

how to hire

THE PERFECT VA IN 7 EASY STEPS

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No matter how much of a rock star you are, no matter how profitable your business is, and no matter how talented an assistant is, the key to a successful virtual assistant relationship is making sure you are well suited to one another. You need to be well-matched: for the tasks at hand and for working together.

Finding the right VA for you probably seems like an intimidating task. We get it! But remember: the perfect VA (for you) is out there, somewhere, just waiting to connect. They want to find their perfect client as well. No matter what the gig is or what kind of work is involved, for the right price and time there's an internet superhero ready and waiting to save your day.

But where are they? How do you find them? And how can you be sure you'll be able to develop a lasting relationship that grows your business in the long term?

With a proven process, you can find the perfect virtual assistant. It only takes seven steps.

(Hopefully, you've done our life audit already, so you're prepared with a list of tasks you're ready to delegate. If not, [click here](#) or check out chapter two of Panic Proof.)

step one

DETERMINE WHAT KIND OF HELP YOU NEED



Start by figuring out what kind of help you need (because, spoiler alert, you might not need to hire a virtual assistant at all).

First and foremost, we're assuming you need to hire someone for *online* help. There is actually a lot of confusion around this despite the title of "virtual" assistant. If you need someone to go around to your rental properties and collect and deposit checks every month, or if you are looking for someone to drop off your daughter's snack at soccer practice, you need an IRL (in real life) assistant. Does this sound like you? No need to read any further. You will not find the answers you seek here, my friend.

But if you need someone who can help you via internet, you're in the right place. In addition to virtual assistants, there are other digitally-minded professionals who might be able to help with some of your outsourced tasks.

The Freelancer

If you need a genuine expert to handle a one-off project, but you don't have the resources or need for an in-house hire, you probably want to consider hiring a freelancer.

Freelancers are generally very specialized at certain things and they like to take projects that fit within the scope of their specialty. You'll often see graphic design freelancers, web development freelancers, and freelance writers because all of these specialties take a bit more experience and expertise than, say, cleaning out your inbox from spam. (Don't get me wrong. I love a beautifully organized Gmail inbox, but there's a reason you can't get a degree in Google Hacks . . . yet.)

Freelancers usually work alone or with a small team, so the good ones are often unavailable on short notice. (There are so many hours in the day, after all.) If you need a web developer, consider you might be third or fourth in line, meaning the person you want to work with might not have an opening in their calendar for weeks or months. But then, you might luck out, and catch the perfect potential colleague between gigs.

Depending on the scope of work for your project, freelancers can charge anywhere from \$25 per hour to \$500 per hour, and they might charge hourly or by the project. Be clear about your budget and the needs of the assignment so you can both negotiate terms that are fair and beneficial for everyone involved.

The Agency

The agency model is designed to provide everything from strategy to implementation under one roof, all managed by someone on the outside. They tend to handle big projects for big companies (think of hired-out law firms or PR agencies). In a strong agency relationship, all you'll need to do is provide your vision, your goals, and your budget. From there, they are off to the races working on a solution. When you work with an agency, you tend to communicate with a single account manager, and they keep on the trains on the track and running on time on the backend.

With agencies, you're paying for top-notch work that includes all the project management and nitty-gritty admin that inevitably comes with working on big projects from scratch. Agencies aren't meant to serve as assistants. They are meant to be partners in your business. For this level of help, expect to pay a premium price, often on retainer.

The Virtual Assistant

While VAs are often freelancers; freelancers are not always VAs. Freelancers tend to do one thing and one thing only. They aren't generally willing to jump into other scopes of work because they're getting paid well for the one thing that they do.

VAs tend to be generalists. They can do a little bit of social media management (but they can't strategize a campaign from start to finish), some light copy- or blog-writing (but they don't write for *The New York Times*), or basic project management (but they aren't an Agile framework mastermind). Unlike freelancers, most VAs prefer to have a small corral of clients that do not turn over. They

like to have ongoing, consistent work and they like to develop relationships with their clients for the long haul. If you need ongoing or intermittent support on lower-level tasks, such as data entry, administrative work, marketing implementation, research, or the like, that's where a VA may be your best bet.

