



Sound Support Virtual Assistance

Supporting Your Business IS My Business

Rock Your Biz - Work with a Virtual Assistant!

*A Comprehensive Guide to Choosing the Right VA for **YOUR** Business*

It's time!

Because you requested this guide, I believe you are ready to work with an assistant. As a busy entrepreneur / business owner, you're probably (and perhaps most likely) working with a certain amount of overwhelm and considering how you will go forward as your business is growing and the tasks that need doing are taking up too much of your time. You know your time could better be spent *growing your business* rather than attending to details; you're aware that you are doing too many tasks that *could* be delegated or outsourced to someone else.

You have so many ideas and so little time to implement them. You are spending way too much time handling the *back office* tasks; those tasks that have to be done but are not revenue producing.

Finding a trustworthy assistant *is imperative* to help clear your plate and remove that overwhelm.

Here's help!

Read on to learn what to look for in a virtual assistant and where to find one that fits your needs.



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What is a Virtual Assistant?

A virtual assistant, commonly called a VA, is a small business owner who provides administrative (and possibly personal) support by working with clients in long-term, collaborative relationships.

A VA works from her own office and has the ability to support another business without ever actually meeting face to face or visiting their office. The support that a VA provides is usually administrative in nature. Some VAs offer additional specialties that are creative or technical or have additional specialized training to support their clients.

A VA works from her own office, owns her own business, pays her own taxes and insurance, maintains her own equipment using the latest technology and can support anyone, anywhere. A VA is a professional business owner building a successful business.

What a Virtual Assistant is NOT

It's important to know that a VA is **not** someone who provides consulting services. That person is a consultant. A VA isn't someone who *only* provides bookkeeping services. That person is a bookkeeper. A VA isn't someone who *only* provides marketing support. That person is a marketing consultant. VAs are also not tax advisors, accountants, medical transcriptionists, web designers, or professional business and personal coaches.

What makes a person a VA is that the services that are being performed are administrative in scale and scope and are provided with the desire to support the client across the board, not with just one specific function or task.

What are the benefits of working with a VA?

Just imagine for a moment what it would be like, as a business owner, if you only had to deal with the things which truly needed your attention? How would this free up your time? Now, picture what your life would be like if you gave away a third or more of the work you now do. You'd have time for your



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family and friends! You'd have time to strategize and plan for the future growth of your business! You would become more balanced! In other words, you'd have much more of a life!

- A VA backs you up and makes it possible for you to free up your time to earn more money.
- A VA offers support that lightens your load, *gives you the ability to leverage your time* and helps you shine with your clients and customers.
- A VA can handle all your administrative tasks. A good VA, over time, will analyze your business and understand your business needs, learn your goals and will be committed to helping you achieve them. Your VA then becomes a collaborative partner with you in your business, and as you build your relationship with your VA and she gains your trust, she will be doing more of the things you don't have time to do so you can focus on your work and do what you do best.
- Having a VA allows you to have the administrative support you need without having to provide space or equipment for an assistant.
- You will have support while you travel, no matter where you go.
- You will have an assistant that knows and understands your business as well as you do.
- You will have more control over your schedule and your life, because you will have more time.
- Your time will be freed up to do the things that *boost your income* – after all, time **IS** money.
- You will **not** need to pay: overhead, employee taxes, insurance, benefits or vacation to your assistant.
- You are paying for 100% productivity – You are not paying for the time your assistant takes for coffee breaks, water cooler chats, or other distractions. Every minute worked is directly focused on YOUR business.
- Working with a VA is an outsourcing business expense which means that the fee you pay to your VA is tax deductible. But to confirm this, please double check with your accountant or CPA because I am not a tax adviser. However, that's usually the case.



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What if my VA doesn't know how to do something I need done?

A good and properly trained VA, as the administrative professional she is, (and I use *she* as my pronoun of choice because the majority of virtual assistants are women) will go out and find the expert who can do the job. VAs don't know how to do everything, of course, but they can connect you with that professional who knows how to do that particular task and they can also manage the process, if that's what you need her to do.

Why wouldn't I want to work with one of the secretarial services I've seen around my area?

If what you want and need is the most basic secretarial support, then you might just want to work with a local secretarial service. But if you want the benefit of working with someone who really wants to know you, your business, your customers, and who wants to be deeply involved in your success, you'll want to work with a VA.

