

Questions Frequently Asked

by People Thinking
about Working with a

Virtual Assistant

Q. What is Virtual Assistance?

A. Virtual Assistance is a new administrative profession, formalized more than five years ago by Stacy Brice, President of AssistU, to meet the needs of small business owners and entrepreneurs, as well as the needs of any busy person who could use some great administrative support. The people who do Virtual Assistance are called Virtual Assistants or VAs. What they do is no less than an art -- working long-term and closely with a successful person (client) without needing to be physically in the client's office.

Its base is in traditional administrative support, but we've widened the scale and scope, and placed it on a new foundation. That foundation holds the relationship at its core, with the people (both business owners, and equals in the relationship) choosing each other, rather than, as is the traditional norm, one person being placed in the role of working *for* the other. It requires a level of commitment and desire from both people to give the best they have to the relationship -- to commingling talents and strengths, that surpasses anything the corporate world could currently imagine. First and foremost, it requires that both the VA and client fully understand, value, and desire a collaborative partnership.

Once the partnership is established, Virtual Assistance works wonderfully well, skipping over geographical barriers easily with the use and immediacy of communications media (fax, phone, Internet). Working virtually allows people to be in touch as easily as if they were sitting 20 feet from one another.

Q. Who would work with a VA?

A. VAs work with smart, successful people of all kinds; authors, sales people, consultants, coaches, executives, professionals, entrepreneurs--anyone who wants to be professionally successful and live a more balanced life with more free time to do the things he/she wants to do!

Q. What's the point? I manage everything on my own!

A. As you grow a business, sooner or later, you'll find that you can do anything, but you simply can't do everything! And when you give away the stuff that doesn't need your personal attention, you gain space

and time in your life for an abundance of other things. Those things might include:

- Growing your business
- More time with family, friends
- Responding to other opportunities
- Balancing home and work responsibilities

Q. If I wanted an assistant, why would I hire one who's potentially hundreds of miles away?

A. Well, part of the benefit of having a VA is that you haven't *hired* anyone. When you work with a VA, you get a partner, not an employee. You get someone who chooses to work with you as much as you choose to work with him or her. The VA's decision to work with you will be based on being attracted to your work and on being interested in being your partner for success, rather than because he or she is looking for "some job." People work with VAs because they:

- Don't have the space for someone in the office
- Don't want someone in the office
- Don't have the equipment needed for someone else to use
- Don't want to buy the equipment
- Don't want the associated work and cost of having an employee:
 - Payroll
 - Benefits
 - Paying for someone else to administer payroll, benefits
 - Don't want to have to conform to federal standards like OSHA

If what you want and need is the most basic office support, then you might want to work with a secretarial service.

If, on the other hand, you want the benefit of working with someone who really wants to know you, your business, your customers, and who really wants to be deeply involved in your success, you'll want to work with a VA.

Q. Do all VAs work in partnerships? Can't I get one to type just a couple of documents for me, just this one time?

A. Because each VA owns his or her own business, each is going to have very different standards regarding the kind of work he or she is willing to do. All of the VAs you'll find in The Registry (the free AssistU referral service) primarily work in partnership

with others. They find it's more rewarding for them to do that, and feel they don't do their best work unless it's in a relationship with someone.

You can certainly contact any of them to see if they'd be willing to do your work, but you'll probably find that you'll get your work done more quickly by contacting a local secretarial service.

Q. Why wouldn't I want to give my secretarial work to a local company, and have a VA just working on bigger things?

A. You might. However, what people have found is that it doesn't really pay to do that.

Secretarial services are a bit less expensive per hour. That's true. The problem is that the people who work there don't know you, or your business, or your customers. You have to do a lot of work, up front, before giving them the work, so that they know what you want — and even then, sometimes you need to speak with them several times before your documents, faxes, messages, etc., represent you in your voice.

A VA can speak for you. A VA can write in your voice. A VA, because he or she has learned you, can listen to you speak just a few words about what you want done, and make it happen — sometimes, even better than you could have done it yourself.

In addition, the more the VA knows about your needs, the less time it will take him or her to do your work.

So, even for the basic secretarial work, where do you really get your best value?

The key is to remember — a VA becomes your partner for success. A secretarial service helps you for the short term.

Q. How long would I work with a VA?

A. Just as there are assistants who have worked for the same person in the corporate world for many years, it's possible that could happen with your VA.

Part of the power in this dynamic relationship comes in the synergy which happens between the people working together. There's a flow, a spark, an ease of working with a VA which turns days to weeks, weeks to months, months to years, all before you know it.