VAs exist all over the world, have different sets of skills, and different levels of experience. You can truly find a VA for anything you can think of, provided the things you need can be done on the internet. And generally, VAs are less expensive than freelancers or agencies, which explains some of their popularity.

Because VAs are generally not as specialized as freelancers, however, you'll need to make sure you're hiring for the skill as much as for the personality. So similar to the ways you'd find a freelancer, make sure you're using "marketing virtual assistant" or "podcasting virtual assistant" or "data entry virtual assistant" when you're making your search queries as opposed to just "virtual assistant." (More on hiring in just a moment!)

VAs charge anywhere between \$1 and \$150 per hour, but in my experience the average for U.S.- and Europe-based VAs is usually \$15–\$40 per hour for most administrative-level tasks, with higher rates for more difficult or involved work.

The Hybrid Model

The hybrid model is—drum roll, please—an agency of virtual assistants. I'm not talking about a marketplace like Upwork, Red Butler, or the like. I'm talking about an actual agency where there's accountability and backup support, similar to a web development agency, a public relations agency, or a marketing agency.

The goal is to get the skills and dedication of a virtual assistant but with the set systems, processes, and additional support of an agency. In many ways, it's the best of all worlds.

Don't Panic is the only hybrid I know of that operates exactly the way we do with personalized matchmaking service and a layer of quality control, but there are plenty of other virtual assistant agencies out there. Each one has its own unique selling proposition. The best way to find them is, as always, to talk to your friends or do a Google search. You should always look at reviews, news, scandals, and recommendations. Ask if you can do a test project with the agency before committing to a full contract.

It won't surprise you to learn that hiring a VA agency will cost you more than a one-to-one VA relationship (due to overhead

costs of varying degrees). But for many entrepreneurs, the tradeoffs are worth it: The agency does the work of vetting its assistants, training them, and handling administrative tasks like contracts and invoices. They provide backup assistance in the event of an emergency and oversee all deliverables and communications to ensure high-quality work. For these services, you can expect to pay between \$5 and \$30 per hour more for a hybrid agency.

Assuming you made your way to this little downloadable nugget because you want to work with a virtual assistant, we'll look at freelance VAs and VA agencies going forward.

Here's a quick and handy chart you can use to determine quickly which type of person works best for you.

	The Freelancer	The Agency	The Virtual Assistant	The Hybrid
Who	Solo-provider of specialized services	Team of consultants and implementers that can provide soup-to-nuts service solutions	Individual VA with a more general set of skills	Virtual assistant agency with multiple VAs and a variety of skills, plus management team
When	Often a waiting period for skilled freelancers, others are available now	Longer sales process, availability varies	Available now	Available now or with a short waiting period
Cost	\$\$-\$\$\$	\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$	\$-\$\$	\$\$-\$\$\$

step two

DO SOME DIGGING



You want an internet assistant? Search the internet. In short: Google it. Next section.

Just kidding, my friend! I know you came here for help, and I'm happy to oblige. There are a lot of corners of the web where you can find a professional VA.

Find a Company That Will Connect You

From true VA agencies to matchmaking dashboards, there are tons of companies in the business of connecting overworked entrepreneurs with focused assistants. Below are just a few known for their excellent support.

- **Upwork:** One of the most diversified freelance companies online. In addition to VAs, they also make it possible to connect with other, more specialized freelancers as well.
- **CloudPeeps:** A platform, marketplace, and community that enables freelancers to manage and grow their business (read: find that next client).

- **Belay Solutions:** Belay contracts virtual assistants, virtual bookkeepers, content writers, and webmasters.
- **Zirtual:** The company specializes in helping clients outsource both professional and personal life tasks.
- **Don't Panic Management:** I suspect you already know why I think my own company is awesome.

