead to fruitful actions—in the absence of executive presence.

—Kristi D., Executive Assistant (San Jose, CA)

Game-changing Leader Assistants are discerning. As Oxford defines it, discerning means “having or showing good judgment.” There are many ways this characteristic can play out in your role, but I’m going to focus on two: anticipating the needs of your executive, and making decisions on their behalf.

Anticipate the Needs of Your Executive

“What’s one thing you wish your assistant could do?” I’ve asked dozens of executives this question. And every single one of them said they wish their assistant could read their mind. In other words, they want an assistant who anticipates what’s needed, long before it’s needed.

Thinking five or six steps ahead is critical for assistants. Why? Because our executives are always thinking ahead. So plan for what’s coming next week, next month, even next year.

Remember what I said before: Being proactive means planning for something that's scheduled to happen. Anticipating means planning for something that might never happen. For example, booking a flight for a planned trip six months from now is proactive. That's essential, but it's not game changing.

Anticipating your executive's needs means you book a backup flight for the next morning because (a) the weather is typically awful in January, (b) your executive has a critical board meeting they can't miss, or (c) their primary flight departs toward the end of rush hour, so there's a high likelihood they'll get stuck in traffic and miss the flight.

Anticipation is a game-changing characteristic because it requires you to consider and analyze unlikely scenarios your executive still might need you to handle. If you struggle to anticipate, ask your executive to share their long-term goals and ideas with you. If you know what their "big picture" is, you can better shape their "little picture" to match.

The best mind readers are in the same room as the mind they're trying to read. Sit down with your executive on a regular basis to go over their top three goals for the next week, month, and quarter. Discuss what needs to happen to accomplish these goals, and write out action items for each.

Another way to better anticipate your executive's needs is to spend time every week looking ahead a few weeks, months, even a year, then working your way back. Your executive doesn't have time to look at every detail of a trip four months from now. That's why they have you.

If you've tried to anticipate in the above ways but still seem to be a few steps behind, consider seeking help from outside training and coaching. If that still doesn't help, you might need a new executive. Or, perhaps the administrative profession is not the right fit for you.

Make Good Decisions

Your executive makes decisions all day, every day, so any time you can make a decision for them, do it. Be decisive to protect your executive from getting a serious case of decision fatigue.

Game-changing assistants are always ready to make decisions. You can start by making several small choices throughout the day, like what to get them for lunch, which conference room to book for their upcoming brainstorming meeting, or whether to reply to that random LinkedIn message.

Once you've proven capable of handling small decisions, your executive will trust your judgment on more critical matters. I've influenced key decisions during my career as an assistant, affecting things such as product updates, a company rebrand, and hiring and firing. Twice, my company faced a tough decision on which office to move the team to. In both instances, my executive looked at me and asked, "Which office do you think we should choose?" I quickly gave my answer, as well as my justifications for it. Each time, he said, "OK, let's do it."

Unfortunately, I didn't always speak up when I had a gut feeling. I didn't feel good about several employee hires that, down the road, turned into awful situations I could've helped us avoid. We interviewed a candidate for a

major leadership role at my previous organization. He gave off a bad vibe when we interacted. I thought he was inauthentic and putting on a show to land the job. However, I didn't say anything—partly because I knew how important it was for us to fill the role, but also because I didn't trust my gut.

We ended up hiring the guy and it went OK for a few months. But it quickly went downhill when it turned out he wasn't the kind of person he made himself out to be. He was supposed to be leading a team, but everyone eventually saw right through his façade. He was lazy and failed to keep his promises. We fired him, but it took years for that team to recover.

If you have a bad feeling about something or someone, don't dismiss it. Your insight is valuable.

How can you improve your decision-making skills? Start by making suggestions to your executive. It could be as simple as recommending a template for the board slides. Get your executive's feedback to determine whether your views on the template align. Rinse and repeat with other suggestions until your decisions match theirs more often than not.

Your job is to free up your executive so they have more bandwidth to focus on decisions only they can make. With practice, the number of decisions only they can handle will decrease, and your value to the company will increase.

**GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF-
REFLECTION**

Reflect on your ability to anticipate and make good decisions by considering these questions:

What are some upcoming situations I could think through for my executive? What unlikely scenarios do I need to plan for?

In what areas do I struggle to read my executive's mind? What steps can I make this week to better anticipate their needs?