Q. Isn't it more expensive than hiring an employee?

A. No. The cost savings is two-fold: financial and emotional.

When you hire an employee, on top of a salary or hourly wage, you have a ton of things you need to administer (payroll, benefits, etc.), many things to buy or lease (equipment, furniture, etc.), and you have to share space as well. It's expensive and can be grueling.

Depending on the VA, you might pay—as-you-go (giving him or her only the amount of work you actually have during any week or month), or you might have him or her on retainer (buying a certain amount of the VAs time each month for a pre-set and usually lower, hourly rate). Your VA's time is 100% productive time as well -- you don't pay for a second of downtime or break-time.

No muss, no fuss. Just great support from someone dedicated to your success.

Q. What kinds of work might my VA do?

A. The beauty of this work is that the only things that can't be done are things which actually need to be touched in your office, such as paper filing (and even that's possible if you're creative!). Otherwise, you and your VA are only bound by imagination, need, skills and desire.

Some things we've known VAs to do:

- Handle email or US mail, handling most and forwarding to you just those which need your attention
- Make appointments, keep a schedule
- Make/receive phone calls/inquiries
- Fax/receive faxes
- Research of all sorts
- Plan meetings and events
- Plan parties (business and personal), weddings, reunions
- Make travel arrangements — business and personal
- Handle registrations for seminars given by clients
- Writing
- Proof reading
- Copy editing
- Desktop publishing
- Newsletter publishing (print and Internet)
- Coordination of web design/hosting
- Mailings
- Buy gifts/cards for customers of clients
- List managing (majordomo, listserv)
- Reminder service
- Transcription and Dictation

- Bill paying
- Bookkeeping—business and personal
- Manage vendor relations
- Create/maintain databases
- Web maintenance
- Supporting busy families with scheduling, arrangement of services, etc.
- Supporting busy managers and executives with the kinds of professional and personal work inappropriately requested of a company-provided and employed assistant

The VAs vary, in terms of the types of work they do... and some of them offer more specialized, or premium services, such as:

- Corporate Intelligence
- Marketing
- Advertising
- Personnel Management
- Business Planning
- Quality Control
- Space Planning
- Safety Consulting
- Ghost Writing
- Position clients as experts in a given field/Publicity
- Virtual Office Management
- Web Design

Of course, these skills are billed at a rate that is separate from and higher than the rate generally billed for assisting.

It's not so important that your VA knows how to do it all. What's important is that she knows how to get it all done. AssistU trained VAs know how and have the resources to do that. All of the AssistU-trained VAs are able to make just about anything happen for you. Plus when you work with an AssistU trained VA, you get the benefit of all the expertise in our community — that's how committed we are to the success of every one of the AssistU trained VAs and their relationships with their clients.

Q. Ok – I can see how this might be a good thing. But since I've always worked on my own, can you suggest a way for me to think about what I could give to a VA to do and what I should keep to do myself?

A. Here's what you can do:

For the next week, keep a pad of paper and a pen on your desk, or with you if you're far more mobile (notes in your PDA would work just as well, too!). Every single time you do something, think to yourself, "Did I really have to be the one to do this?" Be rigorous as

you consider the answer -- remember, your goal is to find as much "stuff" to get off your plate as you can!

Everything that you didn't personally need to deal with gets added to your list. At the end of the week, you'll have a terrific idea of just how much you do that keeps you from what you should be doing, and just exactly the kinds of things you can turn over to your VA.

When you talk with VAs, share that list with them -- it will help them understand better how to support you.

Q. So, how much can I really expect to pay?

A. Again, VAs are in private practice, and they price their services according to their skills, their desire to do certain kinds of work, their experience, and their reputation. You really need to speak with a VA, share your ideas and the vision for your success, and ask what it might cost to have him or her be a part of that.

Generally speaking, however, you can expect to pay \$30 — \$70 plus, per hour. It depends on your needs, and the VA you work with.

Q. Now wait — you said that working with a VA isn't more expensive than hiring an employee, but I wouldn't pay an employee \$30 per hour!

A. Not in straight time, perhaps. You're more likely to pay someone with this level of skills between \$17 and \$20 per hour if they were sitting in your office. However, when you add in the cost of administering payroll, your share of payroll taxes, having to pay certain kinds of insurance like worker's compensation and extra liability for having someone in your home or place of business, and the cost of making sure that your location conforms to federal guidelines such as OSHA, you absolutely *do* pay that much per hour. And the more skilled and talented a worker, the more her time is worth, and the higher her fee.

The beauty is this. While you still have the expense, you have absolutely *none* of the hassle. One check per month. Simple. Easy. You can get on with the business of living your life on your terms. Working in partnership with a great VA makes that all possible.