Isn't working with a VA more expensive than hiring an employee?

Virtual assistance was never intended to be the low-cost alternative to getting administrative support. It was intended to be, and actually IS the most convenient alternative to having on-site employees provide that support. Depending on the VA, you might pay as you go, giving her only the amount of work you actually have during any week or month, or you might have her on retainer – buying a certain amount of the VA's time each month for a pre-set hourly rate. One payment, once each month for great support from an assistant dedicated to your success.

Remember that a VA is working in her own space, using her own equipment, paying her own taxes and insurance, is not on your payroll, and is working as a business owner in her own right. She may work less or more than an employee would.

You are only paying for the time the VA does work for you. The time clock stops with any breaks that she takes.



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You are not responsible for the cost of providing a computer, fax, telephone or software, an office space, payroll taxes, worker's compensation, liability insurance or benefits (vacation, sick pay, etc.) You pay her once each month for the time agreed upon that she spends supporting you and your business.

Working with a VA simplifies the process of having an assistant or a secretary. She is as close as sending an email, an instant message or making a phone call. You are not doing everything yourself anymore.

So. . . is working with a VA more expensive than hiring an employee? When you consider this perspective, working with a VA is really a bargain.

How do I know if I really need a VA?

As you know, there's a lot to be done to keep things moving smoothly. Sooner or later, it's going to occur to you that you're spending too much time running the business, to run the business. In other words, you will find you are so caught up in the day to day stuff, that you can't find the time or energy to focus on the things that really need your attention.

As an entrepreneur, especially if you are a solopreneur, you do it all – you wear all kinds of different hats and you try to wear them effectively. But sometimes you start dropping the balls. Things start falling through the cracks that you used to do easily.

That's when you know you need a VA.



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Having a VA means that I will have to delegate work I used to do myself.

What work should I delegate to my VA and how do I decide?

One of the activities I suggest is to create a *Stop Doing List*. The action in creating a *Stop Doing List* reminds me of what folks who want to lose weight do with food. Weight Watcher counselors will suggest writing down everything you eat for a certain period of time. When they say everything, they mean for you to track *everything*, because many people eat beyond their three daily meals with snacks and sodas and you name it, all those calories add up. And many people who struggle with their weight eat out of habit and don't even think about it.

A *Stop Doing List* works in a similar way. It's an activity that helps you to do a sort of *brain dump*, getting those tasks out of your head and onto paper. It works like this: Spend a week or so writing down each thing you do in your business, from phone calls to checking emails to the details involved in sending your newsletter, compiling mailing lists, updating your website, doing follow-ups, customer support, social media marketing and etc. Diligently make as thorough a list as possible. Reviewing this list will help you to evaluate the tasks that you do on a daily basis and you may more easily notice what you are doing that is not directly revenue producing.

Now you have a tool that can help you figure out what you'd like to hand over to an assistant. Making this list will give you ideas and can bring more discipline and focus to your thoughts as you think about what you want to delegate.

You might even want to separate that list into two sections such as *Tasks I know and want to do* versus *Tasks I hate doing and don't know how or don't want to do*. From that second list you can choose what the priorities are. If you do that, you have just zoned in on what you need to hand off ***right now***. The rest can be added in as medium and lower priorities accordingly and expanded as you grow.

If you really want to get more detailed, choose those priority tasks that you want to delegate, and then create a job description that summarizes what they are so you are well prepared ahead of time when it comes to interviewing potential VAs.



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How can I possibly afford a VA?

You'll need to consider your budget and what you can afford to pay.

Most VAs work in two basic ways: *pay as you go* and *retainer*. Several of my VA colleagues are now offering *packages* – a bundle of services that they provide on a monthly basis for one set monthly fee.

Pay as you go means that you delegate work to your VA as you need the help, even though it may be only a few hours (usually less than 10 hours) during the month. Your VA will invoice you at an hourly rate for those hours at the end of each month. With my clients, I also send a weekly status email during the month telling them how much time I've worked so far in that particular month. This helps them to gauge just how much more work they want to delegate and what they can afford to delegate during that month.

If you work with a *pay as you go* arrangement, remember that most VAs work with several clients and *pay as you go* is not a reserved amount of time, so your projects may get lower priority than the *retainer* clients that your VA serves. A good VA will apprise you of the situation and whether or not she can get your tasks and projects done within your deadline if you are working with her on a *pay as you go* basis.

