

How to create a successful relationship with a Virtual Assistant

About 6 months ago I reached a significant milestone as a soloist. It was the realisation that my business could not keep growing if I was the only person working on the business ... I was running out of time and energy. It was at this moment I began to explore the idea of engaging a Virtual Assistant (VA).

If you are not sure what a Virtual Assistant is, Kathie M. Thomas has a great article available: http://www.flyingsolo.com.au/p234181743_Working-virtually-A-definition.html

I engaged my VA 4 months ago and in that time she has become an invaluable resource and contribution to my business – she even 'babysat' my business for 4.5 weeks when I went overseas on holidays. Many people I have spoken to have shared stories about their difficulties making their VA relationship work well and have asked me how I got so "lucky".

I can tell you "luck" has had nothing to do with this! Here are 5 tips for creating a successful and productive relationship with a VA.

Be clear about what you want your VA to do

The first thing I did was a brainstorm of all the activities I currently did that I would like someone else to do. I then added a list of all the things I wasn't getting done which fell into 2 categories:

- a) things I would like my VA to do for me
- b) things that I wanted to do when I had more time (thanks to my VA taking on existing work)

This allowed me to find VAs that had skills and experience that matched my requirements.

Articulate your personal 'quirks'

As a soloist so much about the way I worked was inside my head – such as how do I like my day structured, what are my response times to enquiries, how do I word my email correspondence. Having someone else work with meant I needed to articulate all of these things – easier said than done!

Be explicit with instructions and deadlines

This may seem to be stating the obvious but it never ceases to amaze me how many people issue a request for work to be done without a deadline attached. Then they get annoyed when work is not complete when they want it! Deadlines can be as specific as 'Wednesday 3pm' or as general as 'by the end of this week' – just ensure you have one.



Ensure you are explicit with instructions as it reduces the chance of miscommunication or error. Remember, much of what you do is habit and you can't assume someone else will think the same way you do.

Agree on work flow processes

Spend time in the early stages of your working relationship to agree on work flow processes. How will you share information? How will you ensure things don't slip through cracks or get double handled? How will you issue instructions – verbally or in writing? Will you send requests as they happen or save them up in batches?

Discussing these things up front will minimise the chance of things going wrong.

Be willing to let go

I am a self confessed control freak. The most challenging thing for me was to let go of tasks and trust my VA to do a great job. I didn't want to drive my VA crazy by always checking on work and timelines. To help me soothe the control freak within we created processes which ensure I am updated regularly on progress of work.

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