

# PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

October/November 2021

**What it takes to be a successful secretary**

**Workers feel more trusted and motivated thanks to hybrid working**

**6 common scams that target Small Businesses**

**Conscientiousness: signs you have the Big 5 personality trait**

**Flexible working revolution remains a work in progress**

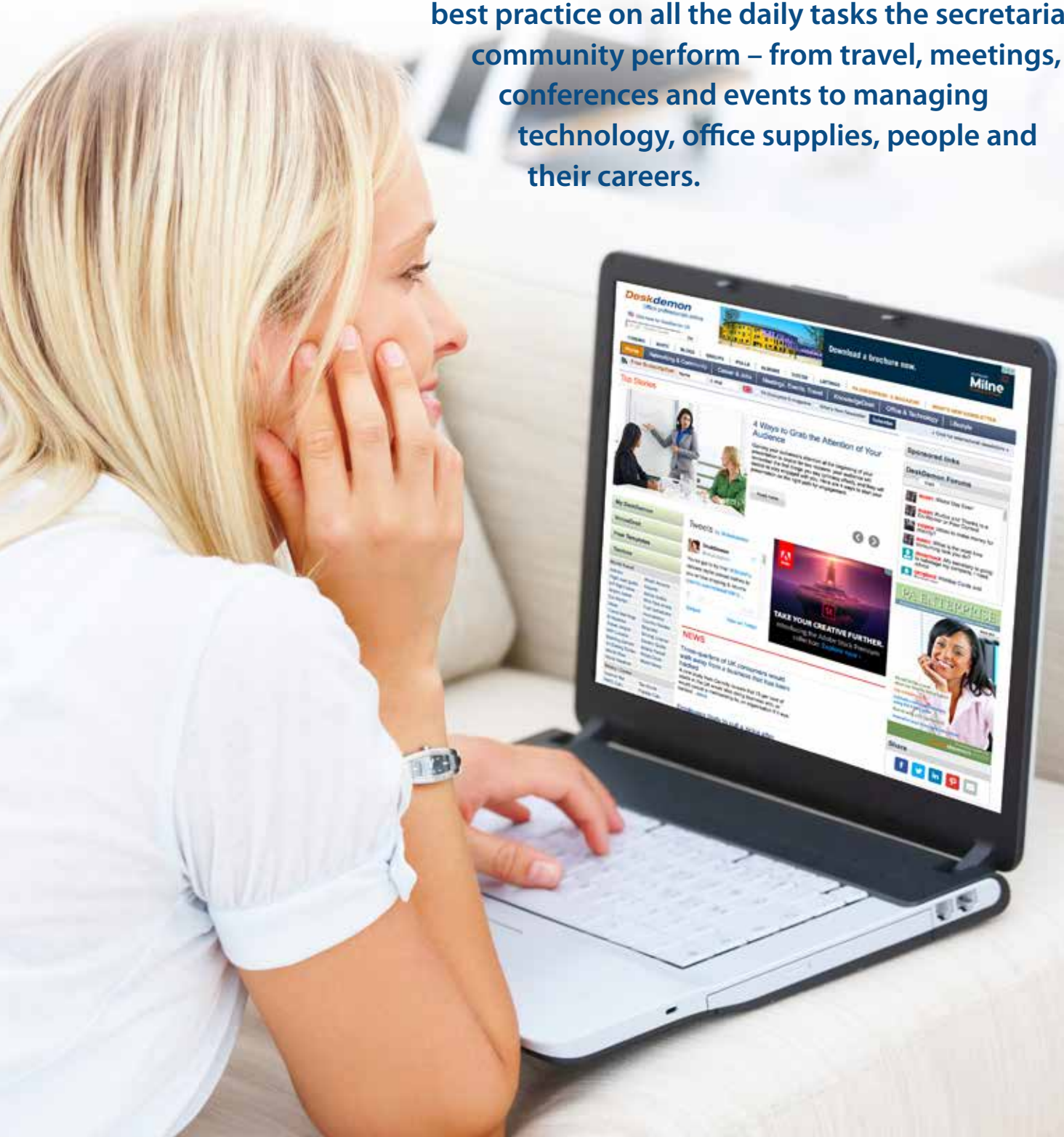
**Communication skills for workplace success**

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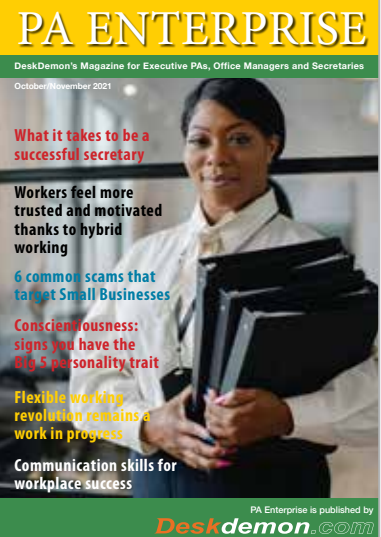
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# What it takes to be a successful secretary

*It's often said that an executive is only as good as their secretary, executive assistant or personal assistant. Handling the day-to-day administration for a person, team or network, a secretary is the "eyes and ears" of a company, privy to unique and powerful insights about the company culture, performance and future direction. It can be a rewarding and exciting career path for any professional.*

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What does it take to be a successful secretary? It's important to understand everything that's expected from you in the role, seek opportunities to go above and beyond and continuously upskill, keep up with new software and technology, honing organisational skills and increasing overall knowledge related to the industry that you are in.