When was the last time I made the wrong decision? What did I miss in that situation?

What's a decision I can make for my executive this week?

Have I ever allowed something negative to happen to my company because I stayed quiet about my concerns? Why did I doubt myself?

] >

Four

4. Steady

Have you ever seen a professional juggler juggling knives? They never drop them, and they never stop smiling. Assistants are similar to knife jugglers. They have the ability to juggle multiple projects and never let others see the stress they may be under. Assistants are leaders not because of their ability to do a lot at once, but because of their posture while doing those tasks.

—David B., Executive Assistant and Interim HR Director (Indian Wells, CA)

One of my coworkers repeatedly asks me how I'm so calm during stressful times at work. For the longest time, I had no idea how to respond. I've always been a fairly steady person. Meg even calls me "Steady Slim" (I have a tall and skinny physique, in case you didn't know). But my coworker's question got me thinking: "How do I remain so steady in the storms around me?"

After some reflection, I unlocked three keys to my steadiness: I enjoy the process, I entertain the worst-case scenario, and I embrace the tension.

Before we dive into these attributes, however, I want to make a quick distinction.

I was going to call this game-changing characteristic “calm in the chaos,” but I like the word steady better. Why? Because sometimes you have to get a little upset in the midst of the madness to get something done. Sometimes you need to raise your intensity to move the needle.

If you’re a parent, you know what it’s like for a kid to not pay attention unless you use a certain tone. If your three-year-old steps onto a busy street with oncoming traffic, you can’t afford to remain calm. You have to be fierce and push everything aside as you race to snag your child out of harm’s way. But your lack of calm in those moments doesn’t mean you’re unsteady. In fact, your steady intensity is what allows you to perform your super-parent mission.

The following three keys help me remain steady in the stressful storms of the workplace.

Enjoy the Process

I happen to like the crazy. It keeps me interested and engaged. I enjoy solving problems when it’s hard to think straight. I enjoy the occasional late-night work session to get a new feature out for a client. The highs and lows of startup life are tough to handle, but one thing is true: there’s never a dull moment—especially as an executive assistant.

If you don’t learn to enjoy the process, you’ll struggle to remain steady. You’ll always be dreaming of the future, which will leave you stressed out by a present that doesn’t match it. If enjoying the process doesn’t come naturally to you, stay connected to the big picture. Setting your sights on your

company's mission can help you roll with the complex process required to achieve it.

You can also think critically about common processes and identify ways to make them more efficient. You'll always face unexpected changes, but if you can streamline things as much as possible, the process won't be nearly as stressful.

Entertain the Worst-Case Scenario

This might seem a bit morbid, but another tactic that helps me remain steady is to remind myself that I'm not dead.

No matter how stressful things are at work, things could be worse. If I lose my job, life will be difficult, but I can find new work. Life is too short to make my career the most important part of my life, or to let a stressful situation cause me to freak out. Instead, I do my best to entertain the worst-case scenario.

If I'm not dead, then I have every reason to be grateful.

I'm not perfect, of course, and neither are you. We all freak out at times. But when we do, it's because we see our circumstances through the lens of ungratefulness. We think to ourselves, "This is the worst," when in reality, it's not. Entertaining the worst-case scenario helps us step back and look at life from a healthier perspective.

Embrace the Tension

The assistant role is fluid. It's unclear. It's ever-changing. It's not clean-cut and orderly. It's full of tension. You'll constantly be pulled in different directions by executives or team members. Heck, I've received two completely opposite requests from the same executive within a five-minute window. This is the tension all assistants face. Don't run from it. Don't let it shake you. Instead, feed off of the tension. Lean into it.

Being hire number one at a software-as-a-service (SaaS) startup with a CEO who sold his last company for almost a billion dollars presents a lot of opportunities for me to embrace (or run from) tension. My executive approached me with one such opportunity about a month after launching the company. He asked me to oversee accounting, human resources, and operations for the company—not forever, but until we could hire an accountant, director of HR, etc.

I'm an introvert who hates math, yet my new role was going to include working with numbers and people. What could go wrong, right? Of course, I was also expected to fulfill my duties as the CEO's assistant on top of these new responsibilities. In other words, I was going to be working in constant tension.

