

Why would you do the same job as someone else and earn less money? That's an important question for many administrative professionals.

As the job has evolved, pay, titles and responsibilities have become more fluid. Some admins have lucked out. Others have not. The difference comes in understanding your value and knowing something about the field.

Numerous factors are in play. Industry and geography make a difference. Ambition is important. Skills are key. Another big factor: the evolution of administrative jobs over the past few decades. At one time, administrators were mostly secretaries who typed, filed, answered the phone and took orders.

Now, many administrative professionals play a key role in information management and other critical functions. They command more respect and have opportunities to move up. But there's also a chance they won't be adequately compensated for their contributions. Here are four tips to help administrative professionals get the job and the paycheck they deserve.

Is the Industry Hot? Or Not?

While we're likely to see job losses in the financial services and banking sector, they still offer some of the best administrative salaries. Law firms are close behind. Expanding industries, such as healthcare, technology and professional services, may also have more generous salaries.

Industries to stay away from, particularly at the entry level, include those with a high-glitz factor. They include publishing, music, fashion and fine arts. Non-profits, particularly smaller ones, also typically offer smaller paychecks.

Go East

Big cities and major metropolitan areas offer the highest salaries. Almost all of the top-paying states for secretaries, administrative assistants and executive secretaries are on the East Coast, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. They include New York, New Jersey, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia. The one exception: Washington is ranked fifth for pay for executive assistants.

Aim for the Executive Suite

While administrative and secretarial jobs are expected to see average growth, the real increase will be in executive assistant and other jobs in the upper echelons of an organization, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Those jobs are expected to increase 15% from 2006-2016, compared to 9% for rank-and-file admin jobs. The pay can also be substantially higher. At the very top of the pay scale, salaries top 70K and can even reach six figures.

Make Sure You Have the Right Stuff to Advance

To be truly successful and receive a fair salary, aim for a winning combo of hard skills, soft skills and industry knowledge. Computer capabilities are essential. Ditto for organizational, written and verbal communication skills. If you have a knack for numbers or an eye for design, so much the better. Budgeting, project management, vendor relations, supervision, training - the list of capabilities that will help you advance is endless.

Be sure you're always learning and upgrading your skills and make sure you're getting the credit - and cash - you deserve. This is not your grandmother's administrative job and it should come with a 21st century paycheck.

