

Future Prospects for Career Secretaries in the U. S. A.

アメリカの秘書職の現状と将来展望

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1986 is memorable and remarkable not only for Japanese women workers but also for the overall Japanese business world. The reason is, of course, the law of equal employment opportunity for men and women which finally came into force on April 1 despite many obstacles.

America legislated the equal employment law in 1964, amended it in 1972, and banned sex discrimination in employment twenty-two years before the enactment of this law in Japan. However, the American law is quite different in one important respect : it is a civil rights law which has by far stricter legal force in the business world. The enactment of this American equal employment law is an amazing and admirable event from the Japanese point of view. However, it is reported that not a few problems have arisen as a result of this law in the twenty years since its inception.

What, then, are the problems the contemporary American business world is now facing? Some of them are : job segregation, unchanged salary differentials between men and women, and the lowering of labor productivity because of unskilled and less-educated minority group employees.

Although the law guarantees equal employment opportunity for men and women, in reality it does not necessarily result in equal consequences upon employment.¹ Ironically, the law has created a situation in which new types of salary differentials have developed between men and women mainly because of job segregation and affirmative action measures.

Women's salaries, especially in the female ghettos of clerical work, confer footnote 2 "clerical work",² services, retail sales, factory or plant work are much lower than those in the fields dominated by male workers. I will take up this underpayment of secretaries later in the following section.

The fact is that in America the salary differentials between men and women have

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remained practically unchanged. According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, working women still earn only 66.5 cents for every dollar a male worker earned in 1983. However, James Smith, a specialist in the study of women's earnings in the workplace, says that women's wages will reach 74 percent of men's by the year of 2000.³ Consequently, the movement to accept "comparable worth" (the equal payment for equal work) is slowly but steadily gaining ground.

Clerical work is the fastest-growing category of employment in America today. A quarter of all the newly created jobs in the 1980s will be clerical, and clerical workers already represent one-fifth of the workforce. Eighty percent of all clerical workers and 99 percent of all secretaries are women.

I. The Changing Secretary

The office of today has changed and is changing at an alarming rate. As a result many secretaries' jobs have changed dramatically and drastically in recent years, with greater responsibility and more skills now expected of them. The changes in a secretary's environment are not limited to the now-prevalent use of word processors, sophisticated tele-communications equipment and other electronic devices. Secretaries are required to have highly developed communication skills and a comprehensive understanding of organizations.

To stay profitable in today's economy, and to keep abreast in the technology and management revolutions, executives have to wade through a growing flood of information.⁴ Therefore, secretaries have to develop, organize, and transmit information. They should also serve as a primary information center for the executives and the company.

With this present situation for professional secretaries, it seems that secretarial work has become more meaningful as a career, bringing greater personal satisfaction and a new sense of professional identity. However, fewer individuals are preparing for and aspiring to secretarial positions in recent years. In this paper I am going to examine how American secretaries are pursuing their professions in the business world. According to Not Just A Secretary by J. B. Morrow and M. Lebov, some secretaries are tremendously frustrated in just being secretaries.⁵ By looking into the environments surrounding most secretaries in the workplace, I would like to investigate the cause of the serious shortage of well-qualified secretaries now and in years to come.

II. Increasing Demand for Well-Qualified Secretaries

According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 3.9 million secretaries and

stenographers were employed in 1985, while there were over 300,000 unfilled openings. It predicts that the number of secretarial jobs will increase by 28.3 to 37.4% between 1980 and 1990, while the percent of growth for the total workforce will be only from 17.1 to 25.3%. It is projected that this secretarial field will continue to be one of the fastest growing in the U. S. By 1990, there are expected to be 5,357,000 secretaries.⁶

Economist Gerald D. Fahey of the Massachusetts Division of Employment Security says there are 6,000 secretarial job openings each year, and 2,000 of these are new jobs created by growth, making it one of the fastest-growing job categories in the state. There will be 95,000 secretarial jobs in Massachusetts by 1990, a 28% increase over the 1980 figure of 74,000⁷

It was also predicted in the July 1984 issue of "SELF" magazine that more than 700,000 secretarial job openings would be expected by 1990.

