

JOURNEY GRRRL PUBLISHING PRESENTS...

# An Extra Hour in the Day

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR HIRING &  
MANAGING VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS

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FREE PUBLICITY  
EDITION



**Journey Grrrl**  
PUBLISHING



WITH STORIES FROM VIRTUAL ASSISTANT ALVIN RAMIREZ

# An Extra Hour in the Day:

## Effective Strategies for Hiring & Managing Virtual Assistants

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## What is a Virtual Assistant?

Virtual Assistant is one of those terms that means something different to almost everyone who uses it. In its most simple form, a virtual assistant is someone who works for you from a location remote from yours.

That is about the only constant in the definition. Of course the world is full of teleworkers and folks who work from home and not all of them are virtual assistants. So what puts the “VA” in Virtual Assistant? That varies greatly!

Virtual Assistants – for purposes of this eBook – are low-cost workers (always under \$20/hr, often under \$5/hr) able to help with entry-level administrative tasks. This book offers tips for work with employees who are living outside the US, often in developing nations, where English is not their first language.

### *Technical Assistants*

Many people think of virtual assistants as web designers and other computer programmers that work off-site to service you. I believe this definition came about due to a common need for assistance with websites among business owners. I call these Technical Assistants.

### *Virtual Consultants*

For other people, a virtual assistant is a right-hand person – someone who helps with strategy, organization, and implementation of all – or at least many – of your ideas. These are talented business people – often based in the US or Canada – who can be the lynch pin to your success and sanity. As you might imagine, their compensation is commensurate with their talents. I refer to these folks as Virtual Consultants.

I make this distinction at the outset because I want you to understand how to use the information in this book. To apply this information in this book to Technical Assistants and Virtual Consultants may work but that is not the way it was intended.

It was intended to address many of the unspoken assumptions Western employers make of their Virtual Assistant. The fact is, life is very different for someone who is open to working for \$2 or \$3 an hour. Often they are not thinking about their career growth path or customer service in the way an American would, and they don't have the same types of critical thinking skills we value in the US. This isn't wrong or bad, it's just different. Because of their motivations, they need to be managed in a way that wouldn't work with many Western employees. Understanding this will help you get what you need from your VA.

When you work with a company that hires virtual assistants some of these management techniques are built into the relationship – though not always effectively. These techniques will work particularly well with individuals working with you directly.

The goal of this book is to get the most value possible out of low-cost workers in developing nations so that they take work off your plate instead of piling it on.

You should also be aware, however, that there is a lot of cross over between these functions. Many Virtual Consultants will have Virtual Assistants and Technical Assistants on their staff or in their inner circle.

Take for example Next Level Consulting & Virtual Assistance (<http://nextlevel-va.com>). This company offers a huge range of services and price points for coaches, consultants, speakers and other online entrepreneurs to help them create productive businesses including HTML, graphic design and WordPress customization, social media and administration. I would say this is a company that employs VAs but I wouldn't go to them for straight VA work since what they really do is broader and more strategic.

### *Common Problems with getting a Virtual Assistant*

As of the time of writing this guide, I have been advising people on their Virtual Assistant strategy for about 5 years and there are a few common problems that come up with getting a Virtual Assistant. Before we get into my suggestions for finding and managing your VA, I want to review these common issues so you know you aren't alone!

**Problem:** I am incredibly overwhelmed, so I don't have time to find a virtual assistant.

**Problem:** I want more time in my day, but I don't really understand what kinds of things I could give to a VA that would save me time.

**Problem:** I have no idea how to find a Virtual Assistant. Can you just give me the name of yours so I can use him?

**Problem:** I have used a Virtual Assistant before and it was a disaster. I didn't get what I wanted and it took me so much time to clean up the mess my VA left behind.

**Problem:** All the projects I have for a VA will require me sharing passwords or credit card information and I'm not comfortable with that.

**Problem:** I had trouble understanding my VA and communicating with him/her. I often thought my directions were not understood.

**Problem:** I am in a specialized field. It will be very difficult for anyone to help me.

**Problem:** I am not a gambler. I need to be sure work will get done in a timely fashion.

**Problem:** I know it's supposed to be cheap, but I am really strapped for cash right now. I'm not sure if it's where I should be spending my money.

**Problem:** How can I trust a person I've never met in person, and never will, to keep my leads and my business confidential?

**Problem:** How am I going to be able to manage someone thousands of miles away and in a different time zone?

If these problems sound familiar to you, read on!

## Why do you want a VA?

Most people I work with want a virtual assistant because they are overwhelmed and want to free up some time and get more done. BUT... because I work with a lot of entrepreneurs who are maxed out on “risk”, they are also looking for low cost, low overhead, and a solution that doesn’t interfere with their flexibility. VAs sound like a great idea in this case.

Virtual assistants are independent contractors rather than employees. They don’t require office space, equipment or supplies. They provide a ton of flexibility, little to no commitment, plus no employee-related taxes, insurance or benefits. But there is a downside. They require precise management and clear leadership.

