

Get paid to work with a star!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Celebrity
Personal
Assistant**



JOHN C. HAVENS

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the *FabJob Guide to Become a Celebrity Personal Assistant*. This guide is going to give you an in-depth understanding of one of the most exciting industries in the world today.

Celebrity Personal Assistants, or “CPAs,” as they’ll be referred to throughout this guide, are a vital member of any celebrity’s team. They function as organizers, coordinators and just about anything else that a busy celebrity might require, giving peace of mind to people who are simply too busy doing what they do best to be bothered with anything else.

CPAs get to see a side of life that a very small percentage of the population will ever know — the lives of the rich and famous. We’re all curious

about what goes on in those houses up on the hill with 20 bedrooms, six-door garages, huge lawns... and a wrought-iron gate to keep people out. Being a CPA allows you to enter this exclusive world and live like a star... if only for the workday. Some CPAs even travel or live with their celebrities!

You will always be aware of the hottest trends in style, fashion, art and decorating, and will often be given cash or a credit card to go out and buy proof that your celebrity is up on these things, too. If your celebrity can't attend the sold-out sports event or the movie premiere, guess what? You do!

You may find yourself sharing a car ride or swapping recipes with celebrities that most people would love to meet, and you'll take it all in stride. Many CPAs get new furniture, jewelry or other expensive gifts from their celebrities, who buy everything brand-new with alarming frequency. You will undoubtedly hear or see things that tabloids would pay hard cash to learn about.

So with all these perks, what's the drawback? You can't really tell anyone what you do. That's right: when someone says, "What's so-and-so really like?" and you want to tell them about the bath they take in Jell-O every morning and their tube-sock fetish, you'll have to smile demurely and say, "Oh, not much different from you or me."

Can you keep a secret? How about hundreds of them?

If so, being a Celebrity Personal Assistant might be for you!

1.1 What is a Celebrity Personal Assistant?

In order to say what a "celebrity personal assistant" is and does, it is useful to look at the meaning of each of the words in the job title – "celebrity", "personal" and "assistant."

1.1.1 "Celebrity"

Celebrity can be defined as: "A celebrated person. A widely known and popularly esteemed person. Also known as: celeb, star, superstar, name, notable, somebody, center of attraction, person of note."

The above definition of celebrity is one we're familiar with. As a "celebrity personal assistant," you would be working with the kind of person described in the definition. However, not all celebrities are alike — there are many different types.

Types of Celebrities

Which of these types of celebrities can you imagine working for?

Actors

From Julia Roberts to Tom Cruise, virtually all the actors you see in leading roles on television or in the movies need a personal assistant. So do many Broadway performers, as well as former TV and movie stars.

Athletes

Many highly paid star athletes in a variety of sports — such as baseball, basketball, football, and hockey — have personal assistants. After all, do you think Tiger Woods has enough time to personally answer all the calls and letters he receives?

Authors

"The best fame is a writer's fame. It's enough to get a table at a good restaurant, but not enough to get you interrupted when you eat."

— Fran Lebowitz, *Writer*

Bestselling authors such as Stephen King use the services of a personal assistant. If you have an interest in literature, this may be the ideal gig for you.

Business Executives

Some C.E.O.s and executives (such as Bill Gates or Donald Trump) are household names. Others may not be celebrities, but working as a personal assistant for one can be a stepping-stone to eventually landing your dream job with a star.

Entertainment Industry

The entertainment industry is filled with people who need personal assistants, including directors, producers, even agents. Others who may need CPAs include national news anchors and morning-show hosts.

Musicians

Rock stars, country music legends, classical musicians and hip-hop artists may need a personal assistant. As you will read later, Madonna's personal assistant eventually became her manager.

Politicians

Nationally known politicians – both past and present – often need someone to handle their personal matters, so they can focus on matters of state. Likewise, many diplomats hire personal assistants.

The Rich

Wealthy families (including royalty) may have many members of a household staff, with a personal assistant for one or both spouses. As a CPA to the rich, you may have the opportunity to help your employer promote the good work of one or more charitable organizations.



Other Celebrities

Anyone else who is in the public eye, such as an artist (painter, sculptor, illustrator, etc.), model or professional speaker, may need the services of a personal assistant.

In chapter 3 of this guide you will learn details on how to get hired by different types of celebrities. Before you start applying, it's a good idea to give some thought to which type of celebrity you would prefer to work for, because it can help you target your job search more effectively.

What Type of Celebrity Should You Work For?

Three factors to consider when deciding on the type of celebrity you want to work for are your interests, your lifestyle preferences, and your location.