Qualities that make a good secretary

A good secretary has various qualities - both hard and soft skills that help them succeed in a role. These qualities can be learned and developed with a little bit of dedication. These are just a few of them:

- **Organisational skills:** a strong ability to be organised, keep a clear head and keep track of everything from deadlines to essential files.
- **Professional communication skills:** clear and friendly communication, along with a personable phone manner.
- **Initiative and drive:** the ability to take the initiative, work independently and seek out new opportunities.
- **IT literacy:** knowledge of software such as Microsoft Office Suite, Outlook, Adobe Programs and typing skills is required. A bonus would be knowing about other softwares that could help with the day-to-day work.
- **Honesty and discretion:** A secretary often handles expenses, petty cash and other sensitive topics, it's important that employers can trust a secretary fully.
- **Time-management skills:** Working on several projects means a lot of multitasking. This requires the ability to manage your own time and ensure that you can deliver on timelines.
- **Being a team player:** better if you have a flair for championing a teamwork ethic and fostering teamwork within a team.
- **Remaining calm under pressure:** an ability to cope with stress, deadlines and multitasking, often dealing with several stakeholders at once.

- **Professionalism:** a skill needed for dealing with internal and external stakeholders.
- **Project management skills:** skilled at managing all the moving parts of any given project.

Besides these soft skills, most employers expect a secretary to be educated to at least matriculation-level, followed by secretarial training. Typing speed is an important skill for many employers. If you can touch-type, your speed will improve the more typing you do – you'll need to be able to type anywhere from 55 to 80 words per minute, and faster is always better.

## What are the characteristics of a good secretary?

### Learn to anticipate needs

The most successful secretaries work towards helping others when they ask for it, then anticipate what might be needed for the future. Be proactive and search out ways to anticipate requests and needs from others. Paying attention to detail on assigned tasks can help you anticipate what will be needed in the future.

### Be meticulously organised

This one is important both for yourself, while juggling multiple tasks and for others that you are working on. Come up with various systems to stay organised, whether handwritten or using organisational technology. Being organised is especially helpful if part of your job includes making travel arrangements, managing people's schedules, or organising multiple events.

### Keep detailed notes

In meetings or on phone calls, keep detailed notes on what is said and requested for later reference. Keeping these notes for reference will mean that you have your finger on the pulse of what's going on - and will be seen as the go-to person to get the details that others may have overlooked or forgotten.

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### Focus on clear communication

Work on your communication skills to communicate directly, clearly and with intent to any stakeholders you interact with. Being able to write a concise email and speak well both internally and externally will be a huge advantage, given that a large part of your job is about communicating effectively.

### What does a secretary do?

There will always be different elements to each secretary's job description. However, generally speaking, a secretary is responsible for supporting various aspects of the business, often taking care of administrative tasks from taking meeting notes to managing schedules, organising events or making travel arrangements.

It is a varied role and depends a lot on whom the secretary is supporting and what type of company they are working for. Given that broad job description, one of the most valuable assets a secretary or business support professional can have is the ability to think on their feet.

Secretarial and business support work is demanding and requires someone who can wear multiple hats and multitask well.

### What does the career path for a secretary look like?

An ambitious secretary can refresh their career every couple of years, once they have mastered the latest role and developed it. This is the perfect time to take on more responsibility, developing the project management and supervisory aspects of a role.

Entry-level secretarial jobs generally have lots of room for growth, and a secretary can evolve into being an administrative assistant, executive assistant, office manager, administrative coordinator or other senior administrative roles. With specialised knowledge of a department, industry or company, effective secretaries should see themselves moving up an exciting career path.

The alternative is to make a lateral move within an organisation to other departments or look to new pastures for the following external challenge. Project management and human resources are two sectors that many secretaries find themselves well-prepared for with transferable skills sets.

### Focus on commitment and resilience

Employers look for stability on a secretary's CV. This demonstrates highly prized attributes like resilience, the ability to make considered choices, commitment and reliability.

Choosing a career path as a secretary can be fulfilling, and successful secretaries often become essential parts of the organisation.

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# Workers feel more trusted and motivated thanks to hybrid working

New research from Kadence has revealed that after a year of flexible working, almost two-thirds of US and UK office workers (62%) now feel more trusted to do their job effectively. Of those workers, half also feel more motivated to do a better quality job (51%) and go the extra mile (48%) thanks to their new working arrangements.

Data from future of work specialist Kadence suggests employees are working more productively and efficiently thanks to the greater flexibility of time and place they've experienced outside of the traditional office. More than six in 10 workers said they feel an increased sense of trust because they're not micromanaged as much as before the pandemic (64%) and are more free to do their work in a time that suits them best (63%).

