

# Super Successful Secretaries!

*A mini handbook for the RHA Secretary*



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With the Help of:  
*The Professional Secretary's Handbook 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*

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## Basic Secretarial Duties

The duties of a secretary depend on your institution's RHA constitution. However, there are common duties that every secretary handles. Some examples are of the following:

- draft/edit letters and memos to executives/department
- schedule appointments and handle follow-ups and reminders
- schedule/arrange meetings
- attend meetings (executive and general assembly)
- operate word processing
- operate email programs
- purchase office supplies/equipment
- keep various books/records
- advertise programs/meetings
- conduct research for proposed proposals
- assist in report preparation
- manage special projects (i.e. Yearly memory book/banquet/traveling/public relations)
- take minutes at all meetings

The Professional Handbook for Secretary's adds, "Within the secretarial position there are also many levels of responsibility, ranging from following instructions to bearing at least some responsibility for administration and office management." The once seen as "easy" secretary position can open up doors within RHA to new opportunities in finance, technology, policy changing, programming, and even presidential leadership.

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### The Professional Attitude

It is important as an executive board member of an organization responsible for the well-being of others to maintain the utmost professionalism, even if it is just a volunteer organization. (Remember you were elected to your position by your peers who will now look up to you 😊)

#### *Using professional oral skills*

It is important when you have good ideas to contribute to the executive environment that they are articulated effectively, or they will be lost. "Speaking well requires a command of English, good diction, and self-confidence. If you are shy and have little experience speaking in front of a group, take a course in public speaking. Such course can help you overcome your fear of addressing a group. Take the opportunities to speak in front of a group whenever they come available. The more you speak publicly, the easier it will become!" (p 44).

#### *Maintaining a Professional Appearance*

In a position that is always dealing with the public, it's important to have the most professional appearance. Remember that you reflect your organization!

The Professional Secretaries Handbook adds, “The way you look—cleanliness, hair style, care of fingernails, cosmetics, jewelry, and dress—are as important as your posture and gestures in nonverbal communication. To dress for success, maintain a neat, clean, professional business appearance. You should, therefore, look like you are dressed for a business meeting, not a nightclub or a camping trip!” (p 44). The President will usually dictate what appropriate dress for meetings is. Your executive board may have a designated t-shirt/polo or you might wear business casual... it all depends on the discretion of the president/executive board.

*Using Positive Body Language*

The simplest gestures and posture we use can convey numerous attitudes and emotions. “If you are nervous or jittery, for example, you will appear uncertain or insecure about your abilities. Try to be aware of your appearance without becoming self-conscious. It can be easy to develop bad habits in conversation, however becoming more aware of them can help to correct them.”

Here are some examples of negative and positive body language habits:

<u><i>Negative</i></u> <u><i>Action/Mannerism/Gesture/Posture</i></u>	<u><i>Negative</i></u> <u><i>Message/Impression Thus Conveyed</i></u>
Hands tightly folded across chest	Insecurity; defensiveness
Clasped/unclasped hands; fiddling with rings, necktie, ect.	Nervousness; stress
Biting of fingernails	Deviousness and deceit; nervousness and general insecurity
Sitting with crossed legs, skirt hitched up, fiddling with hair (women)	Flirtatiousness
Lack of eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking	Disinterest in the other person, the conversation, or instructions being conveyed to you; deviousness
Slouching, either while standing or while sitting	Boredom; laziness; lack of interest in job or conversation
Holding hand over mouth while talking, especially during a meeting	Fear
<u><i>Positive</i></u> <u><i>Action/Mannerism/Gesture/Posture</i></u>	<u><i>Positive</i></u> <u><i>Message/Impression Thus Conveyed</i></u>
Hands held loosely at sides, in jacket pockets, or behind back	Ease; confidence; relaxation; openness with others
Steady eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking	Interest in the other person, the conversation or instructions being conveyed to you, straightforwardness, candor, and honesty
Erect yet relaxed posture while standing, walking, or sitting	Energy; control; self confidence
Casual smiling and happy attitude	Enjoyment of job

Remember, these cues are more important than what you actually say. If you seem uninterested or bored, you will not be seen as an efficient and effective secretary.