When you hire a full-time employee you could easily spend \$5,000 - \$10,000 a month, but what you get for that is the ability to entrust that employee with ownership of a project. In the world of working with VAs, this simply does not work. (Though it hasn’t stopped many from trying!)

It is absolutely necessary to only assign tasks to a VA that you can clearly describe from the beginning to the middle and through to the end. You must know your “why” before you begin your search for a VA. You don’t have to know every single assignment you will give a VA, but brainstorm for at least 10 so you have specific assignments in mind when you begin your search.

Here are some specific projects I’ve successfully given to my Virtual Assistants. These should get your juices flowing as you think about your WHY.

- Re-Type 30 pages of faxed and re-faxed documents
- Give me a three page overview of this comparing 3 similar products using info found online
- Call Fitness First to cancel my membership
- Transcribe a 1 hour Teleseminar I just gave, so I can give my students a transcript
- Proofread my new website
- Look for websites that reach my target market and collect contact information so I can offer a guest blog post
- Make annual doctors and dentists appointments for my son and I
- Online shopping for all my gifts (My VA reviews his choice with me before we make it official – all done on Amazon through my Amazon Prime account and with suggestions by Amazon and a price range provided by me.)
- Internet research for family vacations.

### *Create an Inventory of Your Efforts*

Still not sure what projects you want to assign your VA? Write down a list of the tasks you do in a day. Keep a log for one week looking for repetitive tasks and low-level administrative tasks you can give up.

When you’re looking for work to outsource, look in three places:

- Things you hate to do
- Things that have the potential to generate revenue that aren't getting done now
- Things that are time-consuming but simple to explain

Then screen that initial list to see which tasks meet the following criteria (because this is what you need for an ideal starting project):

- Can someone do this work without knowing a lot about your business?
- Can you easily define the steps they need to take?
- Can you get them what they need to do the work easily?

Or, if that's too hard – look through this exhaustive check list. Check off any thing you do on this list – or plan to do in the future. Once you make the check mark, write in the specific description of your project on the My Project Notes page at the back of this eBook and measure it against the three screening questions above.

#### *Administrative Projects*

- File conversion
- Document Formatting
- Merging PowerPoint presentations
- Transcribing recordings
- Database management
- Scheduling interviews and meetings
- Creation of legal documents
- Posting job vacancies on the Web
- Updating the database for Customer Relationship Management Software
- Managing recruitment processes
- Updating invoices and receiving payments
- Voicemail transcription
- Financial research
- Business plans
- Industry analysis
- Market assessment reports
- Preparing presentations, reports and newsletters
- Legal research
- Managing procurement processes

### *Marketing*

- Ad placement (including Craigslist and similar sites)
- Charts and graphs
- Graphics (advertisements, business cards, letterhead, websites, Photoshop, Illustrator, etc.)
- Image manipulation (resizing images to specified sizes/DPI)
- Reports
- Fact-finding and researching for new marketing initiatives
- Analyzing results of current marketing efforts
- Market research

### *Online*

- Blog posting
- Scheduling and/or uploading tweets and Facebook status messages
- Email management
- Image gathering for websites/collateral
- Maintaining social networking sites (Facebook pages, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Managing Google calendar
- Web design
- Personal or corporate website maintenance
- Web-research
- Monitoring, editing, and publishing comments for online discussions
- Submitting articles to drive traffic to site
- Build mailing lists
- Participating in or moderating discussion forums and message boards
- Managing affiliate programs
- Creating content for and publishing newsletters and blog postings

### *Home Assistance*

- Bill Management
- Vendor coordination
- Follow-up on documentation required for a claim
- Recruiting home workers (landscapers, housecleaners, nanny, etc)

### *Personal Tasks*

- Airline mileage and loyalty points management
- Job search assistance
- Purchasing
- Travel planning
- Following up on appointments, errands, and tasks
- Making online purchases
- Charting a diet plan, reminding client on it regularly
- Ordering groceries based on the specific diet plan



You can delegate just about anything to your VA that will free up your time and that you are comfortable trusting to another person with. The key is to start small. Find a projects that matter, but not so much it will create a major problem in your life if they don't happen as you expect by a certain deadline. It will take a while to develop a relationship with your VA so you can fully trust that. That's normal. Build that into the process.

## How to Use a VA in Getting Free Publicity

Many of my clients come to me because they want free publicity for their business either through my Media School for Life Coaches ([www.mediaschoolforlifecoaches.com](http://www.mediaschoolforlifecoaches.com)) or through my Press for Coaches Kit ([www.pressforcoaches.com](http://www.pressforcoaches.com)). The reasons are pretty easy to understand. When you get free publicity for your business a lot of the work you need to outsource to a VA disappears.