The second way is working on *retainer*. This means that you pay a fee at the beginning of each month and the VA reserves a certain amount of time for you during that month. Many VAs work on a 10 hour or more *retainer*. The advantage for you is that you have an agreement that at least 10 hours, if it is a 10 hour *retainer*, will be reserved for supporting you and your business. Another advantage is that a *retainer* rate is usually a discounted hourly rate as opposed to a *pay as you go* rate. If you cannot afford the 10 hour *retainer* rate nor don't think you have 10 hours of work each month to delegate to your VA, you'll probably want to explore utilizing a *pay as you go* rate.

If you have come to the conclusion that you really need this kind of support and your budget is tight, look for a VA who will work on a *pay as you go* basis. As your VA begins to take the things that are bogging you down off your plate, this frees you to do more and more direct revenue producing activities and as you create more revenue for yourself this allows you to more easily afford your VA. It's a snowball effect going in a positive direction.



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Working with a VA that is committed to helping you move forward and become more successful – how can you *NOT* afford to have that kind of support?

Keep in mind that paying your VA is a positive expense, not a negative expense, as opposed to something like paying taxes, which is a negative, but necessary expense. Think of the fee you pay to your VA as a *growth expense*. This is an *investment* in you and your company. Your business simply cannot grow to its full potential without this crucial step.

Types of Virtual Assistants

There are what some refer to as *techie VAs* – they manage more technical software applications and may charge more for their expertise.

Then there are the *general VAs* – they manage calendars, schedule travel, do general research, provide reminders, customer service, correspondence, data input and perform general administrative duties.

Many VAs have a *specialty*. My specialty happens to be working with ***professional speakers***.

Some VAs structure their business as a *team*. That is, there is a main VA, usually the owner or manager of the VA business, and she has several VAs that she contracts with to do the work for her clients. When working with a VA who passes your work on to a team member, there is a disadvantage in that you will not get to develop a relationship with that VA. She will not have the ability to climb into your business and learn what you do so she can better support you. And you may have different VAs doing different tasks for your business. This could affect the continuity of what you are attempting to achieve.



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How do I choose a Virtual Assistant?

Give yourself plenty of time and space to talk to *at least* a couple of VAs. Not all VAs work the same way or do the same things. Remember VAs are all business owners and all work differently. There are plenty of VAs out there – take the time to find one that works best for you.

Remember that a VA is a business owner. A VA is not an employee or just an administrative assistant or secretary. Be mindful that you should approach a VA as one business owner to another.

Choose a person who clicks with you. If you feel a connection and find you share similar work styles, and the VA feels the same way, that could be a very good fit. The VA/client relationship is just that – a relationship. You want to work with someone who has a few things in common with you and you feel a connection. You'll want someone who gets what you do and has the skills to follow through.

Are you a planner or do you tend to get things done at the last minute? Do you tend to be organized or dis-organized? Do you generally see the glass as half full or half empty? Get the right fit for you. Personality and work styles do matter. Choose the right person that you can work well with. Working with a VA should be fun for you and for your VA. Finding the right VA for you does not have to be a long, drawn out process.

You might want to create *your ideal VA list*. List all the qualities you would like your VA to have – as an example - do you prefer someone who is upbeat and cheery or someone who is straightforward and direct? Add to this list the things you're looking for in the relationship overall, as well as what your expectations are for the short and long term.

The relationship and the connection you feel is the most important factor as long as the VA has the skills and professionalism that you are looking for. Virtual assistants can always learn new things when needed in order to help support you and your business. What you share in common will help to further the relationship and as the relationship progresses, trust is built and your VA will become your chief cheerleader and supporter to help you further your business goals.



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What should I ask a potential VA?

You might want to know how long they have been in business and they will probably want to know the same about you.

You may want to know how many clients they serve and to be reassured that they have the time to support you and your business each month.

You may want to know what kind of training the VA has. For example, does she know WordPress (if your website is done in WordPress and you expect her to be able to edit your website), or Dreamweaver, if your site has been created using advanced HTML and Dreamweaver. Does she know how to manage auto responders, create sales pages, do ezines and newsletters, accounting, know how to manage a virtual shopping cart, create websites, or have specialties? Knowing what you plan to delegate before talking to VA will help you formulate the questions so you get the information on what the VA really will be able to handle for you.