Instead of running or losing my cool, I replied to his overwhelming request with a hesitant, but honest, response. I let him know I didn't enjoy accounting and that I was bad at math. I also said I didn't like paperwork and that I

wasn't the best people person. But I told him I'd run the company—as long as it wasn't a long-term solution.

Thankfully, we now have a much larger team, so I'm able to focus on being an assistant. But during that season of wearing multiple hats, I discovered the more I leaned into the tension, the more confident and steady I became. The more I embraced the stress and anxiety, the more successful I was.

To embrace tension, be aware of it and be ready to discern which characteristic to embody in a given moment. The ability to readily set aside one characteristic for its opposite, depending on the situation, will set you apart from the pack.

For example, there's tension in the constant battle between planning ahead but also being ready to respond on the fly. One minute, you're planning an itinerary for four months out. The next minute, you drop everything to head to your executive's house, grab his new driver's license, and drive it to him at the airport because they won't let him through security with an expired ID. (In case you're wondering, I got my executive his ID with time to spare.)

In these moments, you can't say, "Sorry, boss, I'm working on being proactive and planning ahead right now; I can't help you get through security. I operate better when things are less chaotic and on my calendar ahead of time." Good luck with that response.

What if you catch your longtime executive doing something unethical, immoral, or illegal? There's certainly tension there. Suddenly, you're faced

with the choice of being loyal to an executive you've supported for years—and who has supported you—or doing the right thing.

Deep down, you know reporting your executive's behavior is the right thing to do, but you get paid well, have great benefits, and enjoy your schedule.

You didn't do anything wrong, so why should you lose your job?

Plenty of assistants push things under the rug for these or other reasons, claiming loyalty as their justification. But a Leader Assistant gives up their loyalty to do the right thing.

Take time to identify specific tension builders that are difficult for you to navigate, then work through them. For example, if being proactive is tough because you like to fly by the seat of your pants, develop your proactive muscles by scheduling an hour each week to look ahead at your executive's calendar.

When the tension makes you uneasy, remind yourself of the parts of your life that feel more certain, more comfortable, more settled. Close your eyes and gain some composure by letting your mind go there for a moment. Think of the sense of accomplishment you'll feel when you successfully navigate a difficult situation to reach your goals.

Stick a quote on your desk to think about when you're stuck. I like this one by former UCLA men's basketball coach John Wooden: "Flexibility is the key to stability." Or this anonymous quote: "Be stubborn about your goals, and flexible about your methods."

Will you let the tension hold you back or cause you to stumble? Or will you be steady when it's time to face your own glacier?

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on your ability to be steady in the storms by considering these questions:

When was the last time I lost my cool? What triggered it?

What helps me be steady when things around me fall apart?

What parts of the process do I enjoy? What parts do I dislike? How can I remedy those problem areas?

What's a tension holding me back right now that I could embrace instead?

] >

Five

5. Confident

An assistant becomes a leader by building confidence in him/herself. Confidence is built by will and determination to be the best (personally and professionally), a willingness to work with and learn from others, and the support of others in and outside of your organization (networking).

—Rebecca S., Executive Administrative Assistant (Greenville, SC)

As an assistant, you're in contact with the most confident and powerful people in your company, city, industry—for some of you, even the world. How can you expect to lead if you lack confidence in your ability to get the job done?

Game-changing Leader Assistants are confident.

I'm not talking about a Lifetime-movie, music-pumping, "I am awesome! I am strong! I am brave!" confidence. What if you're not strong? What if you aren't feeling brave in a given moment? What if you fail today, tomorrow, and the next day?

I'm also not talking about an arrogant, narcissistic, "I do what I want, and don't care what you think!" confidence, like when I'm driving. (Hey, leaders should own their dirt, right?). Or like that time I was at a grocery store with a

girl I was trying to impress and I ate a strawberry off the shelf, claiming, “Hey, free strawberry samples!” (They were not free samples, and I did not impress the girl.)

What I’m talking about is a deep-rooted, humble confidence. An unwavering belief that you have what it takes to figure things out, and a forgiving grace for yourself if you don’t figure things out.

Your confidence naturally will take a hit when you face an unexpected glacier. If you doubt your ability in those moments, you’re not alone. The most confident people in the world have doubts, whether they admit it or not.