- You don't have to make nearly as many cold calls.
- Prospects on your list are pre-disposed to buy your service or product.
- You establish yourself as an expert which will give you confidence in anything you do.
- A word of mouth effect is created around you and your business.
- The demand for your business means you need to raise your rates to manage the load.
- People stop shopping around for the service you provide because they want you, not just the service!

All the attention means many of your marketing and administrative tasks simply go away.

Getting free publicity is a smart, savvy thing to do for your business, but getting it requires some work. When you are clear about your publicity goals, a VA can really help you get some of those tasks done.

If you know you want Free Publicity but aren't sure where to start, sign up for my [free PR Tips](#) list and I'll send you my "Why I Want to Get Publicity" worksheet from the [Media School for Life Coaches](#) that I run with Penn State journalism lecturer, [Erika Isler](#).

Once you have isolated a market you want to reach with your PR efforts, you could hire a VA to:

- Make a list of publications, broadcasts, and websites where you can find your prospects based on Google research.
- Write a draft of a survey you could send to people in your demographic to find out what they read, watch and listen to.
- Collect actual copies of the publications, making a note of articles written on your topic and the journalists contact info.
- Request advertising rates and a sample reader's copy of relevant newspapers and magazines.
- Create a list of media sources you've decided to go after with contacts info.

- Create a list of media outlets in your area with contacts for pitching local angles to national stories.
- Send personal pitches you have written to your media lists.
- Collect related press releases and articles related to your field to inspire you.
- Watch TV talk show and news program clips to help you come up with your pitches.
- Send follow up emails for all the pitches you send out.
- Reach out to celebrities or other experts for an angle on your pitches.
- Post links to a survey you create on relevant sites. (You'll use the info as the basis for a release.)
- Set up a page on your website with all your press mentions and links. Include a link to this page on pitches you send to other media.
- Create a virtual press kit with high res photos, video, and press release.

## How to Find a VA - Part 1

I'm continually surprised by the number of people who tell me they want to find a VA but then have no idea what they want the VA to do! This is a big part of why they can't find someone. The most common scenario I hear is that someone has an idea – let's say they want to create a product to sell to clients and prospects – and wants to outsource the entire project because they don't have enough time to do it. This is a terrible project for a VA.

If you are working with someone like Next Level Consulting & Virtual Assistance (<http://www.nextlevel-va.com>) or even an upscale VA like Alicia Rittenhouse ([www.aliciarittenhouse.com](http://www.aliciarittenhouse.com)) or Jessica Riesenbeck from JCR Virtual Services ([www.jcrservices.com](http://www.jcrservices.com)) it's quite likely you'll be able to develop that sort of a relationship but let me assure you – these are not \$5 an hour employees, nor should they be. They provide strategic and tactical services that build businesses. If you are looking for a relationship like this, working with a VA is going to cause a lot of frustration.

In the previous section, we reviewed the types of discrete activities that are a good fit for a low-cost assistant. These include activities that are repetitive (e.g. completing a weekly report of your social media activity and responses that you created) as well as one-time activities that have a beginning, middle and end you could describe. There are several other things you need to know before you start looking for your VA:

- What expertise does the VA need to complete the task you want help with?
- How quickly do I need this project done?
- Does it matter what hours the VA should be available?
- Do you plan to describe your assignments over email or Skype?
- Is there any specific software he or she needs to have?
- How will I pay him or her? Most common options are Paypal and wire transfer but other options are out there.
- Does your VA need to be able to write well in English to do this job?
- Any other particular qualities you'd like your virtual assistant to have?

Most VAs have some sort of specialty, based on either their work experience or training they've had. It may be writing, marketing, SEO, web design, legal support services, research, or bookkeeping. If someone offers only one service, they are technically not a VA. They are a virtual bookkeeper, web designer, copywriter, etc. but I find low-cost workers are very flexible.

Consider my VA, Alvin Ramirez ([alvinwriter@yahoo.com](mailto:alvinwriter@yahoo.com)) in the Philippines – I met him when I assigned him work as a virtual blogger but have used him for other assignments like this eBook, web research, article syndication, and SEO. Or my virtual assistant Lautaro

Cabrera (<http://www.lautarocabrera.com.ar>) who has done most of my logo work for the past three years but has also done book cover designs (not this one!), banner ads, and website projects.

Your best bet is to do your research and treat this search as you would any other business investment. Can you just call the people I have recommended in this book and hire them? Sure. But will they be a good fit for you? Not necessarily. Finding a VA that is a good fit specifically to you and your business is a worthy investment.

Solicit recommendations like the ones in this guide, but be sure you are listening to your heart when you make your selection. My friend, the talented best-selling editor and author Betsy Rapport says when finding someone to work on your book, “Go with love, not like.” And that applies with VAs too. Find someone you love and are excited to work with.