As workers embrace hybrid and flexible approaches to work, businesses need to support their staff to foster an appropriate work-life balance. Of the 2,000 workers surveyed, close to three-quarters (74%) reported an increase in their use of online communication tools, not only during their contracted working hours but outside of them too (71%).

31% have found that the prolonged use of these tools leaves them with less desire to socialise with friends and family after work, and makes it harder to communicate in real life.

True hybrid working, which strikes the right balance between remote and face-to-face time, could help to retain the productivity benefits of being at home, while tackling the habits that lead to burnout, like the overuse of technology. In fact, over half of workers said they would prefer face-to-face meetings at least once a week (51%), and would rather have them in the office (52%). Having the tools to find and book



meeting spaces easily was also a priority (40%).

Dan Bladen, CEO and founder of Kadence comments: "It's clear that a culture of trust is needed for businesses and individuals to thrive as we shift to hybrid ways of working. Employers must move beyond physical location and shape the future of work with employee experience in mind, ensuring it's easy to coordinate remote and in-person time and that staff have resources tailored to their needs.

"As offices open up, business owners should pay attention to the evolving needs and behaviours of their employees to understand how individuals prefer to work and where they flourish, so they can create a supportive hybrid environment. This also means encouraging a balance, where employees work productively but also know when to stop, to prevent burnout.

"The pandemic proved that it's possible for workers to be productive anywhere. Now it's up to businesses to design work around their people, maintaining the flexibility they've become accustomed to, and enabling them to get the best work done, wherever they choose."

# 6 common scams that target Small Businesses

*Cyber fraud is a major threat for small businesses. Here are six of the most common cyber fraud schemes that target small businesses, and tips on how to avoid getting compromised by these attacks.*



SCAM  
ALERT

Cybersecurity is crucial for large corporations. Everyone hears about it when large companies like Target and Home Depot are victims of data breaches, but when small business security is breached, it rarely makes the headlines. However, 43 percent of cyberattack victims are small businesses with fewer than 250 employees, according to the 2019 Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report. That means your business

is potentially a target of cybercriminals, and they are getting better at tricking business owners and their employees.

The first line of defense is to be aware of the ways scammers may conspire against your business. Here are six of the most common cyber fraud schemes that target small businesses, and tips on how to avoid falling prey to these attacks.



## Phishing

How it works: Imagine that an employee who handles purchasing for your business receives an email that appears to be from your company's vice president. The email requests that the employee order a new laptop and have it shipped to an unfamiliar address. Because the email appears to come from an executive team member, the employee follows the request and inadvertently purchases and ships a new computer to a thief.

Phishing emails are targeted emails that appear to come from official accounts, clients, and stakeholders. They are intended to trick recipients into sending money, expensive items, or personally identifiable information. That sensitive information may include Social Security numbers, birth dates, gym membership information, and other data that makes it easy to commit identity theft. In many cases, these emails appear to come from higher management requesting that HR personnel send personal information (think W-2's). This provides thieves with enough information to steal employees' identities and damage their finances.

How to avoid it: Train employees to recognize fraudulent emails. In many cases, phishing emails will contain grammar mistakes and spelling errors, or logos and other graphics that look a little off. Also, instruct employees to check with the supposed sender before providing sensitive information or valuable property. All employees should be instructed to verify any request via trusted communications channels, such as a phone call or originating a new email to the person's company email address, or looping in someone from legal to review the request.

Frequently, phishing emails will come from an email address that looks very similar to the legitimate email address, with one or two different letters. Instruct employees to review the email address when they receive sensitive requests carefully.

## Fake invoices

How it works: Your accounts payable employee receives an invoice for a load of boxes and other shipping supplies. She knows that your warehouse regularly orders shipping supplies. So even though she doesn't recognize the vendor, she assumes the invoice is legitimate and pays it. However, the invoice was from a scammer who has never sold anything to your business, and they just made several hundred dollars off your business.

When scammers send fake invoices charging you for services or items you never received, they take a bet that whoever pays won't check the bill before paying. They may also make an invoice for the types of materials or supplies you would usually purchase, so it doesn't look suspicious.

How to avoid it: Make sure to review each invoice for legitimacy, and never pay unless the charges are verified. Train your staffers to do the same thing. Even if the invoice appears to come from a trusted vendor if it has a different address than the one you usually remit to, call the vendor to verify. Find the vendor's number on previously approved invoices or online to ensure that you are not being redirected to the scammer's phone number.

Also, make sure your business has clear procedures for processing and paying all invoices. For instance, the person who ordered the supplies or services should be required to verify the invoice before the accounts payable department can pay it.

## ACH and wire transfer fraud

How it works: ACH transactions and wire transfers are the quickest ways to send cash, and scammers are taking advantage of these transactions to steal from bank accounts. Cybercriminals use phishing emails, compromised websites, and malware to steal

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bank login credentials. Cyberattackers then use those credentials to transfer money out of victims' bank accounts and into their account, which is often overseas where funds can't be recovered.