I’ve spent more than half my working life as an EA. I’ve worked with celebrities, professional athletes, billionaires, and C-suite executives at Fortune 100 companies. You’d think I’d be extremely confident anytime I meet a high-level executive. But there are days I question whether I’ve got what it takes to ask for extra sauce at Chick-fil-A.

There are times I’m confident in my skills, but I’m not confident in my ability to communicate well. Other days I doubt my talent, but not my worth as a person. Some days I’m confident and assertive at work, but when I get home and have to manage my boys’ bedtime routine, I lose all confidence.

So, how do we strengthen our self-assurance?

Develop a Deep-Rooted, Humble Confidence

Experience is one way to start. No matter how old or new you are to the assistant role, find someone with more experience (and more confidence), and ask them to help you grow. It can be as simple as grabbing lunch with a fellow assistant to share tips and tricks, as well as trade horror and success stories.

You could also reach out to one of the many amazing assistant coaches on LinkedIn for professional development to help you gain confidence. Conferences and online courses can help you become more assured in your role as well.

But experience, coaching, and training will only get you so far. The key to unlocking a deep-rooted confidence is to remember this:

You are a valuable human being—no matter how good or bad you perform at work.

Until you latch onto this powerful truth, you will lack confidence. If you don't remind yourself of this fact on a regular basis, your confidence will fade as you let the ups and downs at work affect you on a deep, personal level.

“But Jeremy, I don't feel valuable.” I get it. I don't feel valuable all the time either. So what destroys our confidence? The lies we've been told, and the lies we tell ourselves.

Don't Believe the Lies

What lies have you been told that you've held on to as truths?

Maybe a teacher in high school said you'd never amount to anything. Maybe a coworker said you were incompetent. Maybe your dad didn't encourage or believe in you. These statements can be tough to shake, but they don't define you.

The lies you tell yourself are another confidence destroyer. Lies like "I don't have what it takes," or "I can't do it as well as Susan can," or "They won't listen to me." These lies wreck your confidence. In fact, they're so powerful, you might not recognize the truth when you hear it. Think about the last time you received a compliment. Did you respond with gratitude, or dismiss it, telling yourself it was undeserved?

Almost every day, my son Silas says I'm "the best daddy ever." I know I'm likely not the best dad ever, so at first I would respond with something like "I doubt it, but I do my best." Then I thought about how he means it. To him, I really am the best daddy ever. But I was unwilling to hear it. Even worse, my response was teaching him to reject compliments or kind words from others. So now I simply say, "Thank you, sweetie."

When someone says something nice about you, own it and say thanks. Don't let the negative lies in your head drown out the positive truth.

Another example of a lie in my life was the seemingly small but powerful thought that I'd never be able to enjoy dining at nice restaurants because I'd always be worried about paying my bills.

This lie I told myself was heavily influenced by my family of origin. I grew up in a family of six, and my parents never made much money. Sure, we had food on the table, clothes on our back, and a roof over our heads. But we rarely went out to eat, we shopped at Aldi and Payless Shoes, and we only went on vacation if we had a cheap or free place to stay somewhere within driving distance. The pro was I learned a ton about saving money, keeping a budget, and not buying things I can't afford. The con was it took me a long time to learn that it's OK to splurge every now and then.

Eleanor Roosevelt said it well: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." This goes for the lies you tell yourself too.

Counseling has helped me process the many ways my family of origin impacts my confidence to this day. Some people attach a stigma to counseling. "Oh, you must be really messed up if you're seeing a therapist." But that's simply not true. Mature people who want to grow and improve seek help in many forms. I highly recommend seeing a good therapist or counselor if you've never seen one. You can't fight back against the lies in your mind, or the lies from others, without outside help.

A Leader Assistant's confidence is not fueled by pride. It's fueled by humility.

Serve the Work

Dorothy Sayers, an English crime writer and poet, wrote an essay called “Why Work?” I find her ideas in this essay fascinating to think about as they relate to how we can be confident in our role.¹ In “Why Work?” Sayers says a worker must “serve the work.” This sounds like a recipe for burnout, but hear her out:

“The moment you think of serving other people, you begin to have a notion that other people owe you something for your pains; you begin to think that you have a claim on the community. You will begin to bargain for reward, to angle for applause, and to harbor a grievance if you are not appreciated. But if your mind is set upon serving the work, then you know you have nothing to look for; the only reward the work can give you is the satisfaction of beholding its perfection. The work takes all and gives nothing but itself; and to serve the work is a labor of pure love.... It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work.”