Scour Social Media

Social media channels offer a surprisingly large number of opportunities for connections between virtual assistants and clients. Post on Craigslist (just don't get murdered), check Twitter hashtags, use LinkedIn to search profiles or create a job posting, or check out Facebook.

While Facebook tends to be known for its more casual pursuits, there are a surprising number of groups dedicated to matching entrepreneurs and assistants. While most of the groups specialize in creating networks for VAs, there's no reason not to message the admins and see if they'll put a callout in the group for your position.

Post the Position on Remote Job Boards

In addition to traditional job boards like [Monster](#) or [Indeed](#), there are sites dedicated to remote positions like [Remote.co](#) and [FlexJobs](#).

Ask Your Friends

Feeling nervous about hiring a person you'll likely never meet in-person? It's possible someone in your circle is already working with an assistant they'd trust and would be happy to share. The next time you're at Happy Hour or mingling at an industry conference, ask around! Your virtual assistant could just be one word-of-mouth recommendation away.

step three

CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

Like any first date, sussing out your compatibility with your potential virtual assistant requires a combination of gut intuition, body language, and thoughtfully prepared questions. (What? I'm the only one who prepares questions for a first date?)

Let's start by talking about the ideal romantic partner virtual assistant so you know who you are interviewing for.

The Anatomy of an Awesome VA

Here's the reality: The hard skills it takes to be a great virtual assistant are always changing. (Or at least they are if you're a good VA who wants to keep up with the times!) Learning is easier than ever and great VAs take advantage of the wonderful world of knowledge we live in.

The soft skills, however? The soft skills and personality traits that make up an outstanding VA are consistent across disciplines because the way the role works is consistent. There are six of them.

To be clear: When I say personality traits, I'm not referring to habits. A good VA might be an

early riser, a night owl, or a literal zombie. It doesn't matter as long as it works for you. When I say personality traits, I'm talking about the core values that make up who they are inside. Not every person was meant to humbly serve across the web.

1. Humility

This is the number one trait in a virtual assistant because they're always going to be just that: an assistant. If a VA is looking for applause and their name in lights, they probably chose the wrong career.

To a great VA, building up a client's personal brand is just as fulfilling as building up their own brands. VAs find joy in seeing a client's following grow, or ghostwriting a blog post that gets featured in Forbes, or successfully booking a speaking gig that takes you across the globe.

If a VA is looking for applause and their name in lights, they chose the wrong career.

2. A Neighborly Attitude

You know the person in your neighborhood who brings brownies to every new family that moves in? Yeah, the best VAs are kind of like that.

Serving with an open heart means going the extra mile. It means crossing off tasks with a smile, offering words of kindness in an email exchange, and signing off with, “Have an awesome weekend!” on a Friday afternoon. And more importantly, it means offering you the help you need before you even knew you needed it. Asked your VA to book you a flight to Chicago but forgot you’ll need a hotel, too? They didn’t. And it’s already done.

3. Proactivity

My previous point of noticing a missing piece of an itinerary is a great example of initiative. It’s one thing to notice that something is wrong or missing, it’s another to offer to fix or add something to make it right.

Great virtual assistants don’t sit around and wait for you to assign things. They watch closely, spot holes, and start filling in the gaps right away. They never twiddle their thumbs because they’re always asking, “How can I help?”

4. Reliability

You’d think it goes without saying, but I can’t count the number of times an entrepreneur has come to me, frustrated and upset, because some random assistant has ghosted them and now they need Don’t Panic to dig them out of the hole they are in. (All the more reason to work so hard to hire the right VA.)

A virtual assistant isn’t a true virtual assistant if they don’t take pride in getting things done on time. They double check their deadlines and deliverables. They put each one on their calendar or into their project management tool to make sure nothing gets lost. They don’t need to be reminded when something is due. They self-edit their work, and they manage their time wisely.