**How to avoid it:** Make sure staffers use the strategies they would use to prevent phishing attacks. This includes watching out for inconsistencies in email addresses or domain names or unusual language in emails. Before approving a wire transfer or ACH transaction, always call a phone number you trust, such as your bank, and talk to someone who has been working with you. Also, instruct your bookkeeping staff to reconcile transactions daily to identify and return any unauthorized ACH debits. You and your team could also consider blocking all ACH debits.

### Unordered office supplies

**How it works:** Picture this: A person claiming to be a vendor may call to "verify" a supply order and your address. After talking with you, they send supplies or equipment you didn't order and demand you pay for it. When you protest, they present a recording of your conversation, which includes you verifying your address, as proof that you "ordered" the supplies.

**How to avoid it:** If you receive merchandise you didn't order, you can legally keep it for free. But you can prevent the appearance of ordering unwanted merchandise by directing all calls about orders to one person or department who handles and tracks all orders.

### Ransomware

**How it works:** A staff member clicks a link in a fraudulent email or opens a fraudulent attachment, which causes your system to lock up. Then the fraudster demands that you pay a ransom to have it unlocked to regain access to your files.

**How to avoid it:** Train staff members to detect

fraudulent emails. Also, make sure all of your computers and devices are running with the most updated software and operating systems. These updates are necessary to combat the latest bugs, including ransomware. Also, use virus protection software that includes protection for ransomware, and keep it updated. Implement strong spam filters and only allow access to sensitive information for those staffers who need it.

If you get locked out of your computer, first look online to see if there are decryption tools available for the ransomware you've acquired. Sometimes, the details of the ransomware have been leaked, and good guys have already developed a fix. If not, you can pay the ransom, but there's no guarantee that you'll get your files back or that they won't be damaged. When you pay the ransom, you are funding a criminal's business model. Some experts recommend simply recreating the files you can and moving forward.

### Government agency impostor scams

**How it works:** You receive a phone call from someone posing as a representative of law enforcement or other government agency. They threaten to impose fines, suspend your business license, or take legal action.

**How to avoid it:** Rather than getting worried that you've missed an outstanding payment, write down the information the caller gives you. Then tell them you'll call back. Most scammers will do everything they can to keep you on the phone and get a credit card payment. Don't fall for it.

Before paying any money to a supposed government agency, call the number for the agency listed in your local directory and verify the charges. Visit in person if possible and never send money via wire transfer or gift card.

Following these tips can help you to ensure that your business stays safe from any hackers or any malicious attacks.



# Levelling up

*Levelling up the UK will take years, be costly and likely cause job losses if not carefully prepared and managed, says expert*

The government's move towards an economy with high-skill, high-wage and high productivity will likely cause economic disruptions and job losses if the government is not preparing and organizing the transition, according to an expert from Durham University Business School.

Professor Bernd Brandl, who for years has researched the governance of wages, skills, and productivity in different countries, and what the role of interest organizations is in the governance has examined the consequences of the government's transition on the economy, businesses and workers.

Professor Brandl says that this move may be highly beneficial for businesses and workers in the long run, however, without planning, it will cause painful disruptions over the next few years as the change will not be quick, and could take years or even decades for some businesses. In the short run, many existing companies will not be able to afford higher wages and go bust, causing job losses and industrial conflict. In the long-run the economy could benefit because more productive, skill-driven and innovative companies would be able to succeed on the market.

However, the success of a successful transition is not be taken for granted but needs to be accompanied by policies that support business and workers. A smooth transition will be costly for the government due to the need to invest in infrastructure and training facilities.

"Many British businesses have been previously running on a low-wage, low-skill, low-productivity business model, due to two main reasons; in the past decades there was a constant

influx of migrant worker who were willing to accept low(er) wages, and second, apart from the minimum wage, there was almost nothing in place that prevented companies from keeping wages low." Therefore, many businesses competed with each other by keeping wages and working conditions low and they had little incentives to invest in skills of their employees in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Now the new economic vision of the PM looks to replace mass immigration with higher wages and better working conditions to encourage people into key sectors under the guise of moving the British economy "towards a high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity economy", in which "everyone can take pride in their work and the quality of their work".

Professor Brandl says there are three key elements to make the transition work. The first is patience, the transition could take years for some sectors, and even decades for others, it's not a quick change. Secondly, the transition is costly and the government must be prepared to invest in infrastructure and training facilities. Thirdly, the process is likely to be painful for many business and workers since there will likely be job losses and social disruptions in the years ahead.

However, in order to accelerate and facilitate the transition the government should manage and coordinate the transition process. Preferably together with representatives from employers and employees so that no one is left out and the expertise of everyone is taken on board. The way how the government manages the transition will also show how conflictual the years ahead will be since the transition could be socially and economically cushioned.



Therefore, Professor Brandl states that the transition of the British economy “towards a high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity economy” is not as easy as it looks and might lead to substantial disruptions and conflicts in the years ahead. The transition process can be expected to be time-consuming, costly and likely to cause some damage in the short-term. However, in the long-run it could be highly beneficial for businesses and workers.

Professor Brandl says “it takes a lot of “guts” for the government to initiate this move since voters in the next election might go to the ballots on basis of the short-term pain they already see instead of considering the long-term gains.”