If you’re “serving the work,” as opposed to “angling for applause” from your executive, you won’t feel as defeated or be as negatively influenced when your executive doesn’t appreciate your amazing work. Your confidence will have deeper roots. You’ll no longer do what you do to be recognized.

Instead, you’ll simply seek to do great work.

Are you placing your professional confidence in what your executive says, or the quality of your work? When you ask for a compensation increase, will you base your business case on your executive’s subjective opinion, or on the objective data showing the quality of your work?

Be confident in your ability to figure things out (and be kind to yourself if you can't), your value as a human being (no matter what happens at work), and the quality of your work (not the amount of accolades you receive).

Let's shift our focus to humility—the deepest and strongest root of your confidence as a game-changing Leader Assistant.

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on your confidence by considering these questions:

Where do I lack confidence?

In what environments do I feel most confident?

Am I confident in some areas, but not others? Why?

Do I work to receive recognition, or because I enjoy the work?

[1 I was made aware of this wonderful thought from Sayers in Timothy Keller's book, Every Good Endeavor.](#)

] >

Six

6. Humble

An assistant leads in the trenches, working confidently yet humbly, side by side with their executive and peers, not exerting power or control, but influence and diplomacy.

—James S., Executive Assistant (Chicago, IL)

I like to think I'm a humble person. Then I remember the times I fail to be humble, or the times I'm humbled by my mistakes. Or how I much I like to pretend I'm right—even when I'm wrong. Did I mention how hard it is for me to listen to the feedback I receive from coworkers or podcast listeners?

Maybe I'm not so humble after all.

In fact, to keep my pride in check, let's kick off this chapter on humility with a humbling story of a time I made a mistake.

The Million-Dollar Typo

My executive and his business partner were looking to purchase a large office building. When they found one, I was one of four people responsible for editing the offer letter. We made several changes to it, reviewed it a few times, then sent it to the building owners. Our intent was to offer \$2.5 million, but thanks to a single typo, we offered \$3.5 million for the building.

There's nothing like the feeling of discovering you missed a million-dollar typo. I wasn't the only one to miss the error, but I still felt awful and completely responsible for missing it. After all, I'm the detail-oriented assistant who's supposed to catch these things.

After we corrected the error, I apologized to the parties involved, including my very upset executive. I had to be honest and admit I did not review the letter thoroughly, because I assumed the other parties involved would. It turned out OK in the end (the owners didn't want to sell the building), but I learned there's nothing more humbling than having to admit when you've made a mistake.

The truth is, it doesn't matter how confident or capable you are at doing your job—you will screw up. The question is, will you let your mistakes humble you so you can learn from them? Or will your pride get in the way of you becoming a humble leader?

Don't be afraid to admit when you make mistakes.

How Do You Receive Criticism?

Another way to gauge how humble you are—or aren't—is how you receive criticism from others. Do you get defensive as soon as someone suggests you make a change? When was the last time you applied even a small piece of constructive criticism you received? Humble assistants embrace vulnerability by laying down their defenses in the face of criticism.

Criticism stings. But there are things you can do to ease the pain. The next time someone criticizes you, tell them you appreciate their feedback. Let them know you're going to take some time to consider their thoughts. Then remove yourself from the situation. Take a walk, do something you feel confident in, or sleep on it before you come back to it. Remember: It's OK to be wrong or make mistakes, as long as you learn from it.

In new-teacher training, you learn that kids need to hear criticism sandwiched between positive reinforcement. Your critic might not do this, so do it for yourself. Tell yourself something positive you did, think about the criticism, and follow it with another positive.

When you're ready, engage in a thoughtful conversation with the other person. Of course, sometimes the criticism is unhelpful and not worth your time; a simple "Thanks for your note" is more than sufficient in these situations.

You can also head off the discomfort of negative feedback by asking for it. Our pride can't be bruised when we've already acknowledged our need to learn. Try asking, "What could I have done better?" to encourage constructive feedback, not just complaints.

Being humble means asking for, accepting, and applying feedback from others.

