

Alan,

To: Alan Kay

From: Bob Stein

There seems to be some question as to whether the position of your assistant will be filled or left vacant. The argument against seems to be that you don't have enough work for two people. This probably is true if the assistant is functioning as an executive secretary. Since that's mostly what Pat Cooley did, I can see why some people might have that opinion. However, when I think about what an assistant could be, I come to the opposite conclusion - you need one desperately.

Your assistant should be able to do the following with elan and finesse:

a) Be your eyes and ears at meetings you can not (or should not because of their relative importance) attend, but need to know what transpired.

b) Receive and return a significant number of your phone calls and letters, especially the unsolicited variety, thus providing an effective filter for callers as well as a way to cut down on the amount of time you have to spend on the phone. Being an effective filter INCLUDES making the callers etc., feel as if they have spoken with someone who understands the purpose of the call and can be relied upon to take the appropriate action. There are two levels to this; arranging meetings etc., and carrying on informed substantive discussions. Wanda is a great example of the first. When I started dealing with you and Atari, Wanda was superb at taking messages from me, getting an answer from you, and arranging what needed to be arranged, etc. Mason Southworth, Lewis Branscomb's assistant, is an example of the second. When I needed to call Branscomb a few years ago, trying to clarify a statement he had made in a speech, Southworth fielded the call, got my question, tracked down an answer, and referred me to other articles as well as other people I might want to contact. I don't think Branscomb was ever aware of my call, yet I felt quite well attended to and never minded not talking to Branscomb AT ALL.

c) Be capable of reading and absorbing the content of memos you receive, so that he/she is hip to what is going on around AtariLand, and can figure out whether X really needs to see you right away or if next week will do. You need a HIGHLY INFORMED gatekeeper; uninformed brute force won't do.

If your assistant can do all of the above, it will both save you a lot of time as well as improve relations with the rest of the staff and outsiders who require more stroking than you can supply personally.

Ideally, the person we are looking for combines excellent communication skills, ala Wanda, and a good grasp of the broader goals of our work. Further, the person should have a basic understanding of the technical issues involved, plus the ABILITY to go much further. My guess is that we're looking for someone with an advanced college degree and at least two years of experience in a related area. Presumably, this is a job the person would probably grow out of. For example, the person doesn't see him or herself as an assistant, but would welcome the opportunity to work with you for a number of years before moving on to something else.

If you decide that you do want to get an assistant as I've described, I would be more than happy to help in the search.

cc: Chris Jeffers, Wanda Royse