Most people like to think of themselves as reliable, but there’s a difference between doing what you say you’re going to do eventually and doing what you say you’re going to do on time.

5. Open and Honest Communication

Part of growing a positive relationship with your assistant is feeling confident that they will tell you things. Whether it’s the fact that the price of a hotel went up overnight or that they’ll be working from a lake house with slower wifi speed, strong communication skills must be one of their proudest skill sets.

The most important thing about your particular VA is that they communicate with you the way you like to be communicated with, and they’re not afraid to share all the information that’s relevant to the task at hand.

6. Curiosity

After certain skills and experiences, this is the top request I get from prospective clients.

“I want someone who is going to be able to figure things out on their own. I don’t want to have to show them how to do something every time.”

Your assistant needs to know how to figure something out (whether it’s by asking a

colleague, doing a Google search, or going to a library) and take pride in implementing the knowledge they have gained.

They like to know how things work for the sake of their own intelligence, but perhaps more importantly in this situation, they like to understand all options so they can choose the best one for you.

Asking the Right Questions

So you've profiled the perfect VA, and you've got a list of potential resumes sitting on your desktop. Their materials (resume, cover letter, and any past testimonials) should guide you in deciding whether they have the hard skills to do what you need. But how do you match soft skills and values? The best thing you can do is arm yourself with the right questions for the interview. The right evaluation points will naturally eliminate anyone that isn't fit to be your assistant. Here are some of my favorites.

1. What's your story?

Despite having thoroughly checked their materials, hearing a VA's background firsthand is a great way to kick off an interview. Give them a little time to ramble and share. This will help them relax before you dive into more pressing questions. It's also cool to hear which chapters of their story they find most relevant, and you'll probably learn more than you bargained for. (In a good way!)

Don't be afraid to follow up. If they are just coming off a year working on a coffee farm in Hawaii and you want to know more about that, ask! It doesn't have to be directly related to VA work to give you insight into their communication skills, attitude towards

hard work, and more. Take simple notes, and consider how each anecdote matches with assistant values later.

“Worked on a coffee farm in exchange for free meals, room, and board.—Humility. Check.”

2. Have you ever worked remotely before?

It seems obvious, but most people think they can work from home (or a coffee shop, or the hotel lobby) even if they haven't before. And if they haven't, the amount of discipline it takes to do so can be shocking.

(If your candidate has never worked remotely, it's not necessarily a deal breaker. It just opens up the floor for follow-up questions, and it gives you something to think about later when considering all your potential assistants against one another.)

This is also a great time to ask about someone's typical schedule. If you're on the east coast, and you like to take all your meetings at 8 am, but this person is on the west coast and not available until after lunch, it's important to note!

3. Tell me about a time when you crushed it so hard at work that you decided to treat yo'self when you got home.

This question can provide some serious insight into what kinds of work this person feels the greatest sense of accomplishment from. If they respond with a time their manager was in a pinch, and they went the extra mile to save the day, you just found a keeper. If, on the other hand, they tell an elaborate story about that time they got a big part on an SVU episode (Potential Perp #2!), you might need to dig a little deeper to unpack why they want this role with you.

4. Tell me about a time when you made a mistake. What happened and how did you handle it?

Mistakes happen. You know this. I know this. They are rarely a big deal, but how we respond makes all the difference. Note how your candidate took the lead in remedying the situation. Did their manager catch the mistake, or did they? How long did it take them to come forward?

This can help you understand if they are an open and honest communicator, how reliable they are, and if they are proactive about finding solutions in the face of adversity.

5. Let's say we start working together today. One year from now, what do you think I'd have to say in a testimonial about you?

This question tests your candidate's appetite for forward-thinking reflection. It also sets the expectation that you do intend to measure the success of the relationship over time and that it's something they'll need to work on with you.

You want to see the wheels turning here. Taking a pause to think about this one is totally fine. This is the question that reveals what they really think about themselves and their work.