So, where to start? My first step in finding a VA was to check four key websites:

- ★ Guru – <http://www.guru.com>
- ★ Elance – <http://www.elance.com>
- ★ Odesk – <http://www.odesk.com>
- ★ Craigslist - <http://www.craigslist.org/>

You can try posting ads as well as looking for profiles. I do a combination of both and then I have a very scientific process.... I wait until I feel a little zing. I know it might sound whimsical but the second part of my “Find a VA” process takes care of any glitches the whimsy might cause. When I see a candidate that is a good match, I’ll get a little jolt of energy, a nudge from the universe. That’s what I’m listening for.

That said, if the go-with-your-gut approach doesn’t sound good to you, there are plenty of other resources.

You can try submitting an RFP (request for proposal) on sites such as The Alliance For Virtual Businesses (<http://allianceforvirtualbiz.com>), Virtual Assistants Network (<http://www.VANetworking.com>), or The International Virtual Assistants Association (<http://www.ivaa.com>).

These sites have thousands of professional virtual assistants that can respond to your request – not all will respond because many already have a full practice or do not offer the

services you may need, but be prepared to receive several dozen responses. Those sites also have listings of VAs that you can browse through and contact VAs directly as with the four sites listed above.

Search through as many sites as you need to find three potential candidates that feel zingy for you.

As you are looking, be sure to think about the importance of language and culture. In my experience working with dozens of Virtual Assistants, I have found knowledge of American culture is almost as important as English skills. I've had VAs that speak perfect English - but their English makes as much sense to me as Shakespeare's Elizabethan English - all the same words, not much of the same base of knowledge! For that reason I look for a unique quality in my VAs: Someone who has lived in the US, Canada, or Europe.

All my VAs have spent at least a year in the West either with their families, as an exchange student, or with a former job. Now I'm not recommending this to you as it can be hard to find, but I want to relate it to my "Go with love, not like" comment from above - working virtually will be so much easier if you can comfortably and enjoyably relate to your VA.

You'll find many VAs in the Philippines who speak perfect English and understand the culture despite not having lived here. There are so many VAs from there that I always look first to the Philippines now for VAs.

There are lots of candidates from India and Pakistan as well, but I have personally not found the same to be true with VAs from South East Asia.

I have had great luck with Eastern European VAs (Look for VAs from Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, and Poland for instance) and with VAs from Argentina, Chile, and Brazil.

The countries you'll connect with will depend on your personality, interest and needs. Pay attention to the cultures that resonate with you so you can limit the pool of candidates you consider.

Whether you are an entrepreneur seeking administrative support, or a virtual assistant seeking to add clients to your practice, please remember that the connection you make - the fit - is the most important factor in deciding to work together.

Found a few candidates? Then head on over to Part 2 of the process.

## Hiring the “Right” One – How to Find a VA Part 2

I came up with a simple project to make sure you pick the best VA from a pool you have narrowed down. The last time I hired a new VA, I gave this test project to three prospective VAs.

One was an Indian VA firm I found through a VA Association that was charging \$3/hr. The second was a highly recommended VA from Canada who I found on oDesk. She charged \$20/hr. And the third was this guy Alvin from the Philippines who I'd found on craigslist. He was independent and suggested \$5/hr.

My plan was to give them each the same assignment as compare how they did. The assignment I gave each of them had a twist that would give me some fundamental information I needed to know to pick the winner.

Here was my assignment:

*Find 3-5 tax attorneys in the US that do US taxes and Canadian taxes. Provide me their name, email, phone, and website as well as the city and state they are located in.*

THIS IS A PERFECT ASSIGNMENT FOR FINDING A FANTASTIC VA.

- 1) It's a slightly complicated assignment but not exactly difficult.
- 2) It was small enough that I could afford to keep running the test until I found someone great.
- 3) There are definitive right and wrong answers I could check and it wouldn't take me that long to check.

Once I outlined the assignment, I did it myself so I could know how long it took me (75 minutes) and what problems I ran into. Do not skip this step – it's the key to finding the “right” VA for you because you will get information comparing how you think to how they think. You'll run into hiccups with the assignment and you'll make decisions. You want to know the VA you hire will make similar decisions to you when they run into hiccups.

Once I had completed the assignment, I wrote it up in an email as clearly as possible describing exactly what I wanted done. I gave each candidate 2 hours. I did not tell them this was an interview. Instead, I told them it was their first assignment and I planned to pay them their full rate. By limiting their time to 2 hours I was capping my expense at \$66.

In my assignment, I explained if they had any questions or if they wanted to make sure they were on the right track - they could reach out anytime. I also said it was no problem if they didn't finish but to send their results after two hours.

I also asked them to send an email back confirming they understood the assignment and letting me know what day and time they would be turning it in. I told them I was in a rush.

**Candidate #1** confirmed he received the assignment but did not tell me when to expect his answer. He sent me the assignment about 24 hours later but it was comically wrong. He was very formal in his manner and while he clearly didn't understand the assignment he didn't ask any questions. The mere thought of re-explaining the assignment to him exhausted me and so I didn't even bother. I said thanks, sent him his \$6 and went on my way. His performance helped me clarify that I really value folks who ask questions.

