



THE Head's LETTER

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FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES

The Head's Assistant: More Precious than Rubies

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Diplomat, mediator, social secretary, consigliere, chief of staff—the head's assistant can make or break us as heads. How do you know you have the right one?

Your assistant understands what you need, even before you do. My assistant, Erin, has figured out that I can't do back-to-back meetings all day long in my own office. Sometimes, she sends me to someone else's office for a change of scenery. She has an uncanny ability to locate me when I disappear. The phone will ring, and the person with whom I have spontaneously started a conversation will murmur, "I'll send her down." She understands that I am happiest when I have at least a few minutes each day to wander the school, to see the girls in action. She recognizes that more water and less coffee makes for a better-hydrated, calmer head, so she simply sets a glass of water on my desk when she knows I'll be trapped on a conference call. In the spring, when I write a play with our primary girls, my office turns into a costume shop, and Erin, never without a Sharpie, is my trusty wardrobe assistant, carefully writing each little girl's name on masking tape and affixing the labels to the inside of the dresses and shirts.

Your assistant knows how to schedule you. In building my daily schedule, Erin patiently rearranges the house of cards that is any head's schedule when competing priorities cascade. A spontaneous board committee meeting? No worries. The dreaded conference call, arranged through yet another Doodle Poll? Piece of cake. A change in flights again because we now can visit with an alum who was out of town originally? On it. Boarding passes arrive on my phone, and I dance through the TSA line, knowing Erin has figured out the transportation I require wherever I am in the world.

Your assistant knows how to organize you. Erin organizes me without ever letting me know I am being "managed." She keeps lists of notes I need to write, remembers to send gifts when babies arrive and flowers to those in our community who need a lift. She has a built-in GPS for finding things I didn't know I had or had lost. Got a spare five minutes? Erin will suggest I dictate a few letters, which she then types swiftly for my signature. Office a mess? "Let's take a few minutes to tidy up," she offers gently, knowing I do better when we bring some order to the chaos that grows when I run from meeting to meeting.

Your assistant is a gracious ambassador. Erin is exceptional with people on the phone, gracious but efficient, a lioness about protecting me from salespeople, and intuitive about putting through calls I need. She knows that I will always

want a quick hello with one of my grown-up daughters, and likewise she knows that a consultation about child care with my husband regarding our son is always a priority. Her "Scooby sense" about my own progeny is a gift and helps me do my job better. If my schedule is jammed or I am out of the office, she'll talk to our college daughter herself, and she routinely produces a snack for our 12-year-old son when he gets off the school bus and arrives in my office at 3:15. Taking the ambassador role to heart, she never plays favorites; anyone who asks to see me gets time with me.

Your assistant keeps you on time or makes time for the unexpected. Erin knocks on my door 25 minutes into a meeting to say, "Just letting you know that you have another meeting in about five minutes," and then she returns five minutes later, whether or not there is another meeting scheduled. Conversely, if a Laurel girl is visibly upset, she knocks on my door and says, "May I see you for a minute," so that I can make the call about whether or not immediate action is required.

Your assistant is expert at triage. The other day, I was out of the building and a faculty member appeared in some distress. Erin listened, administered chocolate, and sent the teacher back into the fray. When I returned to school, she filled me in and made sure to make time on my calendar the next day for that teacher.

Your assistant is trustworthy. Erin is a vault, protecting the business of the board of trustees with absolute confidentiality, carefully ignoring my own occasional indiscreet mutterings that can slip out late in the day. She sets up board meetings, loads last-minute slide decks, arranges food and drink, and gently organizes the board as well as she organizes me.

And finally, your day goes better because your assistant is irreplaceable. Today, Erin lurked outside my English classroom, and when I emerged, I asked, "What? You don't trust me to come downstairs by myself?" only slightly indignant, forgetting that I had an important luncheon off campus. She smiled, "Without a detour? Not a chance."

My assistant is essential to my quality of life and my 24/7 occupation. If your own assistant is marvelous, take a moment to say thank you.

Laurel School, Girls (K-12), Coed (PK), Day, enrolls 654 students in grades PK-12. Ms. Klotz was appointed head in 2004.