6. What do you do to keep learning?

Perhaps my favorite question of all time, this one teaches you about whether your candidate has a curious mind. It lets you know how (and if) they strive to grow professionally.

And, bonus! You might find out you have some common interests. If they listen to

podcasts daily, ask, "What non-professional podcast is your favorite?" When you realize you are both *obsessed* with S Town, you can take a few minutes to chat about the big Act Two twist. Finding a VA you have a little bit in common with outside of the inbox will help you two build a strong, long-lasting relationship down the line.

IMPORTANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ask your candidates these questions, and don't forget to take notes.

1. *What's your story?*

4. *Tell me about a time when you made a mistake. What happened and how did you handle it?*

2. *Have you ever worked remotely before?*

5. *Let's say we start working together today. One year from now, what do you think I'd have to say in a testimonial about you?*

3. *Tell me about a time when you crushed it so hard at work that you decided to treat yo'self when you got home.*

6. *What do you do to keep learning?*

step four

ADMINISTER THE TEST



Vibing with someone is awesome. Having definitive proof they've got your back is even better.

By creating a test project geared towards the work you intend to assign, you get an opportunity to sample the merchandise. Spritz the cologne at the counter. Get a mini sample of the new froyo flavor. If you're going to go out on a limb with someone, they need to show you what they're made of first.

The type of test project you choose to create should depend on the type of assistant you're looking for. Need a copywriter? Create a blog writing assignment. Need a more generalized admin? Create a fake (or heck, even a real) trip that you need lots of planes, trains, and automobiles booked for.

Regardless of what the actual test project is, make sure it meets the following requirements:

- Comes with specific outcomes
- Has a clear deadline
- Is able to be evaluated/measured

Test projects can be either paid or unpaid, but you need to be clear about it either way upfront. And for the record, at Don't Panic, we always pay for complete test projects. It shows good faith in your candidate and incentivizes them to really put their best foot forward. (Hopefully, they would either way, but the fact of the matter is most people don't get excited to do unpaid work.)

When you send an email asking your candidate to perform this test, make sure the email is specific and clear. You want to test this new assistant's ability to follow directions and complete a project one time. You do not want to test their mind-reading skills. Eventually, it's every assistant's goal to be able to read your mind and tell the future. But not today, pal, not today.

Let them know you're available for questions, too. You can learn so much about candidates in their follow-up emails. I once asked a potential candidate to find me potential flights to Florida for an upcoming speaking gig. I provided a ton of details about my preferences, but even so, she thought of something I didn't and followed up to ask if I prefer to fly in the mornings, afternoons, or evenings. I swooned on the spot!

SAMPLE TEST PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

Executive Assistance (\$50, 2.5 hours)

Research 5 potential speaking gigs and 10 potential podcast gigs for Jess. Compile your research in a Google sheet with all important data (contact info, application deadlines, etc). Then, create Asana tasks and calendar appointments to remind her about any submission deadlines.

- Measure against a current team member's work or a past test you really liked
- Tests calendar management, research, project management, admin work

Email Template:

We're ready to offer your first test project on VA work. The following test is meant to evaluate your research skills, project management skills, and calendar management skills. We'll be measuring you against timeliness of delivery, accuracy of the info included, your formatting preferences, and ability to follow instructions. I'm really excited about this for you, and I'm looking forward to seeing what you come up with!

Jess is working on a big push to bolster her personal brand (and, as a result, Don't Panic's). Because of this, we've been hunting for new ways to get her in front of new audiences for speaking gigs. Please research 5 potential speaking gigs and 10 potential podcast gigs for Jess. To guide you on your search, keep in mind she speaks on content marketing, content management, outsourcing work to VAs, entrepreneurship, and

what it's like to be a digital nomad and work with digital nomads.

Compile your research in a Google sheet with all important data for each event or show (contact info, application deadlines, notes on the event, etc), and when it's ready for review, please share it with me.

