

Our starter guide: How to be good at your job (without needing to be liked)

A practical guide for EA, PA and Chief of Staff professionals who are ready to lead, not just support.

Let's be clear, somewhere along the way, many capable professionals were led to believe that being good at your job meant being agreeable.

That effectiveness comes from keeping the peace, pleasing everyone, and being seen as 'easy to work with'. This guide will help you determine if engaging with a career coach is right for you.

We don't buy into that.

We believe being good at your job has very little to do with being liked, and everything to do with being respected. This is a 'starter' guide for those ready to stop shrinking themselves to make others more comfortable, and to start leading with impact, clarity and confidence.

Be clear on what you're there to do.

You're not there to keep everyone happy. You're there to deliver and to enable progress whilst leading from the side-lines and creating space for others to perform.

Whether you're an EA, PA or Chief of Staff, your role is strategic. You're the filter, the force behind the scenes, and often the one who sees what others don't.

Ask yourself: What does success in my role really look like (not according to a job spec), but in practice? Are you focusing on that, or are you too busy managing other people's discomfort?

Set boundaries (and stick to them).

How people treat you is shaped by what you tolerate. If you're constantly overdelivering, constantly available and constantly saying yes then people will expect it.

Boundaries aren't harsh, they're necessary and show that you know your value.

An example of boundary setting:

“That’s not something I can pick up just now, I’m focusing on [X priority] but I can look at this [in an hour/tomorrow/ by your deadline of X].”

Don’t apologise for prioritising properly.

Protecting your time and focus is part of your role and you are not being obstructive for saying no, you’re being effective. You can still be collaborative and helpful, but that doesn’t mean saying yes to everything and/or over explaining.

You might say:

“This isn’t something I can pick up right now, but I’ll put it on my list for next week.”

Or simply:

“I won’t be able to take this on at the moment.”

Say what needs to be said.

Don’t dress up every sentence or cushion every message (we all do it). If something isn’t working, say so. Tactfully, (of course) but truthfully. People don’t grow from polite silence, they grow from clarity.

Try:

“This isn’t at the level we need it to be, let’s look at what’s missing.”

Build trust (not approval).

Being well-liked is not the same as being trusted. Trust comes from showing up consistently, delivering what you’ve committed to, and asking the right questions that show you are invested.

You’re not in your role to entertain people or make life easier for others (at your own expense). You’re there to make things better, and that sometimes requires friction.

Drop the disclaimers!

You don’t need to start every sentence with ***“Sorry to bother you”*** or ***“I just wanted to ask...”***.

That language undermines your position before you’ve even got your point across.

Try:

"I'm following up on..."

"I wanted to flag this for discussion..."

Get comfortable with being misunderstood.

Some people won't like your directness and some won't appreciate your high standards. That doesn't mean you're wrong, it often means you're raising the bar.

You really don't need to explain your intentions to everyone. Not everyone will get it and that's OK.

From us, to you.

We don't train professionals to be agreeable, we develop professionals who are capable, credible and ready to influence. We focus on helping you back yourself, trust your judgement and lead with authority (even when it's uncomfortable).

So, if you want to be great at your job, stop chasing popularity.

Respect matters more than likeability. And the sooner you stop worrying about how you're perceived, the sooner you'll step into the role you're really capable of performing.