Think of Yourself Less

As you can see, criticism goes better when you start from a place of humility. So don't sit around waiting until you make a mistake or receive feedback to be humbled. Leaders actively pursue humility. As C. S. Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity*, the first step toward humility is acknowledging your pride:

“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

Here's a more succinct version of the above from Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*:

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

Devaluing yourself by seeing yourself as not worthy of recognition is not humility. It's false humility, also known as pride. When you're truly humble, you're driven by the work you do for others, not the recognition you receive from them. When recognition does come, you don't well up with pride—you well up with gratefulness.

Be grateful for any opportunity to help others. A Leader Assistant doesn't think, “How can this help me?” A Leader Assistant thinks, “How can I help?”

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF- REFLECTION

Reflect on your humility and pride by considering these questions:

What am I grateful for?

Where has my pride caused ungratefulness and slowed me down?

Where have I been prideful in the workplace?

How can I work to be more humble instead?

] >

Seven

7. Future-Proof

A Leader Assistant is calm, confident, astute, and uses their emotional intelligence to great effect.

—Alison K., Personal Assistant (London, United Kingdom)

Are you prepared for the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution? Should you be scared your job is going to be replaced by AI someday? Yes, and no. Have a healthy fear (i.e., reverence and respect) of AI and other technology, but don't let it keep you up at night.

More and more tasks are handled by machine learning algorithms and automated software. If you ignore this reality, you might not survive the AI revolution. We're a long way from being fully replaced by robots, but AI is infiltrating a growing number of industries and rapidly changing the way many of us work.

For example, I'm an assistant at Capacity—a SaaS company in St. Louis. Our secure, AI-native platform helps teams do their best work by automating key processes and reducing support ticket load. Our chatbot sits on top of the platform with state-of-the-art natural language processing so you don't have to know the precise way to ask for what you need—you just ask. If a coworker wants to know when my executive (our CEO) is free next, they can ask Capacity. If I'm on vacation and my executive is traveling, he can ask

Capacity for his airline rewards information, or he can ask for his plumber's phone number if a pipe bursts at his home.

Did you notice something? The tasks Capacity handles aren't ones that typically bring us joy and excitement. Imagine if you could spend more time solving real problems and creating amazing products instead of answering the same mundane questions over and over.

If you want to be a game-changing assistant, you can't let the fear of being replaced by AI paralyze you. Instead, explore how you can use the AI revolution to make yourself more valuable. Seek out tools that give you more time at work to do what you love and what really drives results.

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Assistants

I literally watch the AI revolution unfold at the desk across from me, and it can get overwhelming at times. You probably feel the same way when you read the latest article about artificial intelligence automating jobs. My executive puts it bluntly, "Automate before you're automated."

But there's good news: AI will never replace humans. In fact, the future of work is not AI versus humans; it's AI plus humans. It will continue to increase our capabilities and productivity.

However, though AI might not replace you, it could make your specific job obsolete. So be on the lookout for ways to reskill and upskill throughout your

career if you want to be a Leader Assistant. (I know a longtime assistant who became a knowledge management expert at her company during a major reorg. It was a perfect example of embracing the need to reskill.)

The following four tactics will help you automate and prepare for the future of work.

1. Be an Early Adopter

The first way to future-proof your career is to learn about and use new technology as it becomes available—or even better, before it becomes available to the rest of the world. Be an early adopter. Get your hands on the latest software and tools that could help you with some aspect of your job. How? Sign up for free trials, join beta tests, or apply to be a guinea pig for your friend's new project.

Maybe it's exploring an AI platform like Capacity that can schedule meetings, automate onboarding processes, mine policy documents, and answer FAQs. Maybe it's testing an automation tool that can help you quickly audit your executive's time, so you can be more strategic with their schedule. (In chapter 10, we'll look at tracking your executive's time). Or maybe it's something as simple as using Google Assistant, Alexa, or Siri to set reminders. Whatever it is, be on the hunt for opportunities to use technology that's shaping the future.

If you aren't sure where to look for opportunities to be an early adopter, start by educating yourself. Take a course on artificial intelligence. Listen to a podcast dedicated to machine learning. Read books and articles about the

future of work. If you'd like some guidance, I put together a guide at leaderassistantbook.com/bonus to help you kick off your AI learning adventure.

2. Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

Keeping your human-only skills sharp is another way to future-proof your career. You might be up to speed on all the latest and greatest software, hip to modern business tactics, and crushing it with your leadership skills. But how emotionally aware are you? Can you control the way you express your emotions? Are you able to process the varying emotions you feel? Can you handle relationships empathetically? What have you done to develop your emotional intelligence?