Finally, I'll be sharing access to our task management tool Asana. Please assign task reminders to Jess ("Application for X event is due today!") and calendar events (conference dates, etc) where you feel appropriate.

Content Marketing (\$75, 3 hours)

Assign a blog post. Write the blog, edit it thoroughly, load it into your website.

- Measure against the same post written by yourself or a current team member
- Tests copywriting, editing, content management

Email Template:

We're ready to offer your first test project on content marketing. The following test is meant to evaluate your copywriting skills, basic editing skills, and content management skills. We'll be measuring you against timeliness of delivery, accuracy of the info included, your formatting preferences, and ability to follow instructions. I'm really excited about this for you, and I'm looking forward to seeing what you come up with!

Please write the following blog post with the Don't Panic blog as the intended publisher/audience. (Full disclosure: Because this is a test project, it won't actually be published on the blog, but you will still be paid for your work.)

Category: Small Business

Topic/Title: How to Prepare Your Business to Hire a VA in X Steps

Notes: How can a business owner prepare on their end before hiring a VA to set the relationship up for success? Example steps: Make a to-do list, set a budget, etc.

Word Count: ~750

I'll be giving you temporary access to our website as a contributor. When your blog draft is completed, please upload it into the "Posts" section of the website, do your best to format it according to other posts we have published (hint: our subheads are <h3> headings), and add basic tags/SEO data. (If you've never done this before, that's okay! Just do your best.) When you are finished, please save your draft (you will not have the ability to publish), and email me for review.

step five

EVALUATE THE RESULTS



When you get a test project back in hand, it's important to be objective about what you're looking at. "Well, it's not very good . . . but we both love S Town!" will probably connect you with a VA who you love personally but who disappoints you professionally. It defeats the point of doing a test in the first place.

Before you even assign the work, put together a rubric you'll score it against. Here are some things to consider:

- Was the project turned in on time? Was it complete?
- Did they follow your directions down to the letter?
- Is the formatting how you like to receive work? Is it even better than you'd hoped?
- Did they go the extra mile to surprise or delight you?
- What, if any, edits or changes do you have? Are they minor or major? Consider if the changes are things you think could be tweaked and improved with a touch of constructive feedback.

At Don't Panic, our rubric utilizes a red, yellow, green system to attach an objective value to each consideration. If the project was on time or early, green! If you needed to ping them a reminder it was due, it is marked as yellow. And so on and so forth for each of the metrics we've decided are important to us.

Each color is associated with a number (red = 1, yellow = 2, green = 3). So, we are able to add up those numbers and give the person a score by the end of the process. We have a minimum score every virtual assistant must meet to work with our clients.

Remember, you might be inclined to give your candidates the benefit of the doubt here. But the rubric helps you remain as objective as possible. If someone can't follow your directions, there will be another person ready and waiting in the wings who can. (And they, too, might just love S Town.)

SCORE YOUR TEST PROJECT

Was the project turned in on time?

- ___ RED: No. [results in automatic removal from recruitment]
- ___ YELLOW: Submitted day-of, with a nudge from manager.
- ___ GREEN: Submitted on time or early.

Was it complete?

- ___ RED: No. [results in automatic removal from recruitment]
- ___ YELLOW: Required a small ping from manager (i.e., “Hey, I noticed you didn’t turn in X.” “OMG totally forgot to attach it to my email, so sorry! Here it is!”)
- ___ GREEN: Yes!

If a process doc was provided, did they follow all steps? If not, did they follow the general instructions provided?

- ___ RED: Missed several key steps that affected the overall quality of the final delivery.
- ___ YELLOW: Missed a few small or “preferred” steps, but the end result wasn’t affected.
- ___ GREEN: Yes!

Was the formatting of their final deliverable correct or thorough and usable?