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### Secretarial Time Management

Being an RHA secretary will have you doing what seems like a million different things at once. So, it is very important to have a method of time management that works for you. Here are some ways to get the most out of your time given by the Professional Handbook for Secretaries:

- ❖ Make use of electronic or paper schedules and calendars. Some computer software often has alarms, or reminders, to alert you to approaching deadlines. And make sure you complete the task.
- ❖ Develop goals and set deadlines for important tasks. Make a habit of putting your goals in writing. Watch what tasks you put as the most important. Remember class tasks are always more important than RHA tasks, so never schedule RHA related work before class work.
- ❖ Be receptive to new timesaving procedures and develop your own ideas on ways to save time.
- ❖ Be prepared with tools, supplies, reference materials, and so on before you start a job. Having to stop in the middle of a job for something you forgot wastes time and increase the possibility of errors in your work.
- ❖ Schedule difficult jobs during periods when you are feeling fresh and have a reservoir of energy. You will be less likely to make mistakes and have to redo a job.
- ❖ Learn to delegate appropriate tasks to staff/assistants. If you need additional help, discuss the needs with the rest of the executive board... create an "Executive Assistant" staff position if needed.
- ❖ Work at a steady pace, rather than rush, so that you will do the job right the first time. It will only take more time if you have to redo it.
- ❖ Group similar activities, such as running errands, for maximum efficiency. Check your schedule for the rest of the week to see if certain tasks should be grouped and rescheduled.
- ❖ Find ways to deal with procrastination, such as starting with something you enjoy doing. Sometimes it helps to start with short, easy, fun tasks.
- ❖ Don't make personal visits or engage in too long of social conversations during your scheduled office hours. Use the time you have set aside for RHA wisely so that you don't have to take away from other areas of your life.
- ❖ Be very specific and clear in your instructions and communications with assistants/co-board members to avoid time-wasting errors and misunderstandings. If there is sometime you don't understand, ask for clarification so that you don't waste time doing a job the wrong way.
- ❖ Use down time to plan for future work, but always take time for your self.
- ❖ Develop your power of concentration so that you can shut out noise and other distractions. Try various strategies, such as quietly reading your work out loud to drown out noise.

- ❖ Keep up on daily work, such as minute typing/filing/record organization. If it piles up, it may become unmanageable later.
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#### Office Ethics and Politics

Even in a simple RHA organization, there is politics. “Office politics” often has a negative connotation. The truth is it doesn’t have to be negative if the attempt is made to keep it positive. They also can work to your benefit... here are some examples on how to do just that:

- ❖ Absorb as much information as you can every day, about your job and the organization. The more positions/information you know, the better you can lead.
- ❖ Develop as many contacts as possible. You never know when you’ll meet someone one day who could possibly give you a real job offer on another!
- ❖ Show a willingness to take on additional responsibilities. If others see you as flexible, you’ll be much more appreciated!
- ❖ Always treat department officials with respect.
- ❖ Cultivate a reputation for being cooperative and helpful.
- ❖ Always praise others for a job well done! Never criticize someone in the presence of others.
- ❖ Ignore gossip and do not participate in the spread of rumors.
- ❖ Document your progress and achievements, and periodically meet with your adviser to make sure you’re making the right choices to accomplish your goals.
- ❖ Always use honest, legitimate, and ethical strategies to advance your position.
- ❖ Refute unfair or inaccurate claims against you immediately with clean and accurate facts. Also, do not lose your temper or get involved in an emotional argument.
- ❖ As an executive board member you will have access to very confidential information. Never reveal this information. This could give others reason to doubt your trustworthiness.
- ❖ Use assertiveness rather than aggressiveness. When you have to deal with those who may be rude or try to take advantage of you, avoid becoming emotionally upset, intimidated, or overaggressive in response. Assertiveness training teaches how to express your opinions and feelings candidly and freely without putting others down. Do this by using the pronoun *we* when problems exist. (*We* have a problem; what should *we* do about it?) Avoid emphasis on *I* (not “I think; I want; I need”) to the extent that you sound demanding and self-centered. Giving the impression that “we’re all in this together” and “we all want what’s best for the organization” will help ensure that you’re assertive rather than hostile or aggressive.

