

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT ASSISTANT

The First-Timer's Guide to Hiring
**A VIRTUAL
ASSISTANT**

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virtualassistantassistant.com

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Know Thyself



Let me give a quick background. I was overwhelmed with work and was getting burned out with the day-to-day operation of the business. This was a bad sign because I normally loved my work and hated the fact it was starting to control my life (and not the other way around).

I knew I needed help, but the thought of hiring someone was too stressful. Where would they work? What would my tax and payroll filing requirements be? Would I have to provide equipment? Or benefits?

It was about that time I discovered virtual assistants, and it felt like a whole new world opened up to me. I could get the help I needed, without the administrative headaches of a local employee. Although there will always be bumps in the road (I'll try and help you avoid them!), a VA was a perfect solution for me, and I think it can be for you too.

Like most solopreneurs, **the biggest challenge was letting go**. I had this fear that if I hired a VA to help me, they were eventually going to steal my ideas and put me out of business. Completely unfounded and unrealistic? Yes, but it was something I was afraid of.

I've since realized that competitors will always be there, and that your VA isn't going to be one of them. (They have a different mindset, but if you're still worried about it, ask them to sign a non-compete agreement.)

I was also afraid they wouldn't do a good job and screw things up. And it's true; they probably won't do as good a job as you at certain tasks. But I'm positive you can find some time-consuming projects a virtual assistant can get done with a similar or even greater level of proficiency.

Every sole proprietor reaches a ceiling, where it's impossible to do more business without additional help. For some people, that's fine and they're happy working up to that ceiling. But if you're reading this, I'm guessing you're not happy with that ceiling and want to do something about it.

The first secret to successfully working with a virtual assistant is to **know yourself**. Specifically:

- What are you good at?
- What are you not-so-good at?
- What do you enjoy doing?
- What tasks drive you crazy?
- What do you need to do to grow your business?

- What would you do if you only had more time?

Take the time to answer these questions. Understanding your own strengths and weaknesses is an important step before you hire a VA. I would create a list:

Love: *Writing content, talking to clients, making videos*

Hate: *Accounting, database maintenance, research*

Your answers will probably look a little different from mine, but you should really write them down because we're going to use them in Part 2, Know Your Requirements.

Know Your Requirements

Now that you've analyzed what you like to do, what you're good at, and what you need to do, it's time to figure out how to **unload everything else**. I mean why spend your precious time doing the stuff you hate and are terrible at?

For me it was valuable to spend a week tracking how I spent my time. I wrote down each activity and the amount of time I spent on it. Try it for a day; you might be surprised with the results.



Here's a sample list:

Reading and responding to personal email	45 minutes
Reading and responding to customer email	1 hour
Research for blog post	1 hour
Writing blog post	1 hour
Updating Twitter and Facebook	5 minutes ... and then it turned into 30 minutes...
Going to the gym	1 hour
Design new ad banner	30 minutes
Doing daily website maintenance	1.5 hours
Doing keyword research	30 minutes
Phone call with prospective client	45 minutes
Bookkeeping	15 minutes

The next step is to determine which of these tasks you can outsource. In the most extreme cases, I've seen people outsource **everything on that list** aside from going to the gym. (And I'm sure some people wish they could outsource that too!)

It might be tempting to try and go big and aim for **the promised land** of the *4-Hour Work Week* right out of the gate, but I would caution against that. It's all about baby steps. If this is going to be your first time working with a VA, let's start small.

From that list, choose a handful of tasks you'd like your VA to get off your plate. For example, maybe you start with:

Blog research	1 hour
Blog writing	1 hour
Daily website maintenance	1.5 hours
Keyword research	30 minutes

Now that you have a general idea of what your VA will be doing and how much time it should take them, it's also a good time to start thinking about your other requirements:

- Does your VA need to be at work at the same time you are?
- Do they need to be a native English speaker?
- Are there specific skills they should already have, or will you provide training?
- What is your budget?

In Part 3, we'll examine how to turn your requirements into an attention-getting job listing.

A Word on Budget: How Much Should You Pay a VA?

The virtual assistant industry is a diverse and growing marketplace of companies and freelancers, and because of this, you will find a huge spectrum of prices. In general, the old rule of “**you get what you pay for**” still applies, but that's not to say there aren't any high-value bargain-basement VAs out there.

Despite what some other websites will tell you, you're unlikely to find quality workers for \$3 an hour in any part of the world. That said, do you need to pay some professional \$40 an hour to get good results? Probably not.

My advice: **Pay a fair wage** and move on. Overseas that will be between \$6 and \$10 an hour; in the US, about \$10 to \$20 an hour.

One age-old business rule that definitely applies is to simply **hire the best talent you can afford**.

If you underpay your VA, how motivated are they going to be to go the extra mile and really help you? If your business-model allows for it, you might also consider an incentive plan to reward strong performance. This is something I haven't implemented yet, but plan to in the near future.