**Candidate #2** send me an email back saying she'd love to help and she was super excited and totally understood what I wanted but asked a couple clarifying questions anyway. She stated the assignment back to me perfectly and I was feeling pretty confident that "you get what you pay for" and I'd be paying \$25/hr for my VA. The day she said she would have the assignment in came and went without a word from her. I emailed asking what happened but never got a response. Even if she had written back I wouldn't have hired her after this happened. The truth is I don't have time for people who don't respond or deliver on time. I understand things come up but I'd like to know my assistant is reliable and prioritizes the work, especially on a first assignment. (On the plus side I saved myself \$50 since she never finished and I still got the info I needed!)

**Candidate #3** replied with a short note confirming the assignment and promising to have it back in about 2 hours. A few minutes later he sent me an email with a single example and asked me if he had it right. He did! Within 90 minutes he'd sent back an excel spreadsheet with 6 tax attorneys. Of the 6, only 3 met my criteria, but I'd only asked for 3-5 so by over delivering he met the threshold - way to anticipate a problem! He didn't have all the contact info I required but he had about the same amount as I was able to find and I like that he sent it to me incomplete without asking me if it was okay. Someone who likes to check in a lot feels too needy for me. He was fast, friendly, and he got it generally right. I knew this was someone I could work with.

It won't surprise you to learn I picked candidate #3 and he has been a terrific VA.

You can feel free to use this assignment to test your VA, or create another one with similar features to test your candidates.



I love being able to see my potential employee in action. Here are some of the qualities I am looking for in a VA that I find an interview doesn't tell me.

- Caring/Engaged – Dedicated to their job and to building a relationship with me.
- Proactive – Anticipating problems, proposing solutions, and looking for opportunities.
- Curious – Interested in what I am doing and how their assignment fits into the big picture.
- Consistency – In responsiveness as well as delivery of work that is high-quality and on-time.
- Organized – Coordinating, keeping things and people on track and updated, following up, closing open loops.
- Professional but warm – I expect my VAs to be professionals, but I like personality too. I don't want to work with a robot!

By performing a test, I learned if my candidates have these qualities relatively cheaply and in a more trustworthy way.

## How to Effectively Manage a VA

As with the hiring assignment, I usually do a mini version of the assignment myself so I know what I am asking for.

I always describe the project in detail but I ask my VA to show me what he's done after 1 hour so I make sure he isn't wasting his time and my money.

Here's a sample assignment – this was taken from the very beginning of my recruiting effort to find authors to write for my [So Smart self-help book series](#).

9/17/10

Hi Alvin,

I need a little research done and I trust you are up for it. Let me know if you aren't! Otherwise I would like to start on the following task.

**TASK:** I need to find the names, e-mails and websites of the best known EXPERTS and LIFE COACHES in the US on each of the following topics: infertility, romance (specifically dating and finding love), reducing clutter (organization), money management (saving), starting small businesses. An example would be Michele Woodward for starting a business/entrepreneurship.

The most important factor I am looking for is a large following/fan base so please check tweets and or Facebook fans. They should have 1,000 fans on facebook or followers on twitter but not more than 25,000. I am particularly interested in every LIFE COACH registered with Martha Beck coaches that will meet this 1000 – 25000 fan base on FB or Twitter. You can see the full list of Martha Beck coaches here:

[http://www.marthabeck.com/martha\\_beck\\_trained\\_coaches.php?add1=&info11=&info21=&sort=info2&cat=&category=Coaches&submit=Search](http://www.marthabeck.com/martha_beck_trained_coaches.php?add1=&info11=&info21=&sort=info2&cat=&category=Coaches&submit=Search)

**EXAMPLE:** I'd like you to present the info in a table like this:

Specialty	Name	Website	Email	Twitter name	Twitter Followers	Facebook address	Facebook Fans
Starting a business	Michele Woodward	<a href="http://lifeframeworks.com/">http://lifeframeworks.com/</a>	<a href="mailto:michele@lifeframeworks.com">michele@lifeframeworks.com</a>	@michelewoodward	1815	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/michelewoodward">http://www.facebook.com/michelewoodward</a>	1571

Can you do this? If so, what I'd like you to do is to spend 1 hour on the assignment and after an hour send me what you have completed. Please reply and confirm what you will plan to do to complete this task and when you can complete the first hour.

**DEADLINE:** Since I'm in a rush, I'd love it if you can complete that 1 hour right away. Please begin this task now if possible. The deadline for this first hour is end-of-day ET Monday but the sooner the better.

Thanks,

Angela

The way I structure the assignment gives him a chance to be wrong without it having a negative effect on me in terms of time or money. It also enables me to take full responsibility for explaining the project correctly.