Here are some game-changing tactics you can employ to cultivate your emotional intelligence.

Respond, Don't React, to Conflict

To react is to let your emotions get the best of you. When you react to conflict, you say something you'll regret.

To respond is to control your emotions, consider the situation, and think about what you're going to say before you say it. When you respond to

conflict, you put yourself in the other person's shoes, and thoughtfully share your opinions or suggest a solution.

My dad and I like to face conflict head-on. Growing up, we would yell at each other, talk things through, work things out, and by the end of our heated conversation, the conflict typically would be resolved. One of my former executives dealt with conflict in this way too. If we had a disagreement, we'd react to it ASAP—sometimes loudly—work through it, and move on.

One day, Meg and I were in the middle of a disagreement with her parents. Instead of responding to that specific conflict in a calm and collected manner, I did what I had grown up doing. I let my emotions get the best of me and lashed out at my father-in-law with my opinion and a few choice words. As you can imagine, my reaction did not invite my in-laws to engage in further discussion. I didn't resolve the conflict—I escalated it.

A blowup like this would've sparked a genuine conversation with my dad or former executive. With my father-in-law, it built a wall between us. In other words, I was not emotionally intelligent in that moment. I was quite the opposite.

Game-changing, confident Leader Assistants learn to respond to conflict at work, not react.

Be Intentional with Your Vocabulary

Do you think about what you're going to say before you say it? Do you consider whether your words are constructive or destructive? Is your vocabulary vague and full of complaining, or are you specific and helpful?

For example, there's a difference between saying your coworker Jeff is "a bad team member" and saying, "When Jeff shows up late to most meetings, it communicates to the rest of the team that he doesn't value us or respect our time."

Be intentional and thoughtful with your vocabulary. One way to practice this is to write out what you're going to say before you say it. Then read it out loud to hear how your tone comes across.

Process Your Emotions

The ability to process your feelings is critical to developing emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, I'm terrible at this. I have a tendency to bury my emotions instead of questioning why I'm feeling them. If I'm sad, I shrug it off and tell myself to get over it. If I'm angry, I lash out without exploring why I felt the need to lash out.

Meg and our counselor have helped me become more self-aware by encouraging me to question the motives behind what I say and do. Why did I gossip about my coworker at lunch or send that scathing email? Was it because I wanted attention? If so, why did I want attention? Or was I afraid to talk to them directly because I have a fear of conflict?

Processing my own emotions is still a battle for me. But discovering and naming the motives behind my emotions has helped me develop self-awareness.

Be Empathetic

Processing your emotions will help you practice empathy toward others. If a coworker is struggling to produce, put yourself in their shoes. Did they recently experience a difficult personal event? Did they just get a new supervisor? Are they simply having a bad day? Empathize with others.

Robots will never know what it's like to be human. They'll never be able to feel your pain, experience your joy, or know how badly you miss a loved one. They'll never be as intuitive as an emotionally aware human being.

AI won't ask how your elderly father is holding up after his hip replacement. A chatbot won't be sensitive to the fact that you were crying in the break room because your cat died. A robot can't offer you a ride when your car breaks down. (OK, maybe in some places it can, but you get the idea.)

Treat humans like they're people who matter, because they are people, and they do matter. When companies look to trim their head count during a recession, they'll first look at productivity and business impact. But when they're forced to choose between two equally productive team members, they'll pick the more empathetic employee nine times out of ten.

3. Look for (the Right) Problems and Suggest Solutions

The next way to prepare for the future of work is to look for problems others have yet to solve. As an assistant, you see the good, the bad, and the ugly in your organization. You can complain about what's wrong and let other people figure things out. Or you can use the unique vantage point you have to identify problems and suggest solutions. If you're a self-motivated problem solver who constantly brings solutions to the table, you won't be replaced by AI someday.

But being future-proof is not just about solving problems. It's about identifying the right problems. In fact, it's more valuable to suggest the wrong solution to the right problem than it is to provide an amazing solution to the wrong problem.

“But how can I identify the right problems, Jeremy?” I'm glad you asked.

Start with what keeps your executive up at night. What are they concerned about? Look for ways you can alleviate those concerns. Shift your focus toward the issues on their mind. In chapter 21, I share several questions to ask your executive that will help you pinpoint problems worth solving.