How to Write the Perfect Virtual Assistant Job Description



The perfect VA job description is one that covers all your requirements AND shows some personality. We've all read through job listings that sound like they were written by a machine:

The ideal candidate has a master's degree in accounting and 3-5 years experience in corporate tax audits. We seek a team player with strong interpersonal skills... blah blahblah

If that doesn't sound like a cool job to you, it probably won't sound like a cool job to your prospective hires either.

Here's what I posted when I was looking for new VA:

I'm looking for a dedicated virtual assistant for a (hopefully) long-term engagement. I envision this being a full-time position.

You are a super-savvy Internet user who loves Excel and gets more excited than anyone probably should when discussing spreadsheets. You know the best sites to gather information and are an organizational whiz. You are a quick learner and work well without constant supervision.

You find ways to make the routine and mundane exciting. You are a master of efficiency and a guru of productivity. You speak and write English well, and are available to work full-time for the foreseeable future, with at least a few hrs overlap with US Pacific time 7am-5pm. You're comfortable with social media and genuinely care about customers.

An interest in shoes and fashion is a plus, as is experience with AdWords. You'll be doing daily website maintenance and marketing for a growing shoe shopping website.

If this is you, please apply with your resume and references. I will review the applications and probably ask the strongest contenders to submit a few trial tasks before moving to interview stage.

There are several advantages of doing it this way.

First, by showing some personality in your ad, you can expect to get some personality in your responses.

By using some slang and idioms, you can gauge each respondent's grasp of your English.

If you give a hint of what the VA will be working on, you can get more qualified responses. I got several applicants (all female) exclaiming how much they love shoes and how this sounded like a dream job.

And finally, when you give specific instructions, you can immediately weed out those who do not follow them. I asked for a resume and references, yet a few applicants neglected to include those in their reply.

Go ahead and craft your perfect help-wanted ad that lets your personality shine through. In Part 4, I'll show you where to post it to get the most qualified applicants.

How to Post Your Job

There are a few different places you can post your virtual assistant job. I recommend [Elance](#) and [oDesk](#). They are the two largest freelance marketplaces; they have good and transparent feedback systems in place, and offer fraud protection and dispute resolution for employers.

You can post to both sites (it's free) to get a broader range of applicants, but I've found it's easier to pick one or the other. Personally, I like [Elance](#) -- but I have friends who swear by [oDesk](#) so it's really up to you.

Elance

For [Elance](#), the process is very easy. From the homepage, just select the [Post Your Job](#) button and follow the step-by-step instructions.



You'll be asked to create an Elance account if you don't already have one. It's totally free to join and post a project.

Once you're in, you'll come to the "Create Your Job" screen. Simply input your virtual assistant job information from Part 3 and you'll begin getting qualified applications right away.

1. Create your job

2. Select posting type

3. Preview

Create your job

Describe the job or list the skills you're looking for.

Name your job

Kick-Ass Virtual Assistant

Describe it

Need help? Browse our Job Templates.

Add Attachment

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oDesk is the largest site for remote work:

oDesk ranks #1 in annual contractor earnings, almost double that of the next largest online workplace.

9 out of 10 oDesk clients say hiring on-demand "makes my business more competitive."

87% of oDesk clients say they will hire on oDesk again.

You'll probably start getting applications within minutes of posting your ad. Part 5 addresses how to narrow down your choices.

What About Craigslist?

Yes, you can go to Craigslist Manila and post your help-wanted ad, and maybe you'll find a diamond in the rough. But for me, it's not worth sorting through all the spammers and the scammers when the cost savings really aren't that great.

Plus, you'll have no liability protection if they flake.

How to Thin Out the Herd



This is where the hiring process really starts to get interesting. By now you probably have a dozen or more virtual assistant applicants. It's time to thin out the herd, and for this, you sometimes have to **be ruthless**.

Didn't include a personal reply? *Gone*.

Didn't follow directions? *Gone*.

Zero earnings history or feedback? *Gone*.

4 Page Resume for a \$6/hr job? *Gone*.

Application says "strong English skills" but is filled with typos and misspellings? *Gone*.

You get the idea.

In my job post I specifically asked for a "*super-savvy Internet user*," so I had no qualms about immediately rejecting candidates who applied with a Hotmail email address. Sorry if I just offended any remaining Hotmail users.

You'll probably notice you have some applications from individuals and some from big companies.

The Great Debate: Individual Virtual Assistants or VA Companies?

The conventional wisdom says that choosing a [virtual assistant company](#) – a firm with an actual office and many employees – is a safer option. The large outsourcing companies should have better infrastructure in place, data security measures, and a back-up VA if yours gets sick, quits, or just isn't working out. You get the benefit of a team of workers and their pooled knowledge and experience.