Your Interests

Why not pursue work in a field you're interested in? For example, if you have an interest in the entertainment industry, you might enjoy working for an actor or director. You'll get to meet fascinating people and learn what it's like behind the scenes in a very public person's life. Or you may have a head for business, and want to work for a top executive. Or perhaps you're a sports enthusiast who would like nothing better than to work for an athlete and witness their fast-paced life firsthand.

Being a celebrity personal assistant is a wonderful way to learn more about a career you would eventually like to enter yourself. For example, if you have ever thought you would like to be an actor, you can learn about the business and make connections by working as an assistant. However, as you will discover later in this guide, it is strongly recommended that you not disclose your ultimate goal while you are job hunting. Celebrities, like other employers, want to hire people who will remain with them as long as possible, and focus on doing the job they were hired for.

Your Lifestyle

Besides your interests, you should also consider the lifestyle you want. Do you prefer a 9-to-5 workday and thrive in an environment where you're dealing with many of the same people on a day-to-day basis?

If so, consider working for a business executive or wealthy family. Although they may have lots of social events to attend, odds are their work environment will remain fairly consistent, at least in terms of the people you'll be talking with on a daily basis.

Do you like not knowing what you're going to do tomorrow? Does a typical 9-to-5 lifestyle sound stilted and boring? Then you might want to work for an actor, athlete, musician, politician, or speaker. These professions usually entail lots of travel and schedules that are always changing.

For example: actors go on location and are away from home a lot; athletes have away games, or train away from home. Politicians may go back and forth from one state or region to Washington and have dozens of benefits to attend. It can be a lot of fun trying to keep a lot of balls in the air at once, and this is what you'll be doing if you work for someone with a fast-paced lifestyle. However, it may also mean longer hours for you. If you work for an entertainer or athlete, you could be working 14- to 16-hour days and be on-call the rest of the time.

Ultimately, however, each celebrity is different. For example, some authors rarely travel, while others are frequently on the road attending book signings and doing media interviews. Your hours and the nature of the work you do will be determined by whom you work for and what you agree upon. These issues will typically come up during interviews, which are covered in chapter 3.

Your Location

You may think that a CPA would have to live and work only in major media centers such as Los Angeles and New York. It's true that the majority of such jobs are located on either coast, but celebrities can and do live elsewhere.

Sandra Bullock has a home in Austin, Texas, as does her close friend Matthew McConaghey. Many musicians reside in or near the area (Lyle Lovett is a good ole Texas boy), while other hotbeds of musical activity include Nashville and Memphis. Oprah Winfrey, of course, lives in Chicago, where her show was taped; Gloria Estefan lives on Star Island, a man-made island within Miami Beach, Florida; Eminem still lives in Michigan, as does Aretha Franklin. Harrison Ford has a ranch in Jack-

son Hole, Wyoming, while Jessica Lange lived on a horse farm in Virginia. Renee Zellweger has purchased a home in the tony Hamptons on New York's Long Island.

Obviously, stars travel for work or pleasure; some have homes in hot vacation resorts like Aspen, Colorado. But you'd be amazed at how many celebrities prefer to conduct much of their lives outside the public eye. In fact, no matter where you currently reside, there may already be a celebrity living very close to you!

1.1.2 "Personal"

As a CPA, you will have a personal relationship with a celebrity. Some celebrity personal assistants and employment agencies have described the assistant/celebrity relationship as something similar to marriage. JaNiece Rush, President of Lifestyle Resources (an agency that employs CPAs), calls celebrity personal assistants "nannies to grown-ups." As a CPA, your primary role will be as a caregiver. You are going to get hired to take care of the most intimate aspects of a person's life.

Picture yourself as a celebrity: you're constantly surrounded by people who want something from you — autographs, donations, money, time. Now you're going to hire someone who is going to know the most intimate details of your life. You'll trust them with your credit card information, and they may see you in your underwear, figuratively or literally. Obviously, you would only hire someone you could trust completely.

Ideally, you'll become friends with your celebrity, and they will respect you because they know how well you take care of them. Although trust becomes an enormous part of your relationship, when you start you will probably have to sign a non-disclosure agreement that ensures you will not repeat any private information, under threat of a lawsuit.

And what about your personal life? Can you have a spouse and family and still be a successful CPA? This will depend on your celebrity and your agreement with them. It can be difficult to have a steady family life as a CPA, because your job description calls for 24/7 care of your employer. In this case, you can and should set up parameters of availability (more about this later), but be aware that this generally is not a 9-to-5 profession.

1.1.3 “Assistant”

As a celebrity personal assistant, you will be “assisting” your employer. So, what exactly will your duties entail when you become a CPA? Again, there are no set rules, since every celebrity is different.

