



CAREERS IN FORESTRY PERSONAL ASSISTANT & COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST



MORE THAN SIMPLY TALKING ABOUT TREES!

The roles of PAs and communication specialists are varied, constantly evolving and crucial for the smooth running and expansion of the business.

They deal with everything from organising and running whole departments to communicating key messages both internally to a wide spectrum of company employees and stakeholders, and externally to potential end-users, regulators, competitors, the media and society at large.

They are often involved in the:

- dissemination of products and research

- social responsibility initiatives

- trade shows and expos

- advertising

- client liaisons

- corporate events

So it's a wide and varied role that requires an individual with an equally diverse skill set to fit it.

In a lot of South Africa's forestry companies, the job of communication specialist and PA are often interchangeable and the responsibility of a single individual, which is why we have decided to combine them in a single case study.

It should be noted however that the job titles and roles vary dramatically from forestry company to forestry company. With larger companies employing several individuals, each of whom are responsible for a specific aspect of the job role, while smaller businesses may not have anyone who is specifically employed to do the role or one person who wears all the hats.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE:

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

There are a number of potential routes. Various academic institutes offer higher certificates and diplomas courses, aimed at transferring the necessary skills and knowledge to functioning in the secretarial field.

Modules include: communication; business and office management; management; office practice; organisational behavior; compu-typing; introduction to PC using windows; MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint; financial accounting; human resource management; and marketing management.

COMMUNICATION SPECIALISTS:

Communications specialists often have a degree or diploma in communication or a related field such as: business communication; public relations management; strategic communication; and marketing.

Unravelling the different types of qualification

Higher certificates: often obtained within a year, these are often skill-based qualifications with the emphasis placed on how the skill is applied. The focus is on achieving a set of skills necessary to perform within a chosen field. Entry requirements are often minimal.

Diplomas and national diploma: three years in duration and the qualification is a lot like a degree. The main difference is they are often more career-centric in their approach, including a great deal of practical experience in the course. Entry requirements often include matric with exemption or an equivalent.

Degrees: Will take three years or more to complete and can be taken further with the subsequent completion of honours, masters and post-doctoral degrees. Often more theoretical than practice, critical thinking is balanced with practical application, so courses give a rounded overview of the subject.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES:

Here is where the diverse job of a PA & communication specialist becomes apparent.

The PA role focuses on providing day-to-day assistance to the individual(s) who the role is assisting, (usually someone in a managerial role).

The communication specialists' role covers a much broader array of responsibilities, including (but not limited to): mass communication, corporate events management, corporate social responsibility, publicity, promotions & corporate image building and supporting marketing efforts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNSHIPS

With more and more people gaining diploma and degree qualifications, experience in the industry is becoming increasingly important. Internships are a great way of gaining essential experience while developing skills, making connections and learning about the field. They are also a great way to strengthen a resume, while identifying specific interests and personal abilities within a specific field.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Formulate and implement corporate social responsibility programme in line with company objectives.

Liaise with stakeholders and programme managers and reciprocates.

PUBLICITY, PROMOTIONS AND CORPORATE IMAGE

Co-ordinate and manage the following to achieve the organisation's corporate goals and maintain its corporate image:

- Media releases and corporate advertising
- Corporate gifts and promotional items
- Sponsorships and donations
- Exhibitions and participation in forestry related expo's and trade shows
- Corporate uniformity

Provide assistance with the production of brochures and presentations that further the aims of the marketing function.

RESEARCH

Conduct/facilitate regular research to measure employee/stakeholder satisfaction levels.

Analyse campaigns and/or media coverage.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT (PA)

Provide assistant with the day-to-day affairs of the individual(s) the role is assisting.

Aid the individual(s) by assisting with the management of their department.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT & COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST

CORPORATE EVENT MANAGEMENT

Co-ordinate and manage corporate events to effectively achieve management goals.

MASS COMMUNICATION

Facilitate & disseminate all forms of communication to appropriate publics/stakeholders.

Devise, develop and implement short, medium and long-term mass communication strategies.

BUDGET MANAGEMENT

Manage, control and monitor budgets associated with both roles, i.e. communication & marketing budgets, and the budgets of the individual(s) the PA role is assisting.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

Qualifications and experience only make up part of what employers are looking for. There are also a number of essential personal competencies and technical competencies that the ideal candidate should have.

PERSONAL COMPETENCIES / TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

- Highly organised
- Great time management
- Great communicator
- Calm temperament
- Good team player
- Interpersonal skills
- Creative
- Ability to work under pressure
- Appetite for new information
- Networker
- Driven and passionate
- Adaptable
- Self-motivated & self-disciplined
- Enjoys self-improvement
- Initiative
- Diplomatic
- Awareness of current affairs

FUNCTIONAL & TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

- Good command of language - both written and spoken
- Highly computer literate
- Eye for design and detail
- Ability to use desktop publishing
- Familiarity with, or an understanding of all forms of media
- Camera skills
- Presentation and public speaking skills



Social Responsibility

The chance to make a real difference!

Anita Nicholson has been NCT Forestry's PR and communication specialist for the past 15 years and while she enjoys all aspects of her work, one area in particular always brings a smile to her face.

"Social responsibility enables us to uplift those communities who have never had such opportunities before."

When it comes to choosing which projects and programmes NCT Forestry are going to support, they have basically two requirements:

- 1) To help those communities that are 'on their doorstep' so to speak. By focusing on our member's operating areas and the communities surrounding them.
- 2) Supporting projects and programmes that fit into our social responsibility focus.



NCT FORESTRY'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOCUS:

1) EDUCATION: literacy and education in early childhood development; and basic infrastructure at schools and home run crèche's.



LETCEE – trains early development childhood practitioners & set up toy libraries at designated creches in rural Greytown.

Funda Nenja – is a community-based initiative in Mpophomeni, Howick, using dog training skills to impact positively on the pscho-social development of children.

Music voyage – is a rural based music literacy initiative to develop individual life skills and expand social and economic empowerment opportunities through the love of music

2) HEALTH: rural health; welfare of orphans, the aged and those with physical and mental challenges; and food security.



Odidini clinic – services the rural Umbumbulu community outside Durban.

Harding Special School - for the physically & mentally challenged learners in Harding.

3) ENVIRONMENT: conservation and environmental projects.

The Oribi Working Group - by supporting initiatives like this NCT encourages sustainable use of natural resources & the protection of wildlife.



NCT

NCT FORESTRY CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED

Linking independent timber growers to markets



A FINAL THOUGHT

A career as a PA or communication specialist in forestry is both hugely demanding and incredibly rewarding.

It is a constantly evolving role that requires adaptability and versatility. No two days are ever the same and there are often surprises around every corner.

If you are looking for a challenge, communication is your passion and enjoy working on a wide range of projects, this could be the perfect career path for you.

“The real reward is the social responsibility side of my job, seeing firsthand the impact you are making, watching how things develop. It is amazing to see the transition from the initial contact where you evaluate what is needed and where you can help, to the implementation of the programme and finally going back a year on and seeing the impact you have made and the progress those involved are making.” - Anita Nicholson NCT Forestry