

# Be willing to work from the bottom

In our latest Q&A with a member of the Exeter PA Network, **Alison Reid** tells us about her role as PA to the South West operations director at property consultants NPS Group



## **What are the best and most challenging things about your job?**

I have been working for NPS South West for eight years, and been in my current PA position for three years. I love the versatility of my role, knowing that on the whole most days will be different. Some are more challenging than others, but it's never quiet.

My main role is supporting the operations director and senior management team in the Exeter office, but I also provide a light virtual PA service to the group operations director and the strategic operations team, who are mostly based in Norwich.

Supporting more than one person means that my 'To Do' list which I update at the end of each day is invaluable. This acts as my prompt each morning to make sure that things are prioritised correctly, as I often I have many tasks waiting on information from others before I can move them on.

## **What's the biggest misconception people have about life as a PA?**

The role of a PA has evolved considerably and it is no longer just the stereotypical typing, answering the phone and coffee making. There is a misconception that these are the only tasks performed, which is a shame.

## **Describe a typical day at work**

My day always begins with a quick look at my To Do list and scan of directors' calendars to make sure I am up to date with where they are that day. I have a meeting every Monday morning with my boss to run through his calendar and discuss any tasks or issues either of us may have.

Communication is one of the vital parts of being able to provide good support for a busy boss!

The rest of my day may involve travel/hotel bookings, arranging meetings, collating papers, minutes, updating organograms and distribution lists, credit card reconciliation, research, uploading to the website and more.

I also coordinate the work experience students. We have had eight this summer and I try to make their experience as valuable and enjoyable as possible.

We have monthly senior management team meetings and quarterly board meetings for which I arrange, collate the reports, and take minutes. Other elements of my role include areas of HR, marketing and corporate social responsibility.

## **What are the key skills or qualities needed to be successful?**

I think the ability to multi-task is key to being a successful PA along with good communication and organisational skills. I am very much a people person - I love seeing people enjoy themselves, probably the reason I was asked to take on the role of organising the staff social events and fundraising, which I try to vary and keep as regular as possible. This can be time consuming.

## **Why did you join the Exeter PA Network and how beneficial have you found it?**

I joined the Exeter PA Network just over two years ago after hearing about it from a previous PA who had attended a couple of events. As the only PA in our South West office it is nice to be able to chat to others from different companies in a relaxed, friendly environment - an excellent and fun way to network.

You can soundboard ideas as well as swap advice, and with the many speakers on various topics at events, you are continuously learning something new, which is refreshing. I have now found myself more actively involved in the events and fundraising side of the network which I really enjoy, although I have yet to be persuaded to run for money!

## **Do you have any advice for someone considering becoming a PA?**

For anyone interested in pursuing a career as a PA, they should be willing to work from the bottom, and always be keen to take on new tasks, however daunting they may be. It's the best way to gain valuable experience.

This gives an excellent grounding in admin, which together with communication and a willing attitude is the key to being productive and organised.

*The Exeter PA Network, the only group of its kind in the city, has grown from strength to strength since it was established in 2012 and now has 500 members from a variety of support roles from organisations across the region. Founded by Kim Glover, executive assistant to the managing partner at Michelmores LLP, the network provides training and development opportunities to PAs and support staff to help them reach their full potential. For more information on becoming a member, contact Rebecca Eccles on [rebecca.eccles@michelmores.com](mailto:rebecca.eccles@michelmores.com) or 01392 688688, or visit [michelmores.com/events](http://michelmores.com/events)*