

Getting to the Core of VA Competencies

By Lorraine Grout

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With increasing availability of technology, a growing number of people are establishing themselves as virtual assistants. Yet confusion about the industry remains. Just about anyone with a PC and an internet connection can set themselves up to provide virtual assistance in the form of data entry, typing or word processing. A Virtual Assistant, however, is an experienced Personal Assistant who provides administrative, secretarial and / or specialty support on a virtual basis.

Following feedback from the VA community, veterans of the industry - including key members of the Alliance for Virtual Businesses - proposed a set of industry standards and the Core Competencies were created as a result. These Core Competencies outline desirable criteria covering professional and personal skills in addition to education and office standards. The aim of the Core Competencies is to guide emerging VAs as well as provide assurance to clients that they are engaging a competent operator.

A successful VA understands that sufficient time needs to be dedicated to developing their business and skill set, and that by subscribing to the principles of the Core Competencies, a SOHO can offer the same ethics as a corporate environment.

Professional Skills

Virtual Assistants do not simply provide a service, they work with the client to resolve the client's needs. In order to do so, they need to fully understand a client's focus and be in a position to suggest appropriate solutions. Real experience in various industries is of benefit and VAs, like all professionals, are continuously learning about developing technologies and resources.

As business owners, Virtual Assistants comprehend the challenges involved in starting, running and maintaining a business from conceptual planning through growth of the company. They understand the need for organized record keeping - including financials - and for professionally drafted contracts and agreements. Through this experience, they can better assist clients.

Personal skills

The ability to communicate effectively on all levels is an essential skill for any self-employed person but perhaps more so for a Virtual Assistant as they are often required to liaise on behalf of a client. Integrity, excellent organization skills and confidence with their abilities are also essential elements.

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People Skills

VAs are often exposed to sensitive and confidential material, a client needs to feel reassured that their Assistant is as respectful of and passionate about a business or project as the owner is. Virtual Assistants aim to project an executive presence at all times.

Education

The majority of Virtual Assistants have experience in a corporate environment. Many also have relevant business, administration or financial qualifications. Some VAs choose to undertake training and accreditation as a Virtual Assistant. All VAs understand the need for ongoing education and involvement within the VA community.

Office Standards

An understanding of industry issues such as copyright is a basic requirement as is the need to protect the intellectual property of a client through the use of anti-virus software as a minimum. Equipment is generally not restricted to a laptop and a modem. Most Virtual Assistants have a home office with a range of up-to-date hardware and software in order to provide a complete professional service.

For a more comprehensive overview of the Core Competencies and the story behind their development, go to the [Alliance for Virtual Businesses](#) website.