During the 1970s, 20 million new jobs were created in America. However, in 1983 and 1984, 7 million brand-new jobs were created in just two years. The entrepreneurs and small-business people in the information/electronics/service sector are creating these new jobs.⁸ There will be labor shortages in a growing number of jobs beginning in the late 1980s, as the baby bust moves into the workforce. The 1990s will bring the real crunch. Generally, corporations recruit their entry-level workers from the eighteen-to-twenty-four age group. By 1990, there will be 4.5 million fewer entry-level workers than in 1980, according to the U. S. Census Bureau.

Undoubtedly in the seller's market of the 1980s and 1990s, more competent and eligible secretaries will be in great demand.

Ⅲ. Why Is It So Difficult To Get Skilled and Well-Qualified Secretaries?

In spite of the ever increasing demand for skilled and well-qualified secretaries, and the fact that secretaries' salaries have been slowly but steadily increasing, there has been, nevertheless, a serious secretarial shortage in recent years.

Stephen Fogelgren, director of a secretarial recruitment agency in the U. S., says that his organization found over 10,000 individuals for client companies in 1981 but estimates that over 60,000 secretarial positions went unfilled nationwide. He projects that the shortage will increase to over 250,000 unfilled positions by 1985. As reasons for this situation he cited the availability of alternative careers for women, the passing of the post-war baby boom generation, and above all, executives' ignorance of what a secretary does.⁹

More than 1,000 members of Professional Secretaries International¹⁰ discussed

“Why Is There A Shortage of Qualified Secretaries?” throughout North America at the annual PSI District/Regional Conferences in the fall of 1985.¹¹ Some of the reasons they cited are as follows :

- A. 1. Inadequate Compensation
- 2. Management/Corporate Attitudes
- 3. Lack of Opportunities for Advancement
- B. 4. Increasing Nontraditional Work Opportunities
- 5. Office Automation
- C. 6. Negative Image
- 7. Old-fashioned Attitudes of Women/Secretaries
- 8. No Standards/Definitions of Secretary/Job Descriptions

I shall now discuss each of these reasons in detail.

1. Inadequate Compensation

Generally, pay is not commensurate with the level of responsibility assumed. Often, the Certified Professional Secretary¹² rating or other indicators of additional education and experience do not automatically lead to a pay increase.

The New York Times published an article in August 1985 citing “low salaries and sometimes boring work”¹³ as reasons why women were “far less eager to pursue secretarial careers.”

According to surveys conducted by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Administrative Management Society (AMS), the yearly salary for an average secretary was approximately \$18,000 to \$20,000 and even the best salary for a top-ranking secretary was approximately \$40,000 in 1985.¹⁴ Secretarial salary averages for 1985 were from 3.7% to 6.1% higher than in 1984, according to the BLS survey.

The salary averages in 1985 for the five secretarial levels and the percent increase over 1984 averages are :

<u>Secretarial</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>1985</u> <u>Average</u>	<u>Increase</u> <u>Over 1984</u>
1. Secretary/Receptionist	\$15, 869	3. 7%
2. Jr. /Sr. Secretary	17, 721	4. 7%
3. Executive Secretary	19, 988	4. 9%
4. Administrative Assistant	22, 520	4. 6%
5. Administrative Secretary	26, 210	6. 1%

However, according to the April 21st issue of Business Week, 1986, there are some executive/administrative assistants who earn more than \$50,000 a year. On the other

hand, if a woman obtains a job other than a secretarial position after acquiring an MBA (Master of Business Administration)¹⁵ degree, she will be able to command a salary of approximately \$40,000, and, if lucky, even \$50,000 at the start.