This research was carried out through Professor Brandl’s investigation of how and why countries operate in different skilled models, and the effects of collective wage bargaining on wages, skills and productivity in a country.

# Flexible working revolution remains a work in progress

*Employers have yet to adapt to the flexible working revolution sweeping through the UK's offices, new research has shown.*

More than 1,000 office workers across the UK were surveyed in August to understand how well prepared employees and organisations felt for their widespread return to the workplace this autumn, and how flexible working practices – where staff time is split between working from home and from the office – were playing out.

Just 22% of participants reported that their offices had been redesigned to support hybrid working, and only 7% had received training in managing or participating in hybrid meetings, indicating a training gap for effective hybrid working and hybrid meeting management.

The majority [of employers] are developing systems and practices as they go along rather than taking a planned, systematic approach.

While most participants reported flexible working patterns at their workplace, only 31% were aware of a formal flexi-hours policy in their organization, and just 21% knew of a formal hybrid working policy.

The research raises the prospect of significant disruption and change in UK workplaces in the coming months as employers adapt to the biggest shake-up of office work in decades, with findings being a part of a major research project being undertaken by Leeds University Business School on changes in the workplace as

the UK emerges from COVID-19.

Dr Matthew Davis of Leeds University Business School said: "As COVID-19 social distancing restrictions have lifted, many of us are working flexibly; splitting our time in the office and at home. But this survey shows that employers are feeling their way through these changes – the majority are developing systems and practices as they go along rather than taking a planned, systematic approach. This is likely to lead to more disruption and change as employers establish what works and what doesn't."

## **'Hot desking'**

The Leeds research also underlined the unpopularity of "hot desking", where office workers share desks. More than 80% of interviewees said that they wanted to have an assigned desk rather than sharing with others.

Dr Davis said: "It's well known that hot desking isn't particularly popular, but the argument has previously been made that employees will grow to like hot desking given more time. Our survey suggests this is not the case – 43% of those we spoke to were already in workplaces where hot desking was used and still didn't like it. This shows the need for change management and selling the vision of what hybrid workplaces provide to offset loss of personal space."



### Key findings also included:

- Office workers expressed a preference for working more often from the office (average of 2.7 days per week) than from home (average of 2.1 days per week).
- When asked about the prospect of working in the office, 33% never wanted to work in the office, 37% said that they wanted to work there five days a week, while 30% wished for some level of a hybrid work pattern (between one and four days from home).
- 28% of workers never, or only occasionally, had access to a quiet workspace at home, with 36% not having a dedicated workspace at home and instead working from dining tables, living spaces or even their beds.

Dr Davis said that the findings indicated the complexity of trying to manage the move to flexible working, and trying to accommodate employees' competing expectations about work.

He said: "After 18 months of home working due to COVID-19, many of us have understandably developed a rhythm of work that suits us. But as we learn to live with COVID-19, we need to look at the bigger picture and recognise that getting people back into the office – at least on a part-time basis - brings many benefits. Boundaries need to be placed around homeworking and there needs to be grown-up, honest conversations about how we adapt to this new world."

[www.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.leeds.ac.uk)

# Nearly 75% of people still want the option to set their own contactless limit

*A recent study by KIS Finance has revealed some interesting statistics in relation to the limit for contactless payments increasing to £100 today.*

## Key Statistics:

- 73.1% of people want the option to set their own contactless limit.
- 44.8% of people are happy for the contactless limit to increase to £100.
- 38.1% of people think that the contactless limit should be kept at £45.
- 12.2% of people think that the contactless limit should have been kept at £30.
- Less than 1% of people would be happy for the contactless limit to go above £100/ become limitless.

Today, the limit for contactless payments has increased from £45 to £100 per transaction. The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has stated that this “will make it easier than ever to pay safely and securely” as well as providing a welcome boost for retailers and shoppers after a very difficult year for the economy.

Contactless card payments were introduced in 2007, with a limit of £10 per transaction. The limit has been raised gradually over the years with an increase to £20 being made in 2012 and then to £30 in 2015.

At the start of the pandemic in 2020, shoppers

were encouraged to only use card payments in shops, due to hygiene reasons, with some smaller retailers not allowing any cash payments at all. This change in spending behaviour prompted the government to make card transactions even easier by raising the limit to £45.

## Should banks give customers the option to set their own spending limits?

The survey results send a very clear message that customers want the option to set their own contactless limits. Nearly three quarters (73.1%) of people said that they want their bank to introduce this option, rather than the limit automatically increasing to £100.

Currently only the Lloyds Banking Group (Lloyds Bank, Halifax, and Bank of Scotland) and Starling Bank have introduced personalised contactless limits which can be controlled through their apps. Some banks, such as HSBC and Nationwide will give their customers the ability to request a non-contactless card but others have no plans to introduce either function.

The two main reasons that people provided for wanting to set their own limit were:

- To control spending (47.1%)
- Concerns over card theft (33.5%)
- Other (19.4%)





Holly Andrews, Managing Director at KIS Finance says:

“While many are happy for the contactless limit to increase to £100, the vast majority of shoppers want to be able to set their own limit.