In every working group, it is always appropriate to be ethical. This shows that you are indeed a trustworthy individual. The slightest bit of dishonesty can really put a “smudge” on your character. The handbook gives basic rules to follow that should be apart of your RHA work as well as everyday life.

- ❖ Never discuss with outsiders private business affairs.
- ❖ Do not participate in conversations or actions designed to injure or compete unfairly against another person.
- ❖ Do not take credit for another's accomplishments.
- ❖ Do not allow anyone to be blamed for your errors.
- ❖ Do not take organizational supplies for personal use.
- ❖ Do not use organization/departmental equipment (fax, computer, copier, telephone, paper resources) for personal purposes.
- ❖ Do not leave private/sensitive material on your desk uncovered and in full view for everyone to read.
- ❖ Always attempt to act in a positive matter so that you can positively reflect on the organization.
- ❖ Never be afraid to meet with your adviser if you feel that there are unethical behaviors taking place within the organization. You can rely on him/her to take your feelings serious and keep them confidential.

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### Working with the RHA President

A successful secretary should understand the goals of the president and the overall objectives set forth by him/her for the growth of the organization. A secretary plays a very important role in assisting the president in any goal accomplishing. A president often relies on the secretary to keep everything organized so that when he/she calls for any information it is available very quickly. So this makes getting along with him/her essential! If you keep a good relationship with the president, many doors can be open within RHA as well as outside. It's important to remember that a president of an organization's recommendation can carry a long way. Never take criticism personally and harbor resentment about it. Remember that the president probably has a bit more experience than you and he/she only wants to see you grow so that you could possibly one day fill his/her shoes!!

The amount of duties and what kind of relationship you'll have with the president can depend on what kind of person he/she is: an easygoing individual, a workaholic, someone who likes to delegate responsibility, someone who dislikes delegating work, and so on. Regardless of any difference in personalities, the Professional Handbook gives some guidelines for the best working relationship:

- ❖ Use open and regular communication with the president to contribute to a more successful and enjoyable relationship.
- ❖ Do everything possible to encourage a spirit of teamwork!
- ❖ Respect the president and show appreciation for the demands and pressures of his/her position.
- ❖ Support the president's policies and practices even if you have other preferences or opinions. There are always appropriate ways to get your views acknowledged.
- ❖ Learn how to accept criticism and use it as a learning experience to improve your skills and abilities.

- ❖ Do not let annoying personal traits in your boss weaken the relationship; you may have annoying habits as well.

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## Records Management

In RHA the secretary is the person most familiar with record-keeping practices, and serves as a liaison from the records to the rest of the board. For example, if a newly elected/appointed treasurer wanted to see the most updated budget it would be the secretary who could pull the hard copy out of the records area. For this reason it is crucial to have a very precise and technical way of record keeping. There are many different routes a successful secretary can take to improve the record organization. The difference in routes often times depends on the age and size of your RHA.

For a smaller, young RHA the most appropriate way to keep records may be through a yearly binder. The binder can be divided into the necessary sections and should be clearly marked on the outside the year of use. The binder should always change with administration, so that new executives can look back to see what past executives did, but still keeping their work separate. One example of divisions in the binder could be as follows:

- ❖ Updated Constitution/Policy Book
- ❖ Proposals
- ❖ Resolutions
- ❖ Co-Sponsorships
- ❖ General Assembly Minutes
- ❖ Executive Board Minutes
- ❖ Personnel Files (applications, ect)
- ❖ Any other divisions that are necessary for your RHA (i.e. Top 10 lists, Budget info, ect)

However, as an RHA grows in age and size, the secretary might want to look into purchasing a filing cabinet and file folders. This way the organization can keep everything tidy without having huge binders full of papers. Furthermore, the filing cabinet although it takes up office room will take up less space in the long run than years and years of huge binders.

