
Session Preview

Discretion, Diplomacy & Professional Self-Advocacy

SAIS Institute for Administrative Assistants | Keynote #2 | June 18, 2026 | 1:00 PM

Overview

Administrative professionals who support senior leaders operate in a unique and often invisible space, managing access, holding confidences, navigating sensitive conversations, and representing their leaders at every turn.

This session explores three interconnected skills that make that work sustainable and effective:

Discretion Knowing what to protect, and how to protect it with grace.	Diplomacy Navigating difficult conversations without losing your integrity or theirs.	Self-Advocacy Speaking up for your role, your time, and your expertise, professionally.
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What You'll Explore

A few of the ideas we'll dig into together:

- | **The difference between discretion and diplomacy**
- | **A simple 3-step framework for any difficult moment.**
- | **The reason your skills already work, and how to use them more intentionally.**
- | **What professional self-advocacy really means**

What You'll Leave With

- A framework for navigating sensitive situations with confidence
- Ready-to-use language for common difficult moments
- A clearer understanding of how trust works, and how you build it
- Practical tools for advocating for your role without burning bridges
- A renewed sense of the value and visibility of what you do every day

A Question to Sit with Before You Arrive

You don't need to prepare anything, but if you'd like to arrive with something in mind, consider one of these:

Think of a recent moment at work when you had to navigate something sensitive.

- What made it difficult?
- How did you handle it?
- What, if anything, would you do differently?

There are no right answers, just honest ones. That's exactly the spirit of this session.

See you on June 18.

The work you do managing access, holding trust, navigating complexity, is not background support. It is the infrastructure that makes great schools function.

This session is for you. Come ready to think, reflect, and leave with something real.

You matter because you show up with discretion, diplomacy, and dignity.

Activities & Personal Reflection

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Use this during and after the session. This is yours; write freely, honestly, and without editing yourself.

Activity 1 — Would You Rather? Reflection

After the icebreaker: note what landed, surprised, or challenged you.

The question that surprised me most, and why:

The answer I gave that felt most true to my current role:

A question I found difficult to answer, and what made it hard:

Quick thought:

Every answer you gave came from real experience, not a textbook. That instinct is judgment. And judgment is exactly what today is about.

Activity 2 — Scenario Workshop

Small groups | 15–20 minutes | Scenarios will be assigned.

Apply Pause → Assess → Respond to each. Then discuss: What language would you use?

Scenario A — Parent Demanding an Immediate Answer

PAUSE	ASSESS	RESPOND
What did you do before speaking?	What did they need? What could you share?	What would you actually say? Write it out.

Scenario B — Colleague Requesting Confidential Access

PAUSE	ASSESS	RESPOND
What did you do before speaking?	What did they need? What could you share?	What would you actually say? Write it out.

Scenario C — Tasks Outside Your Role

PAUSE	ASSESS	RESPOND
What did you do before speaking?	What did they need? What could you share?	What would you actually say? Write it out.

Scenario D — Board Member Asking Your Personal Opinion

PAUSE	ASSESS	RESPOND
What did you do before speaking?	What did they need? What could you share?	What would you actually say? Write it out.

Debrief — What language came naturally? What felt hard to say?

Personal Reflection — 10 Minutes

This is for you. You will not be asked to share these. Write what's honest.

Where in my current role do I rely most on discretion — and where could I improve?

When have I struggled to advocate for myself? What held me back?

What is one diplomatic phrase I will commit to using this week?

Who in my life or career models a calm, credible presence? What can I learn from them?

What is one situation coming up where I want to apply what I learned today?

My One Commitment — Taking This Back to School

Before you leave today, write one specific thing you will do differently in the next two weeks. Share it out loud with someone near you.

You are trusted because you are trustworthy. You are heard because you speak with intention.
You matter because you show up with discretion, diplomacy, and dignity.

Session Notes

Capture anything from today, key phrases, questions, ideas you want to come back to.