Time spent addressing the wrong problem is a waste of time. But repeatedly failing to conquer the right problem is sometimes the only path to progress. Thomas Edison famously said, “I have not failed. I've just found ten thousand ways that won't work.” You might as well find the solutions that won't work

to help your executive more quickly discover the right solution for the right problem.

4. Be a Revenue Generator

If you want to be future-proof, be one of the best salespeople in your company. Always be on the lookout for ways to impact the bottom line. If your company fails to increase revenue or raise enough money, you and your coworkers will be out of work, so don't sit around waiting for tasks to hit your inbox.

If you've never seen yourself as a revenue generator, it's time to change your perspective. (This still applies to you if you work at a nonprofit, by the way, so don't skip ahead.) Future-proof assistants lead by example and get those around them excited to help their company grow. If you're not excited to help your organization grow, and don't believe in what they're doing, figure out why quick.

There are a few ways to step up your sales game.

First, know your company's mission, vision, and sales pitch like the back of your hand. If you don't know it, invite yourself to sales meetings so you can soak up the info. Learn how to give the pitch yourself by reading all the onboarding guides for account executives. Read the fundraising prospectus your executive just asked you to send to potential donors. The goal is to confidently and succinctly describe your organization's mission and/or product to a stranger on an elevator, or to that business-owner friend who could be a future customer.

Speaking of friends who run a business, I sourced and helped close our young startup's first multiyear contract—with a company run by a friend of mine. I'm not sharing this to gloat. I'm sharing this as a challenge to you.

Who do you know that could benefit from your company's product or service? Take them to lunch and see what happens. If you believe in what your organization is doing, why not share it with your network?

Second, grow your influence to increase your company's brand awareness. One of Capacity's sales team members sent me an email from an assistant in my network. This assistant was going to delete a sales email she received from Capacity, but because she follows me on LinkedIn and appreciates what I do for the assistant community, she forwarded the email to her executive.

My influence directly helped our sales team. In chapter 20, we'll look at ways you can grow your influence and, in turn, build trust and credibility for your organization's brand.

Another way to step up your sales game is to study the psychology of sales. Learn to listen to and understand a potential customer's pain points. Be ready and able to clearly articulate how your company's product is uniquely designed to solve their problem. Learn why people buy, not just what they buy. To begin your quest to become the best salesperson in your organization, read top sales resources like my friend Mike Weinberg's amazing books.

If you want to be future-proof, start seeing yourself as a revenue-generating member of the sales team. It's always nice to have sourced, or even closed, a few deals when it comes time to ask for a raise. There's nothing like directly impacting a revenue increase to improve your fellow team members' job security and support your case for a salary increase. Not to mention, when a recession hits and your company is forced to cut costs, they're going to think twice before letting go of a revenue generator.

To recap, here are four ways to future-proof your career:

Be an Early Adopter

Develop Your Emotional Intelligence

Look for (the Right) Problems and Suggest Solutions
Be a Revenue Generator

Your future is in your hands. You can wait until your company automates most of your job. Or you can creatively figure out how to use AI to automate the repetitive, manual processes you manage day in and day out. You can then gather real data on how much time and money you're saving your executive and company. Not to mention, you'll be freed up to focus on higher-value work.

Don't sit on your hands while the world moves forward. Embrace the future of work.

Five Things a Robot Assistant Can't Do

I'm a practical guy who likes examples, so I thought I'd close this chapter with a list of five things robots will never be able to do for you—at least not at the same nuanced, intuitive level that you can.

Run a meeting on your executive's behalf.

Recognize that your executive is running out of steam and needs a few days off.

Call a client, kindly explain to them how your company screwed up, and answer any questions they have.

Give a genuine hug to a coworker who just lost their dog to cancer.

Make an intuitive decision about which applicant to hire based on a five-minute, in-person interaction.

Do you want to position yourself amid the AI revolution? Be more human.

GAME-CHANGING QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Reflect on how future-proof you are by considering these questions:

What problems have I identified at work that I could propose solutions for in the coming days?

How have I developed my emotional intelligence?
When was the last time I reacted instead of responding?

Do I see myself as someone who can directly impact the bottom line? If not, why?

Which manual processes can I automate in my work?