I take a spin through the assignment myself so I know what I'm asking. I include sample assignments and I give him a chance to tell me if my assignment isn't clear without putting him on the defensive. After all, it's my job to get the work out of him that I need. It's not his job to read my mind.

When he hands me a project I'm not happy with, I course-correct by sending him the same assignment again but with completely different words. I rewrite it - usually with pictures - and pretend it's the first time I'm making the assignment.

Because I trust Alvin (largely due to his performance on the hiring test at the beginning) if he gives me bad work, I assume (and I'm almost always right) that I gave him bad directions. Before I even complain to him, I reread my assignment and usually I laugh. He has found a way to give me exactly what I asked for in a way I'd never predict. I rephrase the assignment and refine my technique of giving him direction.

ONE THING I LOVE ABOUT WORKING WITH MY VA IS THAT HE HAS MADE ME A BETTER MANAGER OF PEOPLE I WORK WITH DAILY - CLIENTS AND STAFF.

## Using a VA for Your Salaried Job to Free Up Your Time

If you are like most people, the tasks surrounding your full-time job expand to fill time faster than housework. Market Researchers have to be smarter and more focused than 80% of their colleagues in enterprise in order to get half of the credit.

That's why you need a dedicated executive assistant. It's also why no one is going to let you hire one!

When I was working as [Chief Marketing Officer](#) of a frenetically paced 50-person start up, I had a half dozen people on my team; but I'd still catch myself cutting and pasting results into an excel spreadsheet, proofreading documents, researching other advertising opportunities, editing video, setting appointments to make upcoming trade shows more productive, and wading, day-after-day through mind-numbing stacks of email.

One day, near the end of a particularly difficult quarter, I realized I just wasn't ready for an upcoming board meeting and I did something that seemed unethical, almost like cheating on a spouse. I hired an assistant to help me put my PowerPoint presentation together, out of my own private funds. I'd dipped into my own funds to buy small rewards or meals for my team before, but I'd never imagined posting an ad on [craigslist](#) and actually hiring a virtual assistant to help me put a project together (even though we had several people to do that kind of work on staff!).

The fact was, there just wasn't enough time in the day for me to get what I needed internally so I coughed up \$200 from my own pocket and hands down it was the best presentation I ever made. (Thanks Tim!)

The fact is, there is a reason you command the hourly and salary rates you command. And if you are reading this eBook, I assume it's because of your education and experience, not your ability to sort email, cut and paste phone numbers or re-tab an excel spread sheet.

What I am proposing is going to sound extreme but I can already tell it's the best decision you've ever made.

**For the next month, set aside \$100 (presumably a small fraction of your salary) for a virtual assistant to do the grunt work from your full-time job.**

Assuming you review everything before turning it in, this is neither unfair to your company nor short changing yourself. You are buying more time out of the office, setting yourself up

for a nice raise and/or promotion, and reducing the unpleasant, repetitive parts of your job to free your mind for the higher order thinking you were hired to do.

Here are some of the tasks Alvin's been working on for me this week. You'll see it's a mix of personal and work tasks, but to be honest, I work long days and do a bit of both in the office.

- Email EZPass for my password, then go online to get my past 3 months toll bills (needed for an expense report I have been putting off doing)
- Review the EZPass bill for tolls on certain dates, highlight them and send them back to me to submit with an expense report
- Complete an expense report for the EZpass bills
- Go through my Facebook account and grab the email address for everyone I have labeled as "GW Alum". I have a college reunion coming up and I want to reach out to everyone to see who is going. I'll have him draft that email for me next week
- Do keyword research on a new product we are thinking of launching in Q1 2011. I've given him a spreadsheet with the fields and links to the sources I like to use. This alone will save me 2 hours of work, plus 2 hours of internet surfing and the coinciding guilt.
- Write cliff notes on 10 articles that have been sitting in a folder marked "To Read" for more than 7 days. I've instructed him the cliff notes should be about 100 words and that I prefer bullet points (no more than 10, each 25 words or less) and a maximum of 250 words.
- Create rules and folders for all email that is recurring – subscriptions etc – so as to keep my inbox limited to personal email and new requests. I can review all my email newsletters and the solicitations I get from Norwegian Cruise Lines in batches once or twice a month.

With Alvin's help, I'm already spending more time at work focusing on the higher level tasks I'm actually paid to do. I've left the office early for 3 days in a row, and I am producing more than ever. It's a win-win-win – for my company, Alvin, and me.

If you are serious about being productive at work, because you want to grow in your career or just because it feels good, I recommend the investment. My bet is the \$100 a month you invest now will get you far more than \$300 in money or the equivalent value in free time to spend outside the office with friends and family.

## Real Life Stories from a Real Life VA – The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

### *Here's an example of a Project that Went Bad as Told to me by my Virtual Assistant:*

I'm a professional writer and I've worked for clients online who hire me as a virtual assistant. I've had some good and trustworthy clients and I've nothing but good experiences with these, but there have also been one or two that were bad.