Despite this, I went with an individual freelancer for my most recent VA hire. Why? Individual virtual assistants can more closely match your job requirements and can be a better personal fit. I'm not concerned about data security (big companies seem to have security breaches more often than home networks). If she leaves, it's true I'll have to start from scratch with someone new, but I'd have to train my backup VA at the big company just the same.

I suggest narrowing down your list of applications until you have about 5 or 6 strong matches. These can be either freelancers or companies. In fact, for Part 6, Trial Tasks, it might be worthwhile to test both.

How to Ask for Trial Tasks

Now that you've narrowed down your list of applicants, it's time for a **performance test**. You wouldn't buy a car without taking it for a test drive first, right?

Ask each of your remaining candidates if they will be willing to work through an hour or two of trial tasks. Most will agree to this as long as your trial isn't outrageously long or complex.

Here's how to create your performance test. Do some work as you normally would, but as you're working, create a set of instructions for your candidates. I recommend 2-3 different tasks to see how they do in different areas.

For example, you might ask for:

- One online research task
- One spreadsheet task
- One writing sample

Most recently, I also included instructions to contact me via Skype if anything was unclear related to the trial tasks. I was surprised that most candidates preferred to feel their way through the tasks on their own – even if it meant missing the point entirely and not following the directions – rather than ask me for clarification. Only one VA contacted me via Skype, and she got the job.

As a best practice, ask each virtual assistant candidate for the **same tasks**, so you can compare the results to the others and to your own work.

When judging the results, look for accuracy and attention to detail. Is this person someone who, with a little training, could be a valuable asset to your team?

These trial tasks will help you narrow down the field a little more before you move to Part 7, Interviews.



How to Interview a Virtual Assistant



I think interviewing is an important step in hiring a virtual assistant. You're about to let someone into your life and your business, so it only makes sense to **get to know them** a little bit first.

You'll get a sense for how they speak (Are they confident, shy? How is their English?), how they think, and how serious they are taking this opportunity.

For a lot of people, this might be your first interview on the other side of the table. It's nice to be in the position

to be asking the questions, but it can be stressful too.

I suggest using Skype to conduct your interviews. The call quality is generally pretty good, and if you and your candidate have webcams, you can even see each other during the call which is really helpful since a large part of communication is non-verbal.

The best interviews play out like a dialogue, rather than an interrogation. I like to give the candidate ample time to ask questions of their own, as well as give a little background about myself and my company.

You can find dozens of websites with sample interview questions, but here are some of my favorites. (Some may not apply directly to you, depending on the type of VA you're interviewing.)

- Tell me about yourself. What's your background?
- Out of all the jobs on Elance, what attracted you to this one?
- Of the sample tasks, which did you like best and why?
- How would you market this product / this website / this service?
- In your work history, what kind of work are you most proud of?
- If you have a question and I'm not available, what would you do?
- What keeps you motivated?

I would try to keep the interview around 15-20 minutes. You're not trying to hire a new chairman of the board.

It's also important to **keep realistic expectations**. You're not hiring a rocket scientist or a smooth-talking salesperson, and in many cases your candidates will be answering your questions in a second language. Just try and get a gauge for who they are, their enthusiasm, and their ability to learn quickly and follow directions.

You're Hired!

Once you decide on the winning candidate, you can negotiate your terms in the Elance or oDesk systems. If you want, you can generally negotiate a small reduction in salary at this point, but don't take it too far. You don't want to start your relationship on bad terms, and remember that Elance or oDesk also takes a 10% cut out of whatever you pay.

I've found it worthwhile to set-up a two-week trial period to see how things work out in real life. After that, you can simply edit the terms of your agreement and continue working with your new virtual assistant!



A Final Word of Caution:

Some candidates will try and sweet-talk you into hiring them outside of the **Elance/oDesk** system. They'll offer a slightly lower price because they can avoid paying the Elance fee.

I know because I fell for it.

This gentleman seemed like a stand-up guy, a real professional, and I trusted him and hired him outside of Elance. Turns out he was a real professional scam artist. He didn't deliver the results he promised, and wouldn't return my phone calls and emails. It was a terrible experience and cost me a few thousand dollars and a lot of headache.

And the worst part was I had no recourse. Even though I found him through Elance, I didn't qualify for any of their buyer protections because the job wasn't on their books.

So don't make my mistake: ***Use the system and sleep easy.***

What Did You Think?

Was this worth reading or was it a waste of time? Please let me know what you liked and didn't like about the ebook so I can improve it in future editions.

Thanks!

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Got Questions?

I'm here to help! Let's set up a quick call to jump-start your outsourcing efforts.

This **one-on-one strategy-session** with me is to answer any questions you have about the material in this ebook, on the VirtualAssistantAssistant.com site, or on outsourcing in general.

No sales pitch, no upsells, no strings attached.

(You'd be surprised what we can cover in just 10-15 minutes!)

Use this link to schedule a time that works for you: <https://clarity.fm/nickloper>