According to the survey conducted by the editors of The Working Woman Report,¹⁶ the average salaries of U. S. women workers in other fields in 1983 are as follows :

Position	Salary (US\$)
1. Public accountant (manager/large firm)	\$35–55, 000
2. Corporate advertising manager	36, 500
3. Attorney (recent law school graduate)	30, 000
4. Cashier of large bank	28–37, 000
5. Computer : Senior systems analyst/ Programmer	28, 726
6. Computer : Director, data processing	39, 185
7. Chemical engineer --- Starting	26, 736
--- 5–9 yrs. after B. S.	37, 800
8. Nurse practitioner	20, 448
9. Clinical nurse specialist	19, 419
10. Physician	93, 270
11. Teaching–Elementary (public school)	20, 000
12. Teaching–Secondary (public school)	21, 100

Although there have been many reports that men are taking secretarial jobs in growing numbers, and undoubtedly this is true especially in a shrinking job market, the U. S. secretarial field is comprised mainly of women—99.1% in 1981 and 99.0% in 1983, according to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. And often workers in female-dominated professions are notoriously underpaid. This may be due to sex discrimination, a lack of pay equity, the traditional view of women as providers of secondary incomes, or positions being seen as “interim” employment.

2. Management/Corporate Attitudes

Management has traditionally been male-dominated and may reflect chauvinistic attitudes toward subordinate women workers. Few managers receive training on how to work effectively with a secretary, delegate responsibility, or use a coworker as part of the management team. Because managers may not know the full range of contributions a qualified secretary can make to the organization, job descriptions often do not reflect the potential support that could be given.

Moreover, the secretarial position is generally viewed as an entry-level position and a stopgap between high school and/or business school and getting married. Some organizations do not recognize the progressive career path of the secretarial profession, but call all women office/clerical workers "secretaries."

What distinguishes a secretary from clerical workers then? Most secretaries think of a secretary as performing more administrative roles rather than just performing technical tasks. Some of these are listed as :

- "decision making,"
- "ability to step in for the executive,"
- "level of authority," and
- "developed and utilized intelligence."

According to a survey conducted by Joan G. Bedell, Administrative Secretary, Elmhurst Memorial Hospital, Elmhurst, Illinois, and Christine Tvrdik Klink, Secretary to Manager of Manufacturing, Continental Group Inc., West Chicago, Illinois, executives and secretaries consider organizational abilities, initiative, assertiveness,¹⁷ dependability, flexibility,¹⁸ and positive attitude as characteristics which distinguish the secretary from clerical workers.¹⁹

Thomas R. Otway, vice president and general manager, Franklin-Pierce Associates, Boston, Massachusetts, writes, "If the status of the secretary were elevated to include some support and some independent responsibilities, management would be able to bring better-trained, more highly-skilled workers into their firms. Companies will have to treat secretaries more as professionals if they are to attract and keep them."²⁰

3. Lack of Opportunities for Advancement

There remains the fact that secretarial positions usually are not included on the organizational chart, or if shown, are indicated as support positions only, with no horizontal or vertical progression. Thus, secretarial positions are often viewed as dead-end jobs.

Secretaries are seldom considered for openings in management, even though they can demonstrate the necessary skills and experience. Incentives are few, perhaps because secretarial jobs are not seen as long-term, career positions. Career planning is not emphasized or encouraged by management.

Judy Scherch, Manager of General Employment with Ohio Bell Telephone Company says, "Women often look for opportunities that can lead to management positions ; unfortunately, most secretarial positions don't offer that potential."²¹

Lucy Sewall, personnel director at the Pioneer Group says, "Management's perception of the secretarial position is 'once a secretary, always a secretary.' I just don't know if changes will occur inside companies without the prompting of personnel pro-

professionals and some external pressure.”²²

According to Jeannette Reddish Scollard, even the position of an executive secretary is a difficult starting position from which to build a successful career in the corporate world because executives so prize an excellent secretary that they are reluctant to promote her. She should indicate at the very first interview that she is interested in the job as a learning experience and would after a period of time like to advance to a position of increased responsibility.²³

The National Commission on Working Women reports that few of the 13.3 million American women in clerical work, which includes secretaries and administrative assistants, ever rise into management, and most remain at the bottom of the clerical ladder. Some achieve supervisory status.