You might also want to know *how much lead time she may need* to complete a project. This will help you to know how far ahead you may need to plan to delegate any certain tasks.

Ask for testimonials or for clients that you may contact. Talk to those clients if you can. Having conversations, either by phone or email, with current or former clients may give you a feel for the VA, her work style and relationship skills. Some VAs have a page on their website with testimonials and links to the websites of those clients who provided testimonials, which makes it easy for you to contact them. Give yourself plenty of time to do some online research and carry out a couple of phone or Skype interviews.

You'll need to know how the VA gets paid. Does she work on retainer? Does she offer pay as you go? Does she roll over unused retainer hours to the next month? Does she charge at the beginning or the end of the month? How does she take payments? PayPal, Intuit, checks? Does she take credit cards?



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What is the usual fee for a VA?

Most VAs bring between 10 to 20 years of corporate business experience to their VA business. And most have learned new skills beyond that, skills they need to operate in a virtual world. VAs can charge from \$30/hour (usually a VA beginning her business) all the way up to over \$100 an hour. If they have a particular skill set that is much more techie than the average VA, like managing InfusionSoft accounts for clients, then the fees may be on the higher end.

You'll want to know and ask about the skill set behind their rate.

What if I live in a different time zone than my VA? Isn't that an important consideration?

A VA in a different time zone can extend your work day, actually. Consider this:

If you live in the United States on the West Coast and your VA is on the East Coast, imagine how much work will be done in the morning before you ever get to the office!

If you live on the East Coast and your VA is on the West Coast, think of how much more she can get done after you leave for the day!

Whether your business is national or international, you can extend your business hours with the support of a VA who is in her office before or after you are in yours.



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Where do you find VAs?

You might start by asking your colleagues for some good referrals. Here are some websites you may want to check out as well.

AssistU.com – [Assist University](#) is where I received my VA training, and they have a registry of VAs who graduated from their program. Interested VAs will respond to you through the registry. This is a free service to you.

IVAA.org – International Virtual Assistants Association – They have a system for entering RFPs; a Request for Proposal. This is also a no-charge service.

VAClassroom.com – is a training organization that trains VAs in specialized skills. They have a list of qualified VAs who have completed VA Classroom certification programs. At the top of their web page you'll want to click on the tab called *Find A VA*.

How long would I expect to work with a VA?

Let's say you found a VA that is a good fit for you and you are working together successfully in a collaborative partnership, where she is assisting you and has climbed into your business to learn about you, your customers, and your life. She is a quick study, proving to learn as much about your business as you are willing to share with her. Trust and respect is being built and with her growing knowledge of your business, she has begun to assist you in ways that you can clearly see will propel your business forward and get you into a position to meet your business and financial goals. In building a valuable partnership like that, how long would you want to work together?

As long as you and your VA are enjoying the work and having fun, it's a win-win situation. I have VA colleagues that are still working with clients they met over 10 years ago, when virtual assistance, as a profession, was not as well known.



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Your take-away thought:

*When you spend the time to do the things that a VA could do, and if **time truly equals money**, you are not making as much money as you could. And isn't that what you went into business to do?*

Why choose me?

I have developed my skills as an administrative support professional for over 15 years in the corporate world. I worked in several industries including aerospace, real estate development, computer sales and marketing, software development, catalog sales, health care, accounting, insurance, financial planning and both public and private schools. Through my work experience, I have developed the skills, training and business knowledge that are the hallmarks of a qualified virtual assistant.

I completed my virtual assistant training in 2008 from [Assist University](#), a premier training organization for virtual assistants. This program is a comprehensive and rigorous 20-week program, inclusive of over 200 hours of classes, testing and field work and was designed for administrative professionals who already have a background in administrative support. This training added another dimension - the virtual aspect – learning to work with clients no matter where they are located.

My resources include several hundred VA colleagues who work together in a supportive virtual community. My colleagues have the ability to summon each other and collaborate on challenges in their businesses and swap new information about their profession through their virtual community networks. We each work individually as solo practitioners in our businesses. We don't, however, work alone. This collaboration with other VAs is a benefit which allows us to do our best work for our respective clients.

I am dedicated to being a life-long learner. I will continue to expand my VA services as I learn new software and explore new and innovative solutions to help support my clients and their businesses.

This guide has been brought to you compliments of:

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