When asked for their reasons why, almost 50% of people stated that they want to be able to control their own finances as they fear a limit so high could see spending get out of hand.

For those who have a tendency to make impulse purchases on a regular basis, contactless cards make this kind of spending even easier. When you have to enter your PIN number, you have a moment to stop and think and realise what you’re doing. When you pay with cash, you can see the money physically leaving your hand. Using a contactless card is a completely mindless process.

With £100 as the new limit, shoppers could see spending rack up a lot faster than they’re used to, especially as we head towards the festive season.

Concerns over an increase in card theft are also shared by a great number of shoppers. With the cumulative cap for contactless payments rising to £00 on 15th October, this could see criminals spend hundreds of pounds before the victim even realises that their card is missing.

As people try to regain control over their finances after a very difficult year, we need to see every bank introducing personalised contactless limits, making it an industry standard. Increasing the contactless limit to £100 for customers who are already in their overdrafts and/or regularly relying on credit cards for every day spending could have a detrimental effect.”

# Conscientiousness:

## signs you have the Big 5 personality trait

*According to the highly regarded Big 5 personality test, an individual's personality is defined by five traits, one of which is conscientiousness. People who display conscientious qualities are typically hard workers and make good team players, which makes them highly sought after in the workplace.*

In this article, we explore the characteristics of a conscientious person, explain how you can develop this marketable quality and look at some jobs that typically require high conscientiousness.

### What is conscientiousness?

Conscientiousness is essentially a form of awareness. Conscientious individuals are typically well organized, plan their time carefully and demonstrate self-control. They're also highly efficient, ensuring that each moment of their time is put to the best possible use. Some people have a natural tendency to be conscientious, but with practice and patience, anyone can develop many of the characteristics associated with conscientious people.

### What are the benefits of conscientiousness?

**There are many benefits to being conscientious, including:**

- **Ambitious goal setting:** If you are a conscientious person, you usually have a strong desire to complete objectives, no matter how big or small.
- **Improved accuracy and comprehensiveness in work:** Conscientious people are extremely detail-oriented. They rarely make mistakes or overlook important information.
- **Increased likelihood for advancement:** These individuals are more likely to be trusted with important tasks, which may lead to raises and promotions.

- **Healthy habits:** If a person is conscientious, they are more likely to pay attention to what they eat, when they exercise and how much sleep they get. Being healthy can increase your alertness, mental ability and productivity, which can positively impact an individual's work.
- **Effective decision-making:** Those who are conscientious typically think through decisions before they act. They consider all the potential consequences of their actions and safeguard against any negative outcomes. This kind of critical thinking is a highly desirable soft skill among employers.

### Characteristics of conscientious people

**Conscientious people may demonstrate the following characteristics:**

- **Commitment:** Those who are conscientious make a plan and stick to it. They may even find it fulfilling to work through a to-do list. Commitment includes showing up early and possibly leaving late in order to get everything finished on time.
- **Efficiency:** Conscientious people strive to avoid waste of both time and resources. They do so by trying to find the most elegant solution to any issue.
- **Emotional intelligence:** Conscientious people demonstrate awareness of their teams' and customers' reactions during conversations and encounters. With high conscientiousness,

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you can interpret nonverbal communication patterns, match tone and mood and have better interactions with both colleagues and clients.

- **Thoroughness:** Since conscientious individuals are detail-oriented, they typically prefer quality over quantity. When faced with a project, they explore every area to ensure that their final product is flawless. If an error slips through, the conscientious person learns from their mistakes and adapts their processes to avoid them in the future.
- **Dependability:** Conscientious people are reliable. If they say they're going to do something, you can consider it done. Team members and managers trust a conscientious coworker to help on any kind of project.
- **Organisation:** Conscientious employees usually keep an organised workspace and schedule. They effectively eliminate clutter, reduce distractions and manage their time so they meet deadlines.

### Tips for becoming more conscientious

You may have some of these characteristics or utilise certain characteristics at specific times, but you can also improve your skills to better develop your conscientiousness and use it more consistently in the workplace. Here are a few steps you can take to be more conscientious in any role or industry you work in:

- **Prioritise:** Order your projects, beginning with the most important. Complete tasks that your coworkers need first or ones that have an approaching deadline. Give each project your full attention and best effort. Try to create a thorough schedule for your projects that allows you sufficient time to produce quality work. By ordering your projects and giving them plenty of time, you can increase the quality of your work and reduce the likelihood of mistakes.
- **Focus:** Reduce distractions while you work. Keep only work-related internet tabs open, and place your smartphone out of reach until

you have a break. When you focus on your duties, you can get more done in less time and successfully meet deadlines. If you really struggle to concentrate, try working in short bursts with small, well-defined goals. Every time you reach a goal, reward yourself with a quick break or a fun activity that helps you relax.