Commission Executive Director Sandra Porter says research shows that career barriers include insufficient information about company advancement policy, restricted choices on job education and training, and poor communication of employee career goals to employers.²⁴

In recent years a number of “how to” textbooks have been published for career-oriented women, especially for those who are targeting the top in the corporate game. And for secretaries who are fed up with their low status, with low pay, and with minimal advancement opportunities²⁵ several books are available to help them choose their course either in moving to an entirely new occupation, or in moving ahead as a professional secretary within the secretarial field before advancing into management.

4. Increasing Nontraditional Work Opportunities

Career alternatives for women are expanding. Women are finding more challenges, increased compensation, and expanded responsibilities by moving out of the secretarial profession and into management positions. As more American women become heads of households and single parents, these incentives are increasing in importance.

The feminist movement has paved the way for women to advance into nontraditional career opportunities. U. S. Government support of quotas and antidiscrimination laws protect minority rights. The movement has also increased the awareness of sex discrimination, pressed for equal employment and educational opportunities, and altered societal attitudes about working women.

As more positions in nontraditional areas are becoming available, women are seeking out those with increased compensation, benefits, challenges, and opportunities for advancement. Leadership positions, as opposed to support positions, carry more prestige and status.

As a result, many American educational institutions, including junior colleges and community colleges, are experiencing a decreasing number of student enrollments for

secretarial science or office technologies, with the exception of the Katharine Gibbs School²⁶ which enjoys a national reputation as a training ground for executive secretaries.

5. Office Automation

The office of today is changing at a bewildering rate. In many businesses, knowledge of automation is now preferable and sometimes essential for success. New skills are being required for secretaries, especially in "information-age"²⁷ and "high-tech" office environments.²⁸ Secretaries should be broadly knowledgeable, for example, about the principles of ergonomics, office automation, microcomputer applications in administration, data processing, word processing, records management, micrographics, reprographics, and telecommunications.

According to Booz, Allen & Hamilton, a management, technology, and market research consulting firm, three to four million organizations will be using electronic office systems by 1990.²⁹ Many secretaries fear change. Some of them have what is commonly known as "computer phobia." They fear that the electronic office will be an office without people. They visualize a room full of machines, perhaps with a token human to oversee the operation. For some of them there is the stress related to the ergonomics of working with machines as well as the stress of being held accountable for new skills.

6. Negative Image

Secretarial as well as sex-role stereotypes still continue to demean the profession. According to a current study, 92% of commercials and advertisements reinforce the sex-role stereotypes. Women are portrayed as being either decorative or functional, while men are portrayed as being rational and knowledgeable and able to make decisions.³⁰

The profession is viewed as female-dominated, and the secretarial role is not defined well enough. Secretarial positions are viewed as being easily filled, and employers do not expect qualified, high-achieving workers to remain in these positions on a long-term basis.

7. Old-fashioned Attitudes of Women/Secretaries

Women usually enter the workplace with no training in assertiveness, team play, or career planning. They tend not to promote themselves or their profession. There is a lack of goal setting and direction for many women in the workplace, and many do not relate to company goals, but rather to personal interests. Recognition of the value of secretaries is low, and more prestige and status are found in nontraditional jobs.

8. No Standards/Definitions of Secretary/Job Descriptions

The term "secretary" continues to be generic and indiscriminately used. Each orga-

nization assigns skills, duties, and responsibilities to the title, independent of a universal standard. There is no standardized definition, nor are there measurable standards of performance for career levels.

Persons enter the field with diverse background education and skill development. Some secretaries are hired from secondary programs, vocational/technical institutions, business schools, and two- and four-year colleges. Others are hired because of their experience rather than any formal training they have received. The CPS rating is not universally recognized as a reliable discriminator yet.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

If the shortage of secretaries continues to increase as anticipated, management will become hard-pressed. One solution suggested is a new recognition by professional managers of the secretary's role and responsibility.

More emphasis must also be placed on the relationship between business and industry, and on working with high schools/colleges to encourage secretarial science courses in the curriculum. Business and industry must strive to demonstrate that "being a secretary"³¹ has as much career potential as other options for women and men.