- ___ RED: The formatting was messy or missing key elements (i.e., a Google sheet without a contact info column).
- ___ YELLOW: The deliverable wasn’t formatted how we’d usually do it, but it’s still clean and usable.
- ___ GREEN: The deliverable was formatted the way we would have done it ourselves.

Was the information inside the deliverable accurate?

- ___ RED: No. Important pieces of information were either missing or incorrect.
- ___ YELLOW: For the most part, yes, but a few “expert level” pieces of knowledge were missing.
- ___ GREEN: All information was complete and accurate to the best of our knowledge.

Did the project require major edits for tone, grammar, or punctuation?

- ___ RED: Assignment needed a complete language overhaul or major edits.
- ___ YELLOW: There were a few noticeable typos or structure issues, but the meat was fine.
- ___ GREEN: The project required minor edits or no changes at all.

How did it measure against the sample assignment?

- ___ RED: Totally missed the mark.
- ___ YELLOW: Not quite as strong, but still a useful deliverable.
- ___ GREEN: As good or better than the sample assignment.

Finally, if this assignment were being delivered to a real client, could it be submitted as-is or with minimal editing?

- ___ RED: Not a chance in hell.
- ___ YELLOW: If it were run through our client manager's editing process, it would be good to go.
- ___ GREEN: You bet! Client manager would feel comfortable delivering work product without further review.

___ AVERAGE SCORE

Reds are worth 1 point, Yellows are worth 2, Greens are worth 3. Add it up and collect the average (divide by 8).

Tester must average a 2.5 or higher to be considered eligible to move forward.

step six

MAKE AN OFFER



So you've met your match. Boom! Done! You can go home! Just kidding. Again.

Now, it's time to put an offer on the table. Most virtual assistants work on a contract basis. This means, you aren't really their boss. You are their client, and they are their own boss. With that in mind, they'll probably have specific rates or rules they're looking for, as well. Be prepared to politely and thoughtfully negotiate an agreement that works for both of you.

First and foremost, figure out what you can afford to fairly pay your assistant. VAs cost anywhere from \$3 per hour to \$300 per hour. I'm serious. It all depends on their experience, where they live, and what their skills are. Consider your budget, the work you expect to be performed, and what's fair (and legal).

Be specific about what you're offering and how you'll pay them (hourly, by project, or whatever the case may be).

The contract you put together—yes, you need a written contract to protect you both—needs to factor in a lot more than pay, of course.

You'll need to discuss and write down:

- Services, duties, and responsibilities of the assistant
- Payment terms and compensation
- Nature of relationship (probably a contractor, but you might want to consider a part-time employee relationship, depending on your needs)
- Confidential information
- Terms and termination
- Miscellaneous information, like vacations or time off

Finally, before you both sign on the dotted line, run your contract by your lawyer to make sure everything is on the up and up. A lawyer who specializes in contracts can help spot holes and let you know if you're asking anything inappropriate of your assistant.

It goes without saying, but I'm not a lawyer. This isn't legal advice. Cover your bases, friend. Talk to an expert!

step seven

WATER THE SEEDS AND REAP WHAT YOU SOW



You've found your virtual assistant soulmate. Now, all you have to do is dig in and support each other. On and on, forever and ever, amen.

While this is the last step in the hiring process, it's actually the most important one because it never ends. Ongoing success means ongoing communication, feedback, and support from both sides. When it comes to working with a virtual assistant, you'll get out of the relationship what you put into it.

As you go, be prepared to put in time to help your assistant understand the nuances of your needs, the tools and apps you use daily, and the secret sauce behind your business's success. Help them help you. I've seen too many folks do all the work to set their assistant up for success only to leave them alone in the lurch when things really start to get going.

Here are a few processes you can put in place to ensure you get started off on the right foot.