“You might have to find a dog groomer that can groom the dog between 3 and 5 am the day of the request, find a plane that can sky write “I love you” in Hebrew or order \$75,000 dollars worth of red roses to be shipped overnight to Japan because you can only trust one florist. The requests sound ridiculous but when you combine how busy the celebrity’s schedule is with how often it changes because of work, plus their obligations, the requests start to make more and more sense.”

— *Ariel Stepp*

Celebrities need to buy groceries and schedule doctor’s appointments like everyone else, but unlike everyone else they’ve also got publicity, fan mail, photo shoots, important meetings and volumes of phone calls to make. And you will be there to assist them.

“I have often said that a personal assistant is part agent, part manager, part psychologist, part hand-holder, part ‘member-of-the-family’ and, of course, part go-fer [‘go-for’ this, ‘go-for’ that]!”

— *Jonathan Holiff*

Depending on your celebrity, your job might include handling phone calls, opening mail, and other office work; running errands, including shopping; helping around the house; making travel arrangements; keeping track of the celebrity’s schedule — even planning parties. In chapter 2 you will learn more about the many different types of tasks that CPAs do, and how to develop the skills to perform them.

1.2 Benefits of a Career as a CPA

Good CPAs are in demand, so the job offers some wonderful benefits. Pay and other benefits vary from one position to another, but in this section you will find some of the standard benefits you can expect. If you have lots of marketable skills (see Chapter 2 for a list of skills that are most in demand), you may have some bargaining room.

“Perhaps the greatest benefit to being a personal assistant is that you are exposed to a lifestyle that would otherwise be unknown to you. By association, you travel in rarefied circumstances, meet famous people, experience luxury and enjoy a tremendous number of perks. When I worked for Don Johnson, I traveled on his private jet, attended a Mike Tyson fight with him (ringside), and experienced the luxury side of Las Vegas, among many other perks. He was very generous. Of course, you are generally well paid too.”

— Jonathan Holiff

1.2.1 Pay

There are no set standards of pay for CPAs. If you are an independent contractor, you essentially negotiate your own contracts. However, there are two basic ways you can get paid: on an hourly basis or on a salary basis.

Hourly

Of the 15 or so CPAs interviewed for this guide, only a few mentioned getting paid by the hour. One of the CPAs said he made \$18 per hour and worked from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Thursday. He received no benefits, but did get some gifts as perks. Another CPA charged considerably more per hour for her services: \$30-\$50, depending on the client and the type of work. Her experience, however, is what allows her to charge more for what she does, since she has well over 15 years in the service industry with a number of impressive references.

On the whole, the greatest benefit of being paid by the hour seems to be flexibility. Although you have to be on-call for the agreed-upon hours, you can basically make your own schedule as long as you get every daily duty accomplished. If your employer is amenable to this kind of day-to-day fluctuation, working by the hour may be just the thing for you. However, many employers want a person who is available all day long. In that case, you would be on salary.

Salary

According to Jonathan Holiff, Founder of the Association of Celebrity Personal Assistants, professional CPAs generally earn between \$850

and \$2,000 per week. The research for this guide revealed that a CPA's full-time salary may range from as little as \$450 per week (less than \$25,000 per year) to \$100,000 or more per year. Here are some other comments about salary from those who are currently in the business:

"The average salary varies from person to person and involvement of the job. On the West coast, as a full-time assistant, one could expect anywhere from between \$600-\$1,000 a week, with no benefits. On the East Coast it is about \$800-\$1,000 a week. Generally, you are talking [about] a 40-hour week, but when the celebrity is actually working on a project, the rate goes up because then the studio is paying for your salary and your workload is greater. Some celebrities are 'easier' than others, and are priced accordingly."

— *Patrick Bevilacqua*

"I've heard of people being offered as little as \$450 a week to start and as much as \$1,500 a week, and this could be with or without medical benefits. There are a lot of variables at work in determining a CPA's salary: the celebrity's own financial level, immediate situation and future potential will be some of the factors."

— *Joyce Cohen*

"A lot of the dot-com millionaires are willing to pay really professional salaries to get really professional, sharp, corporate-level people to work in their homes. I recently did a search for a guy who wanted a CPA, and he was willing to pay \$80, \$90 or \$100 thousand a year, as long as the person had been a personal assistant for four or five years. It was an excellent job."

— *JaNiece Rush,*
Lifestyle Resources

1.2.2 The Perks

CPAs enjoy job "perks" that people in other jobs can only dream of. Here are some examples:

"I did receive tons of things that [my celebrities] no longer wanted. As the old saying goes, 'One man's junk is another man's treasure.' I now have a portable telephone, a beautiful framed drawing/picture of the Brooklyn Bridge, a Stairmaster machine, a large wooden Art

Deco cabinet to hold books, cards and important files, and a modern-looking desk, which I am working on as we speak.”