Q. Does Virtual Assistance work better for any particular type of person or professional?

A. The benefits are enormous to almost anyone who's busy and needs support.

What we've found is that the only people who really aren't in a good position to work with a VA are:

- People who aren't online and who can't understand why this would work;
- People who live in the urgent:

If everything you do is last minute, if your style is to procrastinate and then rush to deadline, if you're not organized and centered, if you're in a high-pressure field where things run you instead of the other way around, if you want someone at your beck and call, you probably need an in-person employee, not a VA;

- People who don't understand the power created in a relationship with a fantastic assistant;
- People who aren't open to learning new ways of working and communicating;
- People who aren't billing their own time at considerably more than \$30/hour.

If you aren't, paying a VA could create a hardship for you. But if you are billing at a much higher rate, or if you work on commission and your time is valued in large chunks of cash earned that way, then every hour you spend doing work that takes you off course, is work for which you are paying yourself, in essence, at YOUR HOURLY FEE. It doesn't take a lot to see the smarts behind paying someone to handle administrative work so that you can be out earning more and more!

- People who can't shift to seeing a VA as an equal.

If you're stuck in the traditional boss/assistant paradigm, or if you need to be the boss, you need an employee, not a VA.

Q. And why would I want to choose a VA from The Registry?

- A.** They are the only people who have had specific additional training in their profession; lots of it, as a matter of fact. They have also worked for years in administrative roles in other fields, having great experiences that have brought them to this place in their lives where they want to be business owners and support other business owners. They uniquely understand working in partnerships and can add tremendous value to your work and life. AssistU holds them to the highest standards in the Virtual Assistance profession, and they have high standards of their own.

In order for someone to receive referrals through the Registry, she has to have successfully completed the

AssistU Virtual Training Program--nearly 250 hours of training and, independent study --no one can buy her way in. Many have made an additional investment by earning the highest level certifications available to professional Virtual Assistants. The first of the two available is the CPVA (Certified Professional Virtual Assistant) which is only earned after having 150 hours working with clients, and then spending a grueling eight weeks and usually more than 100 hours in a skills-based exam, done through a simulated working experience where they prove their abilities in more than 50 core competencies. The highest available certification is the CMVA (Certified Master Virtual Assistant) which is available to those who have earned their CPVA, have spent at least 1500 hours working with clients, and who can prove that they have elevated their professionalism and capabilities to a standard worthy of being labeled "mastery."

You can feel certain that by choosing someone from the Registry, you'll find a partner for your success. The only thing you'll really need to find out is if there's a fit in terms of personalities, work styles, and work objectives. All of them are very well trained and building successful practices.

Q. So, how do I choose?

- A.** Here's how the Registry works:

We know you're busy. You don't have time to search and choose and *then* interview. So we've made it easier for you.

On our site is a form you can fill out. When you submit it, all of our VAs receive a copy. Those who feel they could be a great fit for you will contact you directly. Simple.

From there, we recommend that you immediately move to a phone conversation — it's only there that you can really sense whether there's a connection between the two of you, and whether you might want to work with her/him. Know that the VA is making a similar assessment.

Discuss your business, your needs as you see them now, and your challenges openly with the VAs. They are trained to respond not only to what you say, but also to what they hear in what you don't say. They'll ask questions and share their thoughts about the potential they see in working with you and how that might impact your work and your life. The VA will also share with you how his/her practice is set up, fees, availability, etc., so you can see if there's a fit in that way.

And remember — this is a mutual decision to work together. We're shattering the Boss/assistant paradigm here. It's a budding relationship. Two

people with varied skills and knowledge coming together in partnership for your success. Just be yourself. Being as genuine as you can will allow the VA to understand you far more quickly than she would if you present a heavily professional corporate image.

And when you find one you want to work with who is excited about working with you — you won't have to really do anything. The agreement to work together will come very naturally. Before you know it, you'll have an assistant, and your business and life will begin to be very different.

****Note:** If you get a referral from the AssistU Registry, you may hear from a number of highly qualified and terrific VAs who believe they might be a great match for you. Please don't feel overwhelmed. Remember -- if you'd placed an ad in the newspaper, you might have heard from hundreds of people, most of whom wouldn't have been remotely qualified! Every one of the VAs you'll hear from *is*, and so your job is to narrow the field and decide who to talk with. We suggest that you look at the three or so whose initial contact with you resonated most with you, and talk with them, first. Chances are the ideal VA for you is in that group.

Q. Where can I go to get more information or to find a wonderfully trained VA?

A. AssistU is the place to go. We're the premier organization training, coaching, and referring Virtual

Assistants. We welcome you to visit our home on the web: <http://www.assistu.com>

We've made it content rich, and hope it answers all your questions. If you have others, or if you'd like to talk with us, please feel free to give us a call. We're always here to help!

For your convenience:
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