I'm a casual blogger and a marketer of affiliate products over the Internet. I write online because it's satisfying and fun and I also get to earn money on the side doing what I do best. I don't really advertise any services, but because of my blogs and articles, many of which can be viewed on [Triond](#), people see my work and I sometimes get messages asking me if I can do this or that job for them.

Sometimes, I look for clients only to test the waters and see what's out there. I've heard plenty of good stories about writers and other professionals getting good projects and income online through freelancing sites like Get a Freelancer and Elance, and I thought I might as well see if I can get some people to hire me from classified ad sites. But unfortunately, what I found out is that these sites hide predators who have no other intention than to prey on unsuspecting writers and steal their work. It can be a terrible experience especially if you're a writer who has only had good clients before.

It started when I found this advertisement online of someone who's in need of SEO articles to be submitted regularly for a month or so. The compensation rate per piece he gave in the advertisement was higher than other offers for articles of the same length, which was really catchy and generally attractive to writers, since most clients online prefer to pay less to save money. If I remember correctly, it was \$10 per piece. Those people looking to hire virtual assistants online only offer a small sum these days with the financial crisis and all, so the offer was somewhat of an eye-opener when you see others offering only half the amount and even less.

I contacted the potential client who was from a European country (at least that's how he appeared to be from). He asked for a sample article to be written based on his specifications, which I promptly provided. After evaluating my work, he readily hired me to write SEO articles based on sourced he will provide. If I remember correctly, he had asked for five articles to be submitted daily. That was quite a chore, so I called for help, getting two of my fellow writers to write for me. I gave them an offer they agreed to. I told them I will pay them at the end of each month after I got paid by the client.

So I did my job (and so did my associates) and wrote the articles, editing and proofreading everything. I always submitted on time and always met the quota. I spent quite a few extra hours working on the project outside of my office job and everything went smoothly for the duration of the project, which was one month, initially. The client responded to all of my emails concerning my output which he had no problems with, but when I sent in the invoice at the end of the month, he stopped replying and disappeared. After several more emails, I realized that he was a con man.

Now it wouldn't have been much of a problem for me since I still had copies of the material I wrote and I could still use them to submit to article farms in order to build links for my blogs, but I was also left with the problem on how to explain the situation to my associate writers, who worked hard trusting me that they would get paid. I wasn't going to imitate what my client did to me, so I paid one of them in kind—a bottle of calcium supplements from my

USANA networking business. I tried to compensate the other writer similarly but he politely declined and explained he was taking prescription medicines. Later, I tried to pay him in cash, but he also politely declined it, saying it was not my fault and since I was not paid, it was okay if I didn't give him any compensation. That was really good of him to understand.

Anyway, my writer who declined compensation told me how there are plenty of men lurking in classified ad sites who prey on virtual assistants to take advantage of their talents for some quick money. I told him I've never had a bad client before and so it was easy for me to take the job. I told him about the good people from the Voxant Newsroom where I got projects that he also assisted me with, and I also told him about one client who asked me to write a chapter of his weight loss eBook who paid me more than what he paid other writers. I'm really thankful for those good clients. They make the bad ones seem to not exist at all.

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***On the flip side, here's a good story my Virtual Assistant told me and the Chapter that Led to a Whole EBook:***

I'm basically a blogger, but because many people see my work online as a writer, I'm sometimes contacted and hired to work on certain projects. In my experience, a client who makes the first contact is almost always a good client. I usually stay away from advertisements for a virtual assistant because in my experience, there's a chance that I will get a bad client who is either a thief or is close to being a thief. There's always the chance that a potential client is only advertising to hire writers just to steal their work. They would ask for samples and after you give them your work they cease to communicate. You can imagine how many "free" articles they get this way.

A lot of people wanting to be virtual assistants have been victims of article thieves online. I've read their little stories in social networking sites, but I wasn't really concerned. There was this one time an ad caught my attention because it involved an eBook project which I myself had been mulling about. I made contact with the advertiser and I got a positive reply. Then I had second thoughts on accepting the project, although I had passed the test that he gave me. It was necessary because as a writer himself, he didn't want to place his project in the hands of someone who wrote poorly. He was basically in the business of eBooks and his work involved hiring different writers to write whole chapters of his eBooks. It's a technique that allowed an eBook can be finished fast. With a pool of virtual assistants online, he could churn out one eBook after another with ease like he has an eBook factory assembly line!

To give me an idea of what he required, I was given access to an eBook already in the market. It's about weight loss and was made to look as if it's written by a female author. Informal in writing style and with lots of wit, it caters to a female audience capitalizing on a very catchy title. The contents are largely motivational but it does emphasize a certain technique in losing weight which is essentially something that's similar to but different in terms of execution and style from existing techniques. He explained that he wanted the new eBook was to be similar in style to the sample. I thought that since he gave me one of his eBooks, I think I should at least trust him a little.

