

New Year, New Career!

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The business world would come to a screeching halt without administrative staff to keep things moving. Read below to see how the perception of administrative roles are changing for the better! See a sampling of our positions [here](#) and reach out to us at resume@thelarkogroup.com with your resume to be considered.

**Executive Assistant is the
New Power Job**

By: Sanjena Sathian, OZY

The Larko Group is seeing similar trends in Chicago as the trends depicted below in Silicon Valley.

In Silicon Valley, a once lowly job with meager pay is starting to mean big bucks - and quite a bit of influence.

It's the golden age of the executive assistants.

Highly educated, ambitious young people - most of them women - with off-the-map "soft skill" IQs and EQs are seeing an employment boom in the support world, as it's known. Executive assistants to CEOs, engineers and even middle managers at major tech companies increasingly have their pick of top jobs, say experienced recruiters in the field. Why? Because of a wealthy tech economy, less hierarchical companies, and a cultural shift in how assistants are viewed. Once powerless, the executive assistant is now a gatekeeper, charged with keeping the Big Woman or Man on task. The EA could be the underappreciated career of the century.

The base salary starts around \$60,000 and goes up fast from there ... to as much as \$100,000, plus bonuses and equity.

"There's definitely a stigma" about the title, says 32-year-old Shana Larson, one of four EAs at Pinterest, the San Francisco visual discovery company. But the title didn't stop Larson, a University of California at Santa Barbara grad who also holds a master's in broadcast journalism from the University of Southern California: She went from planning 1,000-person Los Angeles events to joining the support team at Google. "The initial transition was scary," she says, but now, nearly two years into her time at Pinterest and over four years into being an EA, she's "fairly compensated" and gets exposure to many moving parts of a business. For her, this is a long-term career complete with growth opportunities.

Some recruiters are finding a micro-trend within this burgeoning market, too: Young people from Los Angeles - like Larson - might be the holy grail. Executive assistants who jump north from L.A. are often "**talented people who have a thicker skin**," says Alison Brown, who runs a recruiting firm focused on administrative support. After walking the dog, getting lunch and dry cleaning, organizing a shoot and trying to grab edits on a script all at once, the Valley is no sweat. Rather, it's a welcome change to land in an industry where "culture" - read: where managers have to be nice to their assistants, and where froyo's always on tap at the office - is part of the business plan.

Thirty-year-old Amy Negrelli, one of Larson's colleagues on the EA team at Pinterest, chose the company in part because she liked how big the H.R. team was, relative to the rest of the company. A former assistant at an East Coast investment bank and then at a production company, she found the warmth of tech culture welcoming - and a priority later in her career.

"If you're offered a seat on a rocket ship, don't ask what seat. Just get on." That's the advice Google's executive chairman, Eric Schmidt, gave a young Sheryl Sandberg when she was waffling over whether to join the then-fledgling search engine company. So goes the mantra in much of Silicon Valley. Brown, a former EA for 13 years, gives her own candidates a version of it: "You want a good job but you would rather be a window washer at Facebook than a VP of sales at a no-name paper company."

Connections are one reason she cites, but it's also about the story young people can later tell in their career, of being able to see something go from zero to full speed.

Which is why more highly educated people are using support jobs as a launchpad into the wider business world. EAs increasingly attended top schools for undergrads and even have advanced degrees - MBAs, master's, even the occasional Ph.D., says Nicole Budovec, a recruiting manager at GoPro who spent time at Facebook and Yahoo before that. That marks quite a shift from other industries like finance, which often see assistants coming out of vocational training schools. Top EAs, by contrast, often have a decade or more of experience, Budovec says.

Budovec compares EA-ing to being like a "project manager for a person."

Is the EA boom just another incarnation of a crazy bubble?

And the money? Top recruiters say the base salary for EAs (in the Valley) now starts around \$60,000 and goes up fast from there. Junior EAs, supporting managers or engineers, might make around \$110,000, while those supporting the C-suite rake in as much as \$200,000, plus bonuses and equity. That's several tens of thousands of dollars more per year than the same job title earned several years ago, according to the recruiters.

Then again, although the days of "secretaries" and even "administrative assistants" feel far away, even the most powerful EA can't completely shake the job's history. Just think of Joan Harris, the hyper-qualified head secretary turned executive on Mad Men, under-appreciated for years until the men realized they couldn't do without her. Or the real-life Jane J. Martin, whose story is chronicled in Swimming in the Steno Pool and whose typing and organizational skills earned her a secretarial salary of \$300,000 a year in modern terms.

The difference? Today those with these skills can negotiate for better pay, better titles, equity and, perhaps most importantly, a real stake and say in the affairs of the company.

Of course, as with most good things in Silicon Valley, we must ask: Is the EA boom just another incarnation of a crazy bubble? Maybe. Still, there's been a boom and bust here before but if the bubble pops, a CEO still needs her or his right hand to deal with the madness. It's a lucky place to be.

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