

How to Have a Successful Relationship with a Virtual Assistant (VA)

It takes time to find a great VA - someone who you will share information about your business; someone that will, over time, “partner” with you to help you in building your business revenue.

More than likely, you want someone that is excited about your business. Someone who can't wait to help you reach your goals and someone who can offer a wide range of knowledge and expertise in using technology to help simplify and automate tasks.

People “find” their VAs in different ways. You may have been referred to a great VA from one of your colleagues, maybe you browsed around the internet, met someone at a conference/meeting or perhaps the VA found you and contacted you regarding your business. Whichever way you found a VA, there are certain aspects that are imperative to ensuring the relationship is going to get off to a good start.

Through managing the Multiple Streams Team and my own VA business, Victoria Business Solutions, I speak to people every day that know want to hire a VA. They are at different stages of their business, however they know they NEED HELP. When I ask them what kind of help they are looking for, they all have a variety of responses - some that don't match the criteria of what a VA is and can do.

Firstly, before I go forward, there is one thing I must clarify - a VA is NOT a Coach! Little bells go off in my ears when I hear small business owners say that they don't want to delegate to a VA - they want the VA to tell them what needs to be done and then help them do it. Perhaps after working with a VA for numerous months, after they have a clear understanding of your business strategy and goals and have developed a good relationship for you, they will be able to offer suggestions and feedback on what you may want to consider working on. However, it is NOT the VAs role to tell you what needs to take place next in your business. They can certainly provide insight on the tools and resources available to accomplish a task (for example, the various ways to automate your newsletter sign up and distribution function), however they should not be expected to provide you with a strategy on what you need to do in order to build the multiple streams of coaching income for your business.

Here are 5 tips to consider before and during a new relationship with a VA. If you follow these steps, you are more likely to have a positive and successful relationship with a VA from day one.

1. Know your Business Strategy

If you are clear about what you want for your business, you are already heading in the right direction as far as working with a VA. By sharing this information with a VA, they will learn the general structure of how they can best assist you. As your relationship progresses and they learn more about you and your business, they may provide you with suggestions and feedback on how a certain tool may benefit you both short term and long term.

If you are not clear on your business strategy, I encourage you to consider this before starting a relationship with a VA. You will find that by having your business strategy in place, your discussions and focus will be much more streamlined and well worth your investment in having a VA join your team. Remember - think of them as a profit center. If you don't know your strategy, how will you know how a VA can become your profit center?

2. Define Your Goals

By having a business strategy in place, it makes it much easier to define your goals and approximate “deadlines” for when you would like to accomplish them.

By sharing these goals with your VA, they can assist you in prioritizing tasks that need to take place in order for that goal to be completed. As they become more comfortable with you and your business, they will start to “look ahead” at the priorities and consider the kinds of tools/resources needed to accomplish future goals.

By sharing your business strategy and goals with your VA, you have set the foundation for a successful relationship.

This doesn't mean that you can not change your priorities - of course, changing of priorities is “normal” as we build our businesses. We may decide to focus more energy on one area versus another; however the tasks and general direction towards the business strategy remain the same.

3. Communicate Your Expectations

We all have expectations on what we would like our ideal “partner” to be. If you have specific expectations, then communicate these to your VA well before you start to dive in and have them take over tasks for you - avoid any frustration or disappointment well before it has time to evolve!

Remember to be realistic in your expectations. A VA is a sub-contractor - not an employee, therefore, things you may need to consider are their hours of operation that they have other clients also, and they are not always going to be available to you 100% of the time by phone or email.

Also, remember that a VA does not know everything. For example, they may be very skilled in some areas and not as skilled in others. Even in areas that they are very skilled in, they may not be aware of potential glitches unless they have already experienced them with another client.

VAs take pride in what they do and often they are continuously looking at ways to strengthen and build their skills (that's why we started the Grow Your VA Biz Membership Area at www.growyourvabiz.com). If they don't know how to do something, it's not because they're not a great VA, it may mean they just haven't experienced that particular task yet.

4. Be Ready to Invest Some Time

I can't stress this tip enough - it takes time, from both the VA and the client, to build a successful relationship.

Any relationship requires time, especially at the beginning. A relationship with you and your VA is no different.

When starting to work with a VA, be prepared to take time out of your week to connect with them. This may include sharing information about your business strategy, goals, preferences, your “wants” and them learning how they can convert those “wants” into functioning items in your business. Be available to answer questions they may have, take the time to “share” with them and allow for time to simply getting to know each other.

If you make the time for this relationship while you are in the beginning stages, you will find that less time will be required later on. This doesn't mean you won't communicate with your VA weekly, it just means that they will have learned about your style, wants, needs etc. in the early stages and therefore, can confidently move forward in providing you with support.

Not investing time in your VA, especially at the beginning of your relationship could mean frustration from both parties and even failure. You will spend much more time “fixing” pieces

later on than you would have if you had taken the time to put the pieces in place at the beginning.

5. Start with a project

Many times we are so pleased to know there is someone to assist us that we have difficulty determining where to start! I recommend starting with a project - something you've wanted to do for some time but just haven't had a chance to do it. An example may be submitting your articles on the internet.

I quite often refer to a client that I started working with about a year and a half ago. When we decided to work together, he provided me with 5 articles and asked me to find places online that I could submit them to. The goal was to increase his visibility on the internet. This was a GREAT start for both of us. By reading his articles, I was able to learn about his business, his target, the services he provided and his general style. This also provided him with an idea of my work style. Did I call and ask questions if I had them, when I was left to work on an assignment, did I need constant reminding, or did I just do it? After some time of working on this, we moved to bigger and "better" things. He learned he could trust me, and I learned more about how I could best benefit him in his business. Today we're still working together and have a great relationship.

In starting with a project, there is very little "risk" involved. It provides the both yourself and the VA with critical information about the each other before moving forward.

Consider a project that a VA can help you with. If the project is a success, keep moving forward. If there are questions etc., then address those at the time. It's much easier to deal with any issues at this point of the relationship!

Bonus Tip - 6. Have a Communication "Plan".

As virtual partners, it's important to have a good "communication" plan in place with your VA.

For example, with clients whose businesses I am very involved in, I have a weekly one hour phone call with them. Throughout the week we communicate via email relating to the various tasks we are working on, however once a week we get together for a one hour discussion that includes our current tasks, future tasks and anything else that we are working towards.

This provides both parties with a personal connection and allows for easy discussion rather than interpreting details from within an email.

I find this weekly call to be invaluable in my relationship with my clients and I know my clients appreciate it also.

How can you put these tips into place with your new or current VA relationship?

By considering these tips, you will be on your way to having a great, long-term relationship with your Virtual Assistant.

Cindy Greenway has been a VA since 2003, working with reputable clients in various professions. In 2005, Cindy and her partners started the Multiple Streams Team which offers a team of VAs that provide quality VA support to small business clients. To learn how a VA can help you build your business, visit <http://www.multiplestreamsteam.com> and sign up for the free "Boost Business with a VA" Report. Virtual Assistants can learn more about the skills they need to have, as well as how to build and sustain a profitable VA business by visiting <http://www.growyourvabiz.com> and requesting the free 10 Critical Skills ecourse.