Dolores L. Mitchell, Director of the Katharine Gibbs School thinks the "pressure of the shortage will raise salaries and put emphasis on what the job is worth in terms of education, supervision responsibility, level of job responsibility, and acquired skills."³²

Susan C. Bauer and Carolyn Cuttler, who are both Assistant Professors at the State University Agricultural and Technical College, Farmingdale, New York, support her opinion that the secretarial shortage may be a boon to professional secretaries, resulting in higher salaries, greater responsibilities, and higher status in the organization as the supply tries to meet the demand.³³

Forecasters John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene also predict in their book, Reinventing the Corporation, that "Women's wages, especially in secretarial and clerical fields, will grow to reflect declining numbers of entry-level workers—and the increased options for women in other areas. . . The people who want competent secretaries will have to pay them what they are worth."³⁴

Job satisfaction, salary, benefits and the potential to advance in a firm will all be key elements attracting individuals to seek satisfying careers in the secretarial field. Until these are offered, other fields will continue to draw high-calibre individuals away from the secretarial field.

There is no denying that secretaries continue to make a major impact on business,

industry, and government, and are essential to the success of organizations small and large. Secretaries who assert themselves professionals are highly valued components of quality contemporary organizations. There will always be a keen need for motivated, skilled secretaries.

It is quite clear, therefore, that a cooperative effort between business and education are needed to address the issue of secretarial shortages as well as to afford the position the long-overdue status it deserves. Then and only then will more capable, intelligent, aspiring and career-minded candidates enter the secretarial field and take part in training programs in their companies or in educational institutions.³⁵

Notes

- 1 Eiko Shinotsuka, "Koyōkintōhō ga Rodōshijō ni Oyobosu Eikyō," *Eco-Forum* Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 1986.
篠塚英子「雇用均等法が労働市場に及ぼす影響」統計研究会ニュース、統計研究会。
- 2 The secretarial profession is classified within the field of clerical work. Secretaries are categorized according to grades and job descriptions from the lowest level to the top level as follows :
 - Receptionist
 - Clerk-Typist
 - Secretary Stenographer
 - Filing Clerk
 - Junior Secretary
 - Senior Secretary
 - Executive Secretary
 - Executive/Administrative Assistant
 - Administrative Secretary
 - Corporate Secretary(現代秘書実務研究会編「現代秘書ハンドブック」1986年改定版、実務教育出版、pp. 7 - 9)
The abilities and qualities necessary for high-ranking secretaries which are most mentioned in the newspaper 'Help Wanted Advertisements' are word processing/computer skills, organizational ability, secretarial skills, communication skills, initiative, administrative ability, and interpersonal skills.
- 3 John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Re-inventing the Corporation*, New York : Warner Books, 1985, p. 239.
- 4 Marshall B. Bass, "The Changing Secretary," *The Secretary*, May 1986, Professional Secretaries International, p. 3.
- 5 Jodie Berlin Morrow and Myrna Lebov, *Not Just A Secretary*, New York : Wiley Press, 1984, Preface.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 7 Thomas R. Otway, "Secretarial Crunch Coming," *The Secretary*, October 1985, Professional Secretaries International, p. 7.
- 8 John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 - 19.