### *Digital Filing*

The secretary is also responsible for the organization of records on the computers of the organization. It's important to have proper organization so every officer can keep their work out of the way of others. Also, it helps the secretary recall documents on any notice if they are in their proper place. One way to consider filing is:

1. Every officer has their own folder and number. (i.e. 1 President) These folders can be placed in a larger ("my documents" like) folder entitled RHA Documents.
2. Also have a folder for any committees, entities, databases, advertising, and any other folders that are needed to fit your RHA.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Your organization can never be too organized as long as you pass the word to others, letting them know how you've organized everything!

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### Taking Minutes: The Professional Way

Probably the most important and most recognized job task of the secretary is taking minutes at meetings. The way of taking minutes can vary by individual, but there are certain parts of minute taking that should not be compromised. The Professional Handbook gives a few suggestions on taking minutes:

“If you know that you are required to take minutes of the meeting, bring along both pens and writing paper (or possibly a lab top if you have one) and arrive at the meeting before everyone else to be sure that everything is ready. Make sure you have a copy of the agenda, as well as any reports/documents that you may need to refer to during the meeting.”

“The most difficult part of minute taking is deciding what information has to be written down. Be sure when taking minutes you don't allow your personal preferences take influence over your minute taking. Always take down motions and resolutions word for word and who made the motion.” Also be sure that you take down very accurate vote counts so that if your president/adviser asks for the counts, you have the available.

When recording here's a few guidelines:

- ❖ Write down the date, location, and time the meeting begins.
- ❖ Record the names of those present/absent (if the number is less than twenty, if it's more than a quorum check needs to be down to be sure that you can pass legislation.)
- ❖ Identify the type of meeting: (special/executive/general assembly)
- ❖ Identify the presiding officer.
- ❖ Record actions. It's best to also record times at a change in discussion. For example at the beginning of officer reports it was 8:30pm and then record the time again at the next topic on the agenda (8:50pm Old Business).
- ❖ Record the time of adjournment.

Always remember that minutes serve as the official records of the meetings, so it's very important that they are objectively recorded and organized into a professional final document!

#### EXAMPLE MINUTES

Residence Hall Association  
General Assembly Meeting September 5, 2003  
Multi-Purpose Room # 123

President John Parker residing.  
All officers in attendance.

7:32pm-Called To Order  
Roll Call: Quorum check ok.

Treasury report: Checking \$4444.03, Savings \$2323.91  
Adoption of the agenda.  
Adoption of the minutes.

#### 7:40pm-Officer Reports

NCC- Registration for SAACURH due soon, so all interested need to sign up ASAP.

Secretary-working on updating organizational records.

Treasurer-fundraiser September 12. Be at office at 4:00pm if you want to go.

Vice President- “Get Wild” program on September 24. Any volunteers can email [vp@rha.ddd.com](mailto:vp@rha.ddd.com) if interested in helping out.

Adviser-Good job on last program! Can’t wait for “Get Wild”!

President- interested in serving on a parking committee needs to contact president ASAP.

#### 8:00pm-Old Business

Co-Sponsorship for “What in the HALL is up?” program brought to the floor by Washington Building Council. Asking for \$200.

Motion to move to discussion by Booker Council Senator Julie.  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Johnson Council Senator Melissa.

Motion to move to vote by Stephens Council Senator Toby.  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Booker Council Senator Julie.

12y/on/oa—money granted.

#### 8:15pm-New Business

Constitutional Revision brought to the floor by the Vice President.

Revision will change the wording in sections II and III. Minor grammar corrections. Questions from Washington Council Senator Brian.

Motion to move to discussion from Washington Council Senator Brian. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Booker Council Senator Mike.

Motion to move to vote from Booker Council Senator Steve.  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Stephens Council Senator Toby.

8y/on/4a—constitutional revision passes.

#### 8:35pm- Open Forum

Don’t forget Stephens Council sponsored “Fall Ball” on the 6<sup>th</sup>!

#### 8:40pm-Adjourn

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One key advice for minutes, make sure you make them your own. Add your style and taste where appropriate. The most important item in minutes is accuracy. Also, there are several effective ways to keep minutes, this is just one example.

One last bit of advice: Always have fun as secretary and always remember that your job is very important! You are not only helping build one of the best organizations on your campus but you are also making a difference on your campus.