- **Persevere:** There are various techniques you can use to complete a project. If facing a challenge, consider seeking the help of coworkers who can offer a new perspective or have more experience. Also, try separating a large project into smaller tasks that take less time to finish. Completing smaller tasks can help you gain a sense of accomplishment if you're working on a challenging activity. Resolving to finish the work you start builds trust with your manager and team members.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Conscientiousness is all about attention. So is mindfulness, the relaxation technique that has become popular in recent years. By practising mindfulness, you learn to pay extra attention to your environment, even when you're under pressure. This attention will help you spot important details that you might otherwise miss.
- **Ask for guidance:** Mentors and life coaches can help you develop techniques to improve conscientious qualities. They can encourage you to be more thoughtful and diligent in your workplace. Try meeting regularly with your mentor to review your progress toward becoming a more conscientious person.

Constantly seek ways to improve by taking note of the most common errors you make and finding systems that help you get things right next time. Doing so can result in better work, more satisfaction with your performance and possible career advancement.

Conscientious people generally thrive in professions that place importance on concentration, attention to detail and accuracy.

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# Shame, fear and guilt – how managers tackle the ‘imposter phenomenon’ at work

*Do you ever feel like you aren't good enough for the job you have, and any success you experience is due to luck? Does this affect your work performance or have long-term consequences for your career?*

If so, you may be experiencing ‘the impostor phenomenon’, according to new research from Professors Helena Gonzalez-Gomez, NEOMA Business School, and Sarah Hudson, Rennes School of Business.

“The imposter phenomenon (IP) is the feeling that one’s success is due to unrelated factors, rather than one’s competence and qualifications,” says Professor Gonzalez-Gomez.

But what implications does this actually have on individuals’ careers? Using four studies with different methodologies and a total of 648 employees in US and Europe, the researchers investigated the effects of IP on performance and career outcomes.

According to the researchers, because IP is linked to a fear of being exposed as a fraud, IP in the workplace can influence outcomes such as employee commitment, stress, coping, or job satisfaction directly.

“Our findings reveal that in both simulated and recalled work situations, impostors are likely to feel shame, particularly when they attribute failure to themselves, as well having a negative effect on creativity,” says Professor Gonzalez-Gomez.

The researchers also found that IP is also related to the likelihood of an employee finding a job elsewhere, and also links to lower career success in terms of number of positive appraisals and promotions over one’s career.



Ultimately, this research can be used for organisations and managers wishing to develop the talent of individuals with the IP.

For example, because impostors believe they are failing at work, managerial feedback that avoids direct attributions of personal failure and rather focuses on how to improve performance in a more neutral manner is likely to increase creativity in individuals with IP.

The researchers also explain that because those who feel like impostors tend to underestimate their abilities, managers could also use appraisal and promotion tools that are more strongly weighted towards externally assessed performance, rather than towards self-assessment. These tools could be a useful for enabling more successful career advancement for individuals with IP.

# Communication skills for workplace success

*The ability to communicate effectively with superiors, colleagues, and staff is essential, no matter what industry you work in. Workers in the digital age must know how to effectively convey and receive messages in person as well as via phone, email, and social media.*

These communication skills will help you get hired, land promotions, and be a success throughout your career.

## Top 10 Communication Skills

Want to stand out from the competition? These are some of the top communication skills that recruiters and hiring managers want to see in your resume and cover letter. Highlight these skills and demonstrate them during job interviews, and you'll make a solid first impression. Continue to develop these skills once you're hired, and you'll impress your boss, teammates, and clients.

### 1. Listening

Being a good listener is one of the best ways to be a good communicator. No one likes communicating with someone who cares only about putting in her two cents and does not take the time to listen to the other person. If you're not a good listener, it's going to be hard to comprehend what you're being asked to do.

Take the time to practice active listening. Active listening involves paying close attention to what the other person is saying, asking clarifying questions, and rephrasing what the person says to ensure understanding ("So, what you're saying is..."). Through active listening, you can better understand what the other person is trying to say, and can respond appropriately.

### 2. Nonverbal Communication

Your body language, eye contact, hand gestures, and tone of voice all color the message you are trying to convey.

A relaxed, open stance (arms open, legs relaxed), and a friendly tone will make you appear approachable and will encourage others to speak openly with you.

Eye contact is also important; you want to look the person in the eye to demonstrate that you are focused on them and the conversation. (However, be sure not to stare at the person, which can make him or her uncomfortable.)

Also, pay attention to other people's nonverbal signals while you are talking. Often, nonverbal cues convey how a person is really feeling. For example, if the person is not looking you in the eye, he or she might be uncomfortable or hiding the truth.

### 3. Clarity and Concision

Good verbal communication means saying just enough—don't talk too much or too little. Try to convey your message in as few words as possible. Say what you want clearly and directly, whether you're speaking to someone in person, on the phone, or via email. If you ramble on, your listener will either tune you out or will be unsure of exactly what you want.

Think about what you want to say before you say



## Essential Communication Skills for Your Career



it. This will help you to avoid talking excessively or confusing your audience.

#### 4. Friendliness

Through a friendly tone, a personal question, or simply a smile, you will encourage your co-workers to engage in open and honest communication with you. It's important to be polite in all your workplace communications.

This is important in both face-to-face and written communication. When you can, personalize your emails to co-workers and/or employees – a quick "I hope you all had a good weekend" at the start of an email can personalize a message and make the recipient feel more appreciated.

