



10-Step Guide to Hiring The Right Virtual Assistant

By Jeannine Clontz

As an entrepreneur, it's always important to stay at the cutting edge of the competition in your particular field. Outsourcing core tasks can help take your business to the next level by affording you the opportunity to obtain the skilled services of an independent contractor on an 'as needed' basis.

Here is our 10-Step Guide to Hiring The Right Virtual Assistant

1. Expertise

First establish what types of expertise you are looking for such as:

- Database support
- Marketing implementation
- Desktop publishing
- Website design
- Website maintenance
- Graphic design
- Bookkeeping
- IT support

This will help you in identifying candidates that meet these needs.

2. Background

- How long have they been in business and what did they do prior to starting their own business?
- How many years' experience do they have in the specific tasks you require?
- What are their business principles and ethics?
- What are their processes for working with clients (values & expectations of working together)?

3. Professional Traits

- Are they confident in their offerings?
- Do you feel a connection with them?
- Do they seem trustworthy?
- Is there a confidentiality policy in place?
- Do they seem genuinely interested in hearing about your business & needs?

4. Website

If someone you are interviewing doesn't have a web presence, they should not be considered as a viable option. It is imperative that a full-time VA have a website. Their site should give you an indication of their competence and ability to service your needs. Their website should be:

- Well written using good grammar and spelling
- Create a solid business brand
- Organized and easy to navigate
- Up-to-Date with current technologies
- Provide a large amount of informational content

5. Inquiry Response

It's important that a VA respond quickly to client requests, as much as it is to have a high rate of turn-around on most projects. Do they:

- Respond to requests in a timely manner?
- Respond professionally both by telephone and through Email.
- Seem prepared to discuss your needs?
- Seem to understand your needs?
- Offer specific turn-around times?
- Have a minimal amount of background noise (including children)?
- Follow-through as promised?

6. Training, Certification, Involvement

Training, certifications and volunteer involvement is important when considering working with another entrepreneur. This shows stability, as well as, an understanding of the importance this plays in the long-term health of their business. Do they:

- Have any certifications or designations appropriate with your industry or desired skills?
- Are they involved in their industry, through associations and service?
- Are they involved in community or civic organizations?
- Have they been honored in any way?

7. Testimonials & References

Steer clear of any Virtual Assistant who cannot provide you with any testimonials and references. Notice I didn't say 'or' – they should be able to provide you with both. This is extremely important, unless you are specifically looking for someone who is new to the industry. If they are new to the industry, they should be forthcoming with that information. If someone says they've been in business full-time for more than a year

and they don't have any testimonials or references, I would consider this to be a red flag.

8. Who's the Owner

Is there a clear picture in their online or in print materials about who the owner is and what their personality, beliefs and goals are? This information is vital in choosing the VA that will be the right fit for you. If you seem to not be a good fit, they should be willing to tell you, as well as, refer you to someone else or a resource where you can find another VA that may better fit your needs. Someone who presents themselves as someone who can 'do-it-all' most assuredly cannot. None of us can! Look for someone who is going to be up front and honest with you, and knows their own level of expertise and ability to provide you with the services you need.

Is there a photo of them on their website? This is something I am personally passionate about. Because we are virtual and many times never meet our clients, I believe it's important that the client have some level of comfort in knowing what we look like – this should not be a deal breaker, I'm certain there are great VAs out there that do not put their photo on the Web for their own reasons.

9. What's In It For You?

Almost every full-time Virtual Assistant that I know (and I know hundreds) will offer a couple of things to new clients. Here are my must haves:

- Free or complimentary consultation (if they want to charge you just to see if you're a good fit, they're not!)
- Contract (if they don't have a contract for you to sign, you should have one for them to sign – you must know what to expect from the relationship and vice versa)
- Training Costs. With all the technology that's available and coming to bear daily, no VA could possibly be well versed in all software and technologies that are being utilized by your company. However, because you are coming into this relationship with the understanding that they have some level of expertise, the VA should offer you either no-cost, or reduced costs for any training required to bring them up-to-speed on technologies they have not previously worked with.

10. Pricing

I kept the 'best' for last! Pricing is an extremely important factor in finding the right Virtual Assistant. If price is your 'main' focus, then just about anyone with a shingle would work. You will most likely be spending countless hours training and re-training those least-expensive VAs because they most likely don't have very good business skills and in my experience, fail to remain in business beyond 2-3 years.

A good, stable VA, depending on where she calls home (some who work outside the U.S. may live in an area with a significantly lower cost of living, which can be reflected in a lower hourly rate) should range in price from \$25-75 per hour. Those who require more education in areas of software and hardware knowledge may charge as much as \$150 per hour.

You may need to do a little homework for your specific needs to find out what the costs of maintaining the knowledge levels required for any specialty software or hardware needs you may have.

A good example would be software programs like Adobe products or Act!. Not only are many of these software programs more expensive to purchase and update regularly, but they require on-going training to use them to their true potential. Virtual Assistants who specialize in this type of support, may, and should, demand a higher rate.

Remember, you are paying for their level of expertise and your ability to trust that they will handle your work behind the scenes. I can have my cavity filled at the local dental college for \$15, or I can pay a professional dentist a much higher price. The choice depends on the personal result I desire. While both can probably do an adequate job, the professional dentist will have more to offer in the way of long-term support and knowledge. The same holds true with a professional Virtual Assistant., don't undersell yourself, your value, or the value of what the VA brings to the table.

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