Share Your Preferences

Before you do anything else, set up a kickoff call with your assistant and go over all the ins

and outs of your preferences. Do you prefer to email, text, or talk on the phone? When you give a deadline, do you expect it to be met at the beginning of the day, midday, or the end of the day? Do you want your assistant to be available off and on during business hours, or is it totally cool that they get their best work done at 3 am? Not only should you share these things over the phone, follow up by putting them in a shared document your assistant can reference whenever they want or need to.

Revisit your preferences occasionally. Our lives constantly evolve, so our needs might, too. Maybe you used to love calls, but now you have half a dozen meetings a day, so texting is better. Perhaps you always slept in and started work late, but you just got a puppy who needs to pee at 7 in the morning (oof!), so suddenly you're available to answer questions bright and early. As your life changes, or your VA's life changes, you two will need to reconnect about the best ways to work together.

Host a Weekly Meeting

Managing a relationship online can be tricky. You can't peek over your VA's shoulder to say, "Oh, I see you're on Facebook even though you have a blog post due in 30 minutes. What's that about?" Instead, you'll have to set aside dedicated time to check in with each other.

Have a weekly phone call or video conference to discuss the status of projects, go over questions about work that is looming in the air, and offer new assignments. You can share new business goals or objectives and celebrate your VA's wins or milestones. This is also a great time to catch up and chat a little bit about your personal lives so you aren't strangers forever.

Use a Tool

Project management tools are the bomb. It doesn't matter what one you use. Pick one (or ask your VA to), and funnel all your workflows through there. A centralized place for communication eliminates some of the balls you'll both be juggling in the air, and when you're curious about the status of something, you can check for yourself rather than hounding your assistant all the time.

Emergency Procedures

If you drop dead tomorrow (RIP), what should your assistant do? If your VA goes into preterm labor, how will you handle it? Make sure you're both on the same page about business continuity in the event of an emergency.

NOTE YOUR WORKSTYLE PREFERENCES FOR YOUR VA

Use these sample questions to communicate your preferences to your VA.

- What would you like your VA to call you?
- Will your VA be in contact with anyone else from your team? If so, include their email addresses and/or phone numbers.
- What's your physical mailing address?
- When is your birthday?
- What's your preferred mode of communication for day-to-day business?
- How should we get a hold of you in an urgent situation?
- What project management tools do you use?
- What sort of schedule do you normally keep for work?
- When do you expect your assistant to be available?
- How do you prefer your VA helps you keep things moving?
- When do you usually find yourself working?
- How do you like to get things done?
- Do you find it easy to delegate tasks?
- If you've worked with an assistant before, what pitfalls have you run into?
- How urgent are the tasks you'll assign?
- How would you like your VA to communicate that they've received a task?
- What software/app skills will they need?
- What service are you kicking off with?
- If your VA will have an email address on your domain, is there a signature format that you'd like them to adopt?
- Do you have any pet peeves that you'd like them to avoid?
- Do you have any scheduling preferences?
- What types of meetings do you prefer?
- Do you prefer to include alerts on your calendar events?
- Air Travel Information
- Hotel Information
- Any other transportation or travel details that you routinely book?
- What is your publishing schedule?
- For podcasters, what is your expected show length?
- How often do you schedule recordings?
- Do you have a production calendar?

- What platform is your blog hosted on?
- Do you use an editorial calendar?
- Do you have any writing guidelines or brand guidelines?
- Do you have any writing guidelines or brand guidelines that you can share with us?
- How frequently will you provide new topics?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- Anything else you'd like to share?

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON!

Truthfully, the best thing you can do for your virtual assistant is follow the golden rule: treat them the way you would want to be treated. Remember their birthday, offer up a virtual high five when they do something particularly awesome, and generally just be kind.

Hiring the right person is only one, small piece of the puzzle. Nurturing your relationship with them, setting them up so they can copilot your plane business, and building a foundation that is meant to last will be the thing that saves your sanity.

Are you ready to put this workbook in action? Our team can help you get your VA relationship off the ground. Contact the Don't Panic team at hello@dontpanicmgmt.com today for a free 30-minute discovery call to get started.