The client told me he needed a good writer to write a chapter of his new book will cater to a female audience. If I remember correctly, he told me he will pay \$7 for the job. I thought that was too low for a whole chapter and I asked for at least \$15. He said he couldn't afford that amount and that \$7 was his usual price since he wasn't earning a lot from eBook sales yet. So I told him, "well since you seem to be nice guy, and honest too, I'll do the chapter." He provided me with a few more details on what to write in the chapter but gave me free reign on how

to present them. He told me I was to write as if I was a female author. I agreed and drew on my own experiences in working out and what I've learned from other people. I must say I enjoyed writing the chapter and I had several pages done before I stopped. But I felt that if I had continued writing, I would have ended up with a completed book!

I sent in my output to the client and he was pleased with the results like I was. He promptly sent the payment through PayPal, but I was surprised that he gave me \$15 instead of just the usual \$7 that he paid other writers. I must admit that it was a nice gesture from a fellow writer and I thanked him for it. That was the only project I did for him. I guess I was just too expensive for him. I knew there were other writers out there who are willing to write the material for less. But nevertheless, I did get something more out of that project, and that was the idea that I can easily write my own eBook on weight loss. The result is [alvinwriter's Quick Guide to Six Pack Abs](#).

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I included these stories so you could start to get a sense of what's important to a VA and what they are looking for in a client. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. To be a great boss, you have to really understand the perspective of your employees so you know how to motivate them, communicate with them, and inspire them to help you keep your projects on track and moving forward.



# My Project Notes

Use this page to keep track of projects you'd like to assign to a VA.

A series of horizontal lines intended for taking notes, spanning most of the page width and height.



# Journey Grrrl

## PUBLISHING

### About Journey Grrrl Publishing

Journey Grrrl Publishing helps coaches and other solo healing professionals write, edit and promote their business through books and publicity.

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**PR Tips for Coaches** - Advice for Coaches who want to grow their business with Free Publicity - <http://www.journeygrrrl.com/resources/free-publicity-tips-for-coaches/>

**Pick a Publisher Kit** – Considering self-publishing? Thinking about paying a publisher? Want to go the traditional publisher route? This kit gives you everything you need in order to pick the right publisher for your project. -- <http://www.journeygrrrl.com/pick-a-publisher/>

**Must Know Social Media Tools** – Most Coaches don't know where to start when it comes to social media. This handy reference guide tells you all you need to know to identify which technology you need to learn to get to the next level. – <http://www.journeygrrrl.com/resources/free-download/>

*Invest in Yourself with One of Our Programs*

**Media School for Coaches** – The definitive 5 week course to that guarantees coaches will have everything they need – <http://www.mediaschoolforcoaches.com>

**Press for Coaches Success Kit** – Complete Kit to Free Publicity for Coaches has everything you need to start get your message to millions of people through “Free Advertising” on radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and online. – <http://www.pressforcoaches.com>

**Book Writing 101 for Coaches** – In this affordable 4-week class you will learn how to defeat the blank page by creating a book idea to reach your ideal client and then using tools to get organized and stay on track to complete your book. – <http://bit.ly/bookwriting101>

**The Complete If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Write a Book Program** – This is the complete program for coaches who are ready to make their dream of an author come true but just don't have the hours required to get the book done on their own. Included in the package is unlimited coaching and consulting, book strategy and engineering designed to meet your goals, social media and free publicity support, print edition, kindle edition, ibook edition, online book store distribution, Baker & Taylor for in-store (bricks and mortar) distribution. – <http://www.booksforlifecoaches.com>



# Journey Grrrl

## PUBLISHING

### Publishing Opportunities with Journey Grrrl:

#### **So Smart Series**

Are you So Smart? Our readers are! They are definitely no dummies! That's why we created the So Smart Series! These holistic, how-to guides range in topic but share one thing in common — they make difficult problems easy to break up into chunks and then solved. Our first titles include *If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Get Pregnant*; *If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Start a Business*; *If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Write a Book*; and *If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Get Rid of This Clutter*. If you have an idea for a So Smart book, check out the submission guidelines and learn how you can use a book to promote your message. – <http://bit.ly/SoSmart>

#### **Social Publishing**

Publish your book on the Journey Grrrl Social Publishing Platform very quickly! We encourage coaches to write and coach and we take over the production, technology, distribution, and even help with the marketing. For more information on how to have your title published as an eBook alone or also in print, check out this page on how a Life Coach can get published. –

<http://bit.ly/SocialPublishing>

#### **Digital Library Project**

Journey Grrrl Publishing is building the world's largest collection of Free eBooks written by Life Coaches and we want your book. Nope, there's no catch. I know how much time goes into creating a book or an eBook and I know any author who takes the time to do that work, wants the world to hear their message. Get the details for how you can make your Free eBook available in this library today! – <http://www.journeygrrrl.com/resources/digital-library/>