- 9 "Will You be Able to Find a Secretary in 1989?" The Executive Secretary, New Zealand Institute of Management, November 1983.
- 10 Professional Secretaries International was the first of the Secretarial Networks founded in 1942 in the U. S. A. PSI, as it is commonly known, offers members a variety of workshops and forums devoted to the secretary's professional development. A nominal membership fee entitles members to copies of The Secretary, an outstanding publication that is full of information dealing with such topics as compensation, career development, automation, sexual harassment, and other important issues.
- 11 Susan Fenner, "Why a Shortage of Qualified Secretaries?," The Secretary, February 1986, pp. 7-9.
- 12 Certified Professional Secretary Certification (CPS) .
PSI sponsors certification to secretaries who complete satisfactorily a two-day examination based on behavioral science in business ; business law ; economics and management ; accounting ; office administration and communication ; and office technology. Earning the certification identifies the secretary as exceptional according to measurable standards.
The first year the CPS rating was awarded was 1951 when 62 secretaries were certified. Today, more than 18,000 persons are CPS holders.
- 13 Many secretaries complain that their work as a secretary is sometimes boring because most of their time is spent in answering telephones, opening mail, typing, taking dictation, and such chores as serving coffee and at times taking care of bosses' personal errands.
- 14 Kay Fusselman, "1986 Newspaper Help Wanted Ad Survey," The Secretary, January 1986, p. 8.
- 15 An M. B. A. certainly has one definite added advantage for women : It makes them look serious about their careers. It marks them as dedicated, smart and hardworking. In today's tough economic environment the woman with an M. B. A. is much more likely to find a well-paying "career-beginning" job upon graduation than the woman who has only a liberal arts degree.
Any woman with an M. B. A. is likely to enter the work arena with a substantial salary boost. (Jeannette Reddish Scollard, No-Nonsense Management Tips for Women, New York : Pocket Books, 1985, pp. 18-19.)
- 16 The editors of Working Woman, The Working Woman Report, New York : Simon and Schuster, 1984, pp. 28-49.
- 17 Assertiveness is an attribute that can help a secretary to determine what she wants, express her needs, and take action toward getting what she wants. It may be defined as being able to identify what she wants, to share it with others, and to work toward getting what she wants for herself. The significant principles behind assertive behavior include the following : taking the initiative, speaking for herself, identifying what she wants, and analyzing risks and taking responsibility for the outcomes. (Arlene Yerys, The Professional Secretary At Work, New York : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984, pp. 8-11.)
- 18 Career advancement opportunities for secretaries are better than they have ever been. However, it requires flexibility, determination, and risk-taking to move into varied kinds of responsibilities. . . . (Mark Langemo and Daniel R. Boyd, "Secretarial Savvy for the Information Age," The Secretary, February 1986, p. 11.)
- 19 Joan G. Bedell and Christine Tvrdik Klink, "Is Executive Perception the Secretary's Real Challenge?," The

- Secretary, January 1985, p. 27.
- 20 Thomas R. Otway, op. cit. p. 7.
- 21 “Will you Be Able to Find a Secretary in 1989?,” ibid.
- 22 Thomas R. Otway, op. cit., p. 10.
- 23 Jeannette Reddish Scollard, op. cit., pp. 23–24.
- 24 Thomas R. Otway, op. cit., p. 10.
- 25 Jodie Berlin Morrow and Myrna Lebov, op. cit., Preface.
- 26 The Katharine Gibbs School was founded by Katharine Gibbs in 1911 as the Secretarial School for Educated Women. It is located at 21 Marlborough St., Boston, Massachusetts and has ten other sister schools in the U. S. Students are trained to become not only professional secretaries but also top executives. The educational emphasis is on traditional skills, technological competence, and team play.
- 27 Jean S. Bowen and James M. Lahiff, “Forecasting Technological Change,” The Secretary, May 1986, p. 21.
- 28 Mark Langemo and Daniel R. Boyd, op. cit., p. 10.
- 29 Arnold Rosen, Eileen Feretic and Margaret Hilton Bahniuk, Administrative Procedures for the Electronic Office, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1985, p. 9.
- 30 Arlene Yerys, op. cit., p. 3.
- 31 A secretary is not just a secretary. A secretary is a key office staff-member with a wide range of transferable skills. Learning to identify, appreciate, and expand these skills—and getting others to appreciate them—are the crucial steps to maximum career potential. (Jodie Berlin Morrow and Myrna Lebov, op. cit., Preface.)
- 32 Thomas R. Otway, op. cit., p. 10.
- 33 Susan C. Bauer and Carolyn Cuttler, “Training the Professional Secretary. . . The Time Is Now,” The Secretary, February 1985, p. 17.
- 34 John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, op. cit., p. 296.
- 35 Thomas R. Otway, op. cit., p. 10.

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