



How to Succeed in the Virtual Assistance Profession

© Danielle Keister

So you want to be a Virtual Assistant, huh?

Having built a successful Virtual Assistant practice myself, I can tell you it can be very rewarding being your own boss, doing work you love for fantastic clients. But make no mistake – this is a real profession requiring a high level of qualifications and expertise. And life as a business owner can be very demanding.

Virtual Assistance is not for everyone, and not everyone can be a Virtual Assistant. For serious-minded newcomers who are considering entry into the Virtual Assistance profession, I want to share some of my insights.

Q. DOES IT TAKE A LONG TIME TO GET A VIRTUAL ASSISTANCE BUSINESS OFF THE GROUND?

As with any business, success doesn't happen overnight or without much effort. You get what you put in, and it takes hard work, dedication and perseverance.

For some people, business sense is effortless, and they have the experience and acumen it takes to market, network and promote successfully while operating intelligently and providing superior services.

For others, this is a struggle, and they often perpetuate ineffectual methods and practices that won't ever lead them where they'd like to go.

Outside of that, it will simply take time to become established. The better you are at building relationships and creating your own opportunities, the quicker that will happen.

Q. WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO YOU NEED TO BECOME A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

Virtual Assistance practices are true businesses providing valuable professional services. Virtual Assistance is not a get-rich-quick, temporary, work-at-home, telecommuting side job, MLM or other network-marketing scheme.

A small segment of the people attracted to the Virtual Assistance profession are those with little to no qualifications or only entry-level skill sets who are looking for a way to make a quick buck with no effort.

That won't happen in this business, and veteran Virtual Assistants vehemently discourage that mentality as it both disrespects and misrepresents our profession.

Most Virtual Assistants led accomplished professional lives in the workforce before taking their

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expertise into the entrepreneurial world.

Virtual Assistants come from a variety of business backgrounds, but the common denominator is that they are typically overachievers with extensive administrative experience and superior skill sets and training.

Every Virtual Assistant has different tastes, skills and strengths. Along those lines, we determine who our target markets are, and narrow our services to offer only those that we most enjoy and are most qualified to deliver.

Covering all these bases will go a long way toward finding your most suitable clients, and maintaining joy and satisfaction, as well as quality, in your work.

Although Virtual Assistants can take on one-time or occasional projects, our business models are more commonly geared toward establishing long-term partnerships with clients.

Therefore, it's important that the client fit your needs as much as you fit theirs. Your earning potential will also be greater with retained clients.

Working with the "right" client on a long-term basis is also much more gratifying, and creates a positive reciprocal energy for both of you.

You get to know them and the work very well, which makes anticipating their needs more intuitive, and the satisfaction of having a more personal relationship with a client and being a part of their success can be very rewarding for both of you.

I really encourage systemizing your business processes and how you deliver your services. That, combined with specializing in particular services, and choosing to work with people who fit your client profile, will go a long way towards living and working exactly the way you intend. ~ Danielle Keister

Q. ARE THERE COURSES THAT ARE WORTH MY TIME TO TAKE?

Understand that the single-most important qualification to become a Virtual Assistant is at least five years administrative experience earned in the real (non-virtual) business world working in upper level capacities such as secretary, administrative assistant, executive assistant, real estate assistant, legal secretary, paralegal/legal assistant, office manager or supervisor, etc.

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Those whose only experience was in receptionist or clerical roles typically have only entry-level skill sets which will not equip them to meet the very real and important business needs of clients, much less deal with the rigors of running a business.

There are no programs that will “teach” you to be a Virtual Assistant. However, if you already have the requisite skills and experience, the VA industry does have some business training and coaching programs that can be of great benefit.

Entry-level skills and experience simply will not afford the ability to serve clients well. Business owners need Virtual Assistants with top-of-the-line expertise.

Entering into the profession without these qualifications would be a mistake, and a grave disservice to both consumers and the profession, as well as yourself.

Q. IS THE INCOME GOOD?

The income can be very good. And offering certain or highly specialized services can be even more lucrative. But I won't mislead you; it again comes back to how hard one works and learns to create a successful business, and how intelligently the business is set up.

One of the most important decisions, if not THE most important, is determining your rates. Rather than pulling a rate out of thin air, smart Virtual Assistants utilize established business formularies to determine a profitable rate for their business.

These formularies take into consideration, among other things, the amount of salary you expect to earn, administrative costs (non-billable time), anticipated expenses, operating costs and capital outlay. You also need to factor into the calculations the value of your time and expertise.

Realize that in order to remain in business, doing the work you love and living the life of your choosing, you must be profitable, so set your rates with intention and due diligence.

Q. HOW CAN YOU AVOID GETTING THE WRONG KIND OF CLIENTS?

Some Virtual Assistants will take any client on. A larger number of us, however, prefer to screen or handpick our clients.

One of the ways we do that is by first developing a profile of the kind of client we want to work with. That profile can include, among other things, personality traits, work habits, and the kind of work they do.



How to Succeed in the Virtual Assistance Profession

Once you discern the kind of person you prefer to work with, it's much easier when interviewing new clients to weed out those who won't be a good fit.

The premier organization for VA business training is **Assist U**, established by Stacy Brice. The curriculum of this well-respected virtual college is rigorous and demanding, and Stacy maintains the integrity of the program by being very selective about who is accepted.

One of the reasons I'm a huge fan is that Brice has maintained a clear, consistent message through all the years, never wavering in her mission to elevate what we do to the status of profession.

That's big thinking in my book, one that's quality-minded and visionary.

Joining an industry forum such as **Virtual Assistant Networking for Growth Forum** is also a smart move.

For free, you can network with other Virtual Assistants, share knowledge and resources, get answers to technical questions, and learn from veteran VAs who have established successful practices themselves.

From there you can also get tips on who to turn to for other business training programs, personal coaching and mentorship.

Q. I WANT TO LEAVE A CRAZY JOB, AND CERTAINLY DON'T WANT TO "JUMP FROM THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE." CAN THE WORK GET OUT OF HAND?

Again, this depends on how smart you model and operate your business. It can only get out of hand if you allow it. I really encourage systemizing your business processes and how you deliver your services.

That, combined with specializing in particular services, and choosing to work with people who fit your client profile will go a long way towards living and working exactly the way you intend.

These are simplified answers to some of the questions you may have, but I hope they help you start thinking in the right directions.

Happy journey!

*About the Author: Danielle Keister is founding member of the Virtual Assistance Chamber of Commerce. To hire a Virtual Assistant or for more information on Virtual Assistance, as well as to join the forum and download **FREE** business tools and resources, visit the VACOC website at <http://www.virtualassistantnetworking.com>. You may print this article for personal use or republish it online only if it is left unaltered and in its entirety, including bylines, links and author information. Contact the author for any other permissions.*

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