— *Daniel Ellis*

“Perks include benefits, travel, clothing, collectibles — and sometimes cars, too.”

— *Jonathan Holiff*

“As for ‘tips’ or ‘perks,’ there can be few or many. Usually on the holidays, you can expect to get a little something, [and] most often if you go above and beyond duty, you are rewarded. And of course, when you are expected to travel you get airfare and hotels and meals, etc., and it is usually first-class all the way.”

— *Patrick Bevilacqua*

Many CPAs travel quite a bit. You may go behind the scenes at film shoots, or receive great seats to sports events, or tag along for a photo shoot in exotic locales. One CPA who works for a well-known actor/director gets to go to an array of five-star hotels in any city their celebrity is planning to visit. They sample the rooms, order room service and check out all the amenities of the hotel — free of charge!

Most CPAs receive gifts of some kind. Linda Brumfield, a CPA interviewed for this guide, got a bracelet as a present from Liza Minnelli, and another CPA was the recipient of some expensive furniture their boss didn’t want anymore. Carol Burnett even gave her assistant a Land Rover! Although you can’t count on these expensive or intriguing gifts, don’t be surprised if you make yourself invaluable enough to receive some.

Another “perk” of being a CPA is that you will have the pleasure of being around lots of fascinating and talented people. There is also a chance you’ll become close and intimate friends with your celebrity. They may take you in as their confidante, since they know they can trust you with their most intimate secrets.

For many, one of the biggest benefits of being a CPA is realizing that you are successfully taking care of your celebrity to the best of your abilities. As a valued individual with a wide range of talents, you have the secret pleasure of knowing that famous person can only do what they do because you’re supporting them.

1.2.3 Future Possibilities

Being a CPA is a fantastic way to learn about another industry that you're interested in. Some CPAs have found great contacts through their positions, and have gone on to achieve great success in the same field as their employer. Other CPAs have had very exciting career shifts. For instance, Madonna's assistant Caresse Norman became her manager, and former assistants to both Don Johnson and Tony Danza became vice-president of development at their film companies.

You certainly will have the opportunity to make contacts. Perhaps, in working for an athlete, you hit it off with their publicist. You discover you have a real knack for networking and marketing, and a new career is born. We also know a number of CPAs who worked in production for films and TV after they worked for their celebrity. In many ways, being a CPA is an incredible opportunity to learn everything about an industry.

1.3 About This Guide

This guide gives you the practical advice you need to get started and succeed as a celebrity assistant.

To give you detailed insider information, hundreds of hours went into researching and producing this guide. More than a dozen celebrity personal assistants and people who work with celebrities contributed their insider knowledge. These contributors have achieved their dream of working with stars (including several Academy Award winners).

In this guide, they share with you exclusive information to help you launch your career and get hired as a celebrity assistant. Remember, you can't get this information from any CPA association, since you would have to be a working CPA to join any of them. You are being taken into a private, inner circle with the advice provided by our experts. This guide will provide you with answers to questions such as:

- What type of skills does a celebrity look for in a personal assistant?
- How can I acquire those skills?

- How do I locate the celebrity I want to work for?
- Is there any place that job openings are advertised?
- What employment agencies work with celebrities?
- How do I make the right connections to get hired?
- What will my interview be like?

Each chapter in this guide is carefully designed to walk you step-by-step towards finding a great job in the CPA industry:

The Skills You'll Need (Chapter 2) will give you a clear understanding of what personal traits and skills future employers will want from their CPAs. You'll get advice on the skills that will benefit you as a CPA and make you more marketable. We'll round out this chapter with some advice about how you can get some experience with, and education about, being a CPA.

Getting Hired (Chapter 3) is the heart of the guide. This chapter covers how to locate a celebrity you'd like to work for, and contact the people who will help you get you work with that celebrity. This chapter also discusses resumés, references and interviews, and includes a list of agencies to help you find a job working with a celebrity. A bonus section looks at how to make initial networking contacts if you decide to make the move to Los Angeles.

The *Conclusion* offers some final thoughts, along with information about organizations you can join once you become a CPA.

Throughout the guide you'll read quotes from and interviews with experienced and successful CPAs and others who are working (or have worked) with a variety of celebrities. Their exclusive advice will guide you down the right path, and quite possibly save you from making crucial mistakes that will cost you time, money, or even the job of your dreams.

So welcome to the exciting world of being a Celebrity Personal Assistant. Soon you'll experience the thrill of being behind the scenes of a glamorous lifestyle firsthand. You'll have job satisfaction knowing that you are the person keeping your celebrity at peace and on schedule so they can do their job.