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The Executive Assistant's Guide to Effortless Travel Management

A practical and reassuring playbook
for stress-free corporate travel.

Introduction

Executive Assistants and Office Managers carry significant responsibility every time senior leadership steps onto a plane or boards a train. Planning needs to be precise. Disruptions should be anticipated. Policies must be followed. And when plans change at speed, the expectation is that you already have an answer.

This guide brings together practical tools, risk-awareness insights and real-world examples to help you deliver exceptional travel arrangements with accuracy and confidence. Gain insights into how to reduce time pressure and meet your duty of care across every stage of the journey.



REED & MACKAY
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The global service leader for corporate travel and events

We connect your business globally, ensuring your travel and event planning is hassle-free. Supported by 24/7 personal service, a global travel platform, and a true partnership approach, we deliver savings, safety and efficiencies every step of the way.

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The reality of travel management

Corporate travel looks simple from a distance. But for Executive Assistants, it is one of the most pressured and high-risk parts of the role. Travel plans rarely stay still. Diaries shift, destinations change, meetings overrun and unexpected requests arrive without warning. You are expected to create stability in an environment where almost nothing is static.

Four key pressures define the reality of EA travel coordination:

01

Time and cognitive pressure

Executives move fast and expect their travel to reflect their individual routines and comfort preferences. EAs often carry the responsibility for remembering seat choices, connection tolerances, airline preferences, meeting-to-airport timing habits and even unspoken expectations developed over years. These details shift frequently and need to be recalled instantly when plans change. With last-minute requests, overlapping itineraries and tight connections, the cognitive load builds quickly and small oversights can create wider issues.

02

Unpredictable disruption

Travel disruption is now an accepted part of the landscape rather than an occasional occurrence. Airport shutdowns, weather events, industrial action and operational failures can dismantle an itinerary in minutes. When this happens, the EA becomes the first point of escalation. You are expected to interpret incomplete information and find solutions before the wider network begins to react.

03

Ambiguity in travel policies

EAs often need to interpret rules quickly when travellers have overlooked key points or when policies vary across regions. These moments introduce ambiguity, especially under time pressure. The result can be unplanned spend and additional responsibility placed on the EA to re-establish clarity and keep bookings aligned with internal expectations.

04

Spot risks and raise alerts

Risk now extends far beyond health and safety. Geopolitical tension, cyber threats, natural disasters and remote-destination challenges all need to be taken into account. There is an expectation on EAs to spot risks early, even when the information available is incomplete.

The hidden cost of travel mistakes

Regardless of where it comes from, small travel errors can easily lead to wider consequences that raise the stakes for EAs. A missed connection can lead to lost client time and delayed projects, increasing pressure on internal relationships as a result. Alongside this, last-minute fixes frequently push costs beyond approved budgets and lead to friction with finance teams. Senior leaders can also lose confidence in the arrangements around them when issues accumulate.

These knock-on effects sit behind many of the pressures EAs face, especially when plans shift at speed. Understanding these wider implications helps frame why early clarity, calm decision-making and strong operational support matter so much during disruption.

Handling disruption without panic

Disruption is rarely dramatic at first, usually starting off as something small. This can be a delay, a weather warning or a short message from an executive. For an EA, this is the moment where clarity matters most. You're making sense of fragmented information before the situation becomes official. A calm response grows from a repeatable mindset:

First, understand the situation.

Before reacting, confirm what has genuinely changed. Cross-check the update against official sources, compare it to your executive's itinerary and note whether it affects a single segment or the wider route. This helps you avoid unnecessary rebooking and gives you clarity before the situation accelerates.

Next, identify exposure.

Look at the full journey rather than just the immediate disruption. Who is already in transit? Which connections rely on tight timing? Are there meetings, transfers or check-ins that can't move? This is where small delays turn into real problems like missed connections and diverted flights.

Then, determine urgency.

This is often the point where policy questions arise. The best solution might sit outside usual guidelines or preferred suppliers. Assess how quickly availability is shifting and whether you have time for internal approval. Some situations move slowly whereas others leave you with minutes to secure an alternative. Knowing the pace of the disruption helps you choose the right moment to act.

Finally, move to solutions with your travel partner.

Once you've framed the situation, expert support becomes essential. Your partner can monitor capacity, check alternatives, reroute travellers and secure what the wider market is losing quickly. Their intervention lightens the operational load so you can focus on communication and continuity.

Communicate early and clearly.

