# Skills that lead to the top

**By Jennifer Lewington**

How do admin professionals land a top job to support the leader or a senior team of an organization?

Successful corner suite admins develop skills in self-examination, story telling, network building and, not least, risk-taking, according to Atlanta-based leadership and organization coach Hans Eckman, a presenter at this year's Administrative Professionals Conference in Toronto.

Eckman told *AAU* that talented admins who want to work with top management need to harness their skills to earn the desired promotion. The first step, he says, begins with candid self-reflection.

**Hans Eckman**

"Before you can start a journey you have to know what the destination looks like," he says. Figure out what it takes to work as a top executive assistant and conduct a careful self-examination.

"What is that person [the top EA] doing that either I am doing today or I am not doing today or I am doing today but that I need to do differently?" he asks. "What are the bright spots I keep, what are the new things I need to learn how to do and what are the things that I keep doing but have to do differently?" For example, the needs of the organization's leadership may be different from the current boss, so the admin must make adjustments to move up the ladder.

One way to answer the self-reflection questions is to seek out those already in a top admin role, either at the same or different company. "Just start talking to them," says Eckman, who suggests asking the C-suite admin: "What are the three things you do uncommonly well that an average person in your position doesn't do?"

While it may feel like a stretch to reach out (through LinkedIn or professional associations), Eckman says most people are willing to talk about what they do well. "Ask them to share their story about why their work matters and why they are a hero to the people they are supporting," he says. "They will open up."

With clarity about the job they seek, admins need to expand their networks and show they possess the kind of skills demanded at the next level.

For example, an admin can volunteer to help a more senior counterpart organize a special event, write a blog or prepare a complicated request for proposals. In the process, the admin demonstrates a capacity for deadline-oriented projects, such as event planning, seen as valuable to the organization. An admin who develops a reputation as a reliable go-to person is likely to be noticed by those in a position to decide on promotions.

Effective networking is crucial, says Eckman.

"Eighty per cent of our jobs or promotions are going to come through networking referrals,"

Credit: lunokot (Shutterstock)

he says. "The same people you just built the relationship with, the same people you volunteered and helped, are the ones who can make introductions and recommendations," he says. "Have it come from the person already doing the role; it will give more credibility."

Lastly, he urges admins to step outside their comfort zone to reach for the top rung. "If you are trying to tackle something new, it is going to be scary and it is going to have more risk," he says, though incremental steps and quick wins can remove some of the fear.

"If you don't take the risk, you won't get any of the rewards," he says.

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## Do you have entrepreneurial instincts?

**By Staff**

Do you think of yourself as an entrepreneur, even though you work for someone else?

Entrepreneurial instincts can set you ahead of the pack. Check out these signs of an entrepreneurial mind, as set forth in a recent Forbes.com blog by Jules Schroeder, with input from fellow entrepreneur Adam Rivietz:

- You're a trend spotter and get on board early.
- You associate with motivators rather than negative influencers, thus helping you reach your goals quicker.
- You know how to leverage relationships. "Entrepreneurs are able to leverage the power of social networks," says Schroeder.
- You're a rapid executioner, putting things into practice sooner rather than later.
- You're a visionary. Where others see limitations, you see possibilities.