#### 5. Confidence

It is important to be confident in your interactions with others. Confidence shows your co-workers that you believe in what you're saying and will follow through.

Exuding confidence can be as simple as making eye contact or using a firm but friendly tone.

Avoid making statements sound like questions. Of course, be careful not to sound arrogant or aggressive. Be sure you are always listening to and empathizing with the other person.

#### 6. Empathy

Using phrases as simple as "I understand where you are coming from" demonstrate that you have been listening to the other person and respect their opinions. Active listening can help you tune in to what your conversational partner is thinking and feeling, which will, in turn, make it easier to display empathy.

Even when you disagree with an employer, co-worker, or employee, it is important for you to understand and respect their point of view.

#### 7. Open-Mindedness

A good communicator should enter into any conversation with a flexible, open mind. Be open to listening to and understanding the other person's point of view, rather than simply getting

*Continued* ►

your message across.

By being willing to enter into a dialogue, even with people with whom you disagree, you will be able to have more honest, productive conversations.

### 8. Respect

People will be more open to communicating with you if you convey respect for them and their ideas. Simple actions like using a person's name, making eye contact, and actively listening when a person speaks will make the person feel appreciated. On the phone, avoid distractions and stay focused on the conversation.

Convey respect through email by taking the time to edit your message. If you send a sloppily written, confusing email, the recipient will think that you do not respect her enough to think through your communication with her.

### 9. Feedback

Being able to give and receive feedback appropriately is an important communication skill. Managers and supervisors should continuously look for ways to provide employees with constructive feedback, be it through email, phone calls, or weekly status updates.

Giving feedback involves giving praise as well – something as simple as saying “good job” or “thanks for taking care of that” to an employee can greatly increase motivation.

Similarly, you should be able to accept and even encourage feedback from others. Listen to the feedback you are given, ask clarifying questions if you are unsure of the issue, and make efforts to implement the feedback.

### 10. Picking the Right Medium

An important communication skill is to simply know what form of communication to use. For example, some serious conversations (layoffs, resignation, changes in salary, etc.) are almost always best done in person.

You should also think about the person with whom you wish to speak. If they are a very busy

person (such as your boss, perhaps), you might want to convey your message through email. People will appreciate your thoughtful means of communication and will be more likely to respond positively to you.

### How to Make Your Skills Stand Out

**Match your skills to the job.** Analyze the job listing, paying special attention to the hard and soft skills that are highlighted in the job description. Then, personalize your resume and cover letter to match their requirements.

**Familiarize yourself with other in-demand skills.** Soft skills like communication may not get a direct nod in a job description, but they're still highly desired by hiring managers.

**Use job interviews to your advantage.** Job interviews provide an opportunity to show the hiring manager that you have the verbal communication skills necessary to succeed in a job, rather than just telling them that you do. Prepare for your interview, practice beforehand, and don't be afraid to pause before answering their questions – or to ask for clarification if you need it.

**Don't stop when you get the job.** Want to make a lasting impression on your colleagues after you're hired? Use your communication skills at work. Whether it's participating in a company meeting or talking with a client, you'll have many opportunities to show how well you communicate.

### Key Takeaways

HR want more than job-specific skills: to impress potential employers, be prepared to show your communication skills.

Highlight these soft skills during the process: scan the job description for keywords related to communication skills and use them in your resume and cover letter.

Show, don't tell: job interviews are your chance to demonstrate that you have what it takes.

By Alison Doyle



# Poll reveals significant decline in applications compared to pre-pandemic levels

*As vacancy numbers continue to rise, new data from online talent sourcing specialist, Talent.com, has shown that a majority of employers still struggle to find talent amidst candidate shortages, as 56% of them are getting less applications than the months before the pandemic.*

Although the furlough scheme has ended and Covid restrictions have eased, allowing most of the UK return to some normality, the online poll from Talent.com shows the extent of the skills shortages facing almost every business. The firm also found that only 28% of employers were receiving more applications than before the pandemic. Those who are seeing their application numbers rise potentially come from industries that saw their activity grow during the crisis, or benefit from having a complete technology and partner ecosystem, allowing them to adapt quickly during these uncertain times.

With the current fuel 'crisis' and concerns around supermarket stocks rife, this decline in applications highlights the need for better hiring processes."

Noura Dadzie - VP Sales UK & International Markets at Talent.com - explained:

"We're facing a dearth of talent that is impacting almost every business and sector – a scenario that we've not experienced before. The extent of this issue is clear in the fact that it is making national headlines time and time again, and it's showing no signs of abating. As organisations continue to attempt to tackle this issue, many are throwing money at candidates, with 'golden handshakes' and bonuses the go to for a number of brands.

"However, what's arguably needed is a



streamlined approach to recruitment that utilises the benefits of technology to ensure that the right candidates are seeing the right jobs, and their experience in the application process is positive. It's all too easy in the current environment to compromise on quality for the sake of quantity, but that is a viscous cycle to get into. It's crucial that data driven decisions are being made that have the candidate journey at the heart of all decisions. Without this approach, employers and recruiters will face a more difficult skills market that could continue for the longer-term."