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### The Secret of Being a Good Secretary

I was an executive secretary for over ten years. I can type eighty words per minute and write technical reports on subjects I know practically nothing about. I can operate a ten-key, a switchboard, a keypunch, most computers, and a fork-lift. I can unjam a copying machine without smudging my nail polish. I can answer the phone, type a report, eat a doughnut, and place a Spiegel order at the same time. I have had bosses who think I walk on water, but their admiration has nothing to do with how many pieces of office equipment I can operate or how accurately I type. It's because, somewhere along the way, I learned that most secretaries function as one-third wife, one-third mother, and one-third best friend.

Like his wife, the secretary is expected to act as hostess to his host, greeting guests with a welcoming smile and making them feel at home and as comfortable as possible. She serves coffee to everyone. She arranges catering for lunch meetings, serves the food, and even cleans up when the meeting is over. For out-of-town guests, she recommends movies showing downtown, knows which restaurants serve after ten o'clock, and is the resident authority on the quality and location of the nearest golf course, racquetball courts, and gymnasium. She keeps track of birthdays, anniversaries, and other dates her boss is supposed to remember but never can. She reminds him to get his hair cut, makes the appointment, and then nags him until he keeps it.

Sometimes maternal duties take the place of wifely ones. Like mothers with small

children, secretaries spend a great deal of time cleaning up behind and looking after their bosses. For example, she must find a favorite coffee cup that has been lost and must be found before a project can begin or an important report that is buried somewhere beneath a towering pile of papers. If the boss wants to slip off for the afternoon and go fishing or play golf, it's the secretary who must remind him of the meeting he can't miss. Unmarried bosses rely on the secretary to point out that a certain tie doesn't match or that they are wearing drippings from yesterday's sandwich on their suit coat. Like busy children, bosses would often forget to eat if it weren't for their secretaries. And when the busy children have bad days, the mother/secretary must find the right words to make them feel better.

Bosses may not agree that their secretaries sometimes function as wives or mothers, but just about any boss will admit that his secretary is also his best friend. Somewhere between the hours of overtime and the stress of an important project, a special bond grows. Many times a boss will share with his secretary feelings of inadequacy or doubt that co-workers and subordinates never suspect. She is often the first to hear a great new idea. And sadly, she is usually the first to hear news of the boss's great new job, because bosses move on more often than secretaries do.

Because bosses leave so easily, I don't work as an executive secretary anymore. Being a good secretary made saying good-bye too hard. And after all, a woman can have only so many adopted husbands, children, and best friends.