Christina Richards

Executive Assistant to Tina Conlon, CIO
Product & Enterprise Services, Technology
Westpac

The business challenge
It’s with tongue in cheek that Christina Richards says “being an Executive Assistant is like being married to your manager”. But that is only because she’s the EA to a CIO!

Christina has worked with Westpac for nearly seven years and has happily progressed within the business to take on new challenges.

Earlier this year, she attended the Advanced Management for Executive Assistants program in Sydney.

“I’ve been on courses in the past that focus on how to make travel arrangements and maintain diaries and contacts” says Christina. “I wouldn’t be an EA if I didn’t already know how to do all of that!”

Christina was looking for more: a course that would develop her value as a strategic member of the management structure.

The AGSM experience
“I was very impressed with the recognition of the EA as the people person and relationship manager within the team” she says.

“The program focused on enhancing your skills and preparing for the next step. And how to be more influential and persuasive in your interaction with others.”

Christina puts that down to identifying different communication and learning styles.

“Part of the pre-program prep was to complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment” she explains. “That was a real eye-opener when the program leaders went through individual personality traits!”

“It makes such sense. And it confirms why I behave in certain ways – being a thinker and a feeler” she laughs.

Christina says that particular element of the program was one of her key take-aways. “It just put everything into perspective for me . . . being able to understand my learning capability, how I digest knowledge and how I listen to people.”

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Christina was grateful for the open and safe environment created by program leaders, Dr Wendy Grusin and Jonathon Gastin. “They really understand organisational behaviour and the challenges we face on a daily basis” she says.

“Through their teaching, we were encouraged to meaningfully and thoughtfully reflect on how we interact with our managers, and how our managers interact with us.”

“It’s very interesting and powerful to understand why we all behave the way we do.”

**The impact**

Since her program, Christina feels she is better equipped to read different people’s communication and listening styles. “I can respond to different styles by using a different tone, or by changing my wording” she says. “I’m more confident in my ability to manage different situations with this skill.”

“If I speak in a certain way, I realise it’s more likely that what I’m asking of someone, will actually get done for me. And that makes me a better EA” she says with satisfaction.

It’s true that Executive Assistants must work extremely closely with their managers. More closely than most positions. So, making those interactions more effective and efficient, is good for the business as well as the team members.

“I certainly enjoyed my program” says Christina. “There’s not a lot out there that caters for an EA’s professional development. This is one I would definitely recommend to others who want to take their role to the next step.”

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