Executives feel more in control when they know you're already monitoring the situation. Even a short update helps reduce stress and demonstrates that you're ahead of their concerns. Clear communication is one of the strongest duty-of-care tools an EA has during disruption.

The importance of a trusted travel partner

When disruption escalates, you can only work with the information available in the moment. Even the most experienced EA can't monitor global risk, track every itinerary and source alternatives across multiple regions all at once. A trusted travel partner becomes the operational support that works in the background while you stay focused on the traveller.

A strong partner provides three things that matter most during disruption:

- ✓ **Early visibility** when incidents start to develop
- ✓ **Active monitoring** as conditions change and capacity tightens
- ✓ **Fast intervention** at the moment alternatives are still available

This support turns pressure into control as you receive clear, timely insight instead of scattered updates. Decisions become easier because someone is already handling the complexity behind the scenes.

Lessons learned from major disruptions in the past

The value of a travel partner becomes clear when plans collapse suddenly and rapid coordination makes the difference. Here are some examples where Reed & Mackay has navigated some of the most challenging real-world incidents, resolving issues quickly and keeping executives moving when plans collapsed.



Heathrow airport closure - network failure at scale

A fire at a nearby electrical substation shut down Heathrow in the early hours of a Friday morning in March 2025. Reed & Mackay's systems showed 2,600 of their business travellers were affected in the space of three days, with call volumes spiking by 267% and email traffic rising 209% above normal levels. During the first hour alone, calls jumped by 800%, overwhelming most travel channels before travellers were even fully aware of the situation.

Reed & Mackay's incident management unit (IMU) detected the disruption before the airport issued any public statement. This early visibility meant traveller reports were generated immediately, and teams in Australia and the UAE were already working on reroutes while the UK and US were still waking up. By the time executives began sending concerned messages, much of the exposure had already been mapped.

Clear communication, coordinated global handovers and rapid rebooking ensured clients remained mobile, supported by a 95% CSAT score throughout the incident. For many travellers, this meant the difference between being diverted without guidance and receiving tailored instructions before they even cleared immigration.



Eurostar shutdown - a city at a standstill

In March 2025, an unexploded WWII bomb was discovered near Gare du Nord in Paris, forcing Eurostar to halt all services instantly. This created immediate gridlock around the station where executives couldn't get to airports and ticket availability was dropping dramatically. For EAs, the disruption was overwhelming as options were disappearing and updates changed minute by minute.

Reed & Mackay acted within minutes. The team identified all 45 affected travellers for a single client and secured scarce flight seats before capacity vanished. Throughout the day, consultants monitored availability continuously and rebooked travellers each time new seats briefly appeared.

When road closures caused travellers to miss flights, the team shifted again, arranging later departures and emergency hotel rooms. This rapid, persistent response prevented a logistical shutdown from turning into an overnight crisis.



Hurricane Helene - safely and policy under pressure

A C-suite group arrived on the US southeast coast for a board meeting just as Hurricane Helene intensified unexpectedly in September 2024. As thousands of travellers tried to flee, airports were pushed beyond capacity. EAs had to keep executives informed while sourcing reliable updates in a rapidly shifting situation.

Reed & Mackay had been monitoring the weather pattern days earlier. When the storm path shifted, consultants advised redirecting the group to a safer departure point and bringing flights forward. The team worked to secure flights that complied with strict travel policies, including separation of key leadership. Every traveller received personal check-ins until they were safely airborne. This incident showed how quickly a routine trip becomes a safety-critical operation and how essential early monitoring and decisive action are in protecting executives.

Creating stability in an unpredictable travel landscape

Corporate travel places Executive Assistants at the centre of high-stakes, fast-moving situations. When disruption occurs, the EA is the person executives look to for clarity, assurance and direction. With the right support behind you, that responsibility becomes lighter.

Reed & Mackay provides the insight, structure and global expertise to keep travellers safe, keep itineraries moving and give EAs confidence at every stage of the journey. Our traveller tracking, real-time incident monitoring and 24/7 support contribute to safer and more resilient travel plans. Our booking tools, policy alignment features and negotiated rates deliver efficiency and control. And our experience managing large-scale disruption provides reassurance when travel becomes complex.

These strengths create a reliable environment for every stage of business travel and equip organisations with the structure and expertise needed to keep journeys moving with confidence.

Get in touch to book a demo or speak with one of our specialists. Discover how our tools and services can help you manage complex itineraries effortlessly and deliver a smoother experience for every traveller.

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