Virtual Assistants – Cheat Sheet

Introduction

- ✓ Virtual assistants work remotely and can take on a wide a variety of tasks
- ✓ Hiring one can take you from stressed out to focused on growing
 your business
- ✓ It's the hire that makes the biggest difference to solo businesses
- ✓ Pay close attention to the process you choose for hiring and onboarding
- ✓ You'll be working closely with this person and delegating tasks you've always done yourself
- ✓ Get prepared, build solid systems, and create in-depth training

Learning Objectives:

- ✓ Get into an open and receptive mindset for a virtual assistant
- ✓ Identify the tasks you can delegate to a virtual assistant and plan ahead for hiring
- ✓ Define the experience, qualifications, and personal attributes you need in a VA
- ✓ Plan how you will shortlist and assess potential candidates
- ✓ Research sources of VAs and advertise for your ideal candidates
- ✓ Interview and select your virtual assistant
- ✓ Set up the systems and standards you want your VA to follow
- ✓ Design the onboarding and training activities for your virtual assistant
- ✓ Plan how you will delegate to your virtual assistant
- ✓ Manage your VA effectively to ensure tasks get done how and when
 you want them
- ✓ Motivate your virtual assistant and develop their skills so your business will benefit long term
- ✓ Consolidate and implement your learning and plan future action steps so you can achieve the goals you set for this course

Expectations

Before we start the course, take a minute to think about what you want to get out of it.

In the Action Guide, write down three skills you expect to gain.

Module 1 – Get Ready for Your Virtual Assistant

Key Takeaways:

- Hiring a VA is a turning-point investment in your business growth
- Your mindset needs to be open and accepting if your VA's work is to be successful

Learning Objective:

✓ Get into an open and receptive mind set ready for a virtual assistant

Why Use a Virtual Assistant?

- ✓ Free up your time for business growth activities
- ✓ Save you time so you can boost your business to another level
- ✓ Fill in skill gaps Access global talent and the complete range of skill sets you might need

Are You Ready for a VA?

- ✓ Overwhelmed and doing it all yourself?
- ✓ Struggling to get everything done?
- ✓ There are many reasons entrepreneurs consider hiring VAs
- ✓ But many don't do it because of:
 - Fear of loss of control It's my business
 - Concern about finding the right person No one will do it like
 I do
 - Financial investment I can't afford to pay someone to do something I do myself for free
 - o Time taken to train It's quicker to do it myself
 - Horror stories from others or bad past experiences I can't go through that again!
- ✓ None of these justifies giving up on the VA idea if you want to have a successful business

- ✓ You are giving up some control to gain growth
- √ Have checks and performance measures in place as safeguards
- ✓ But don't sabotage yourself by a reluctance to release control
- ✓ Get your mindset in the right place open and accepting
- ✓ Reframe your mindset with questions on the outcome you want e.g. delegate tasks to someone to free you up to grow your business:
 - o What am I trying to achieve?
 - o What outcome do I want?
 - o What resources might I need to get there?
 - o Is this decision to hire a VA getting me closer to my outcome?
 - o If it isn't, then what's a better decision I could make? Why is this better?
 - How will I know when I have achieved my desired outcome?
 What will I see, hear, feel, or experience?

Cost of VAs

- ✓ Depends on who, where, and what they do
- ✓ Average US rates are \$35 to \$70+ per hour, UK rates £20 to £40+ per hour
- ✓ You can spend less if you go to countries where the cost of living is lower than the US/Europe
- ✓ No health benefits, paid vacation, etc. to pay, no office space to provide
- ✓ Focus on how much they will save you of your own time plus the amount of new business you can gain
- ✓ Calculate your hourly rate using the calculation provided

- 1. Quick Win: Brainstorm everything that stops you getting a VA
- 2. Reframe your mindset by answering the questions in the module
- 3. Calculate your hourly rate and compare that to VA hourly rates

Module 2 – Identify Your VA's Tasks

Key Takeaways:

- ➤ Identify the key tasks someone else can do that will allow you to move your business forward.
- > Don't wait until you have an urgent job to get done before looking for a VA. Plan and take time to hire the right person.

Learning Objective:

✓ Identify the tasks you can delegate to a virtual assistant and plan ahead for hiring

What Can a VA Do?

- ✓ More or less anything you can think of
- ✓ Admin tasks, tech set up, graphic design, blog writing, making appointments
- ✓ One person can't do it all
- ✓ You need to be specific about what you want

Identify Tasks for Your Business

- ✓ Most small business owners will look for a VA to do admin tasks
- ✓ Your business may have specific requirements
- ✓ Get clear on the tasks you need to outsource
- ✓ Then it's easier to find the right person at the advertising and selection stage
- ✓ Make a list
 - Things you hate doing every day
 - Things you can't do yourself
 - Things you shouldn't be doing at this stage of your business
- ✓ Review where you are in your business and eliminate any tasks you are still completing that no longer have a benefit
- ✓ Review the list and group tasks as appropriate

- ✓ This may point to a need to recruit from different skill pools
- ✓ Take the admin tasks and estimate how long those will take
 - Track how long the task takes you
 - o Add on some time for a new person to do this initially
 - o This will help you decide how many hours you need someone for

Plan for Your VA

- ✓ Don't wait for a crisis when you need something done in 24 hours
- ✓ This isn't realistic and it won't work
- ✓ It can take 3 months to advertise, select, onboard, and train the right person
- ✓ Think about hires when you're doing your annual business planning:
 - o What growth do I want to achieve in the next 12 months?
 - o Can I achieve that growth on my own?
 - What types of skills and tasks do I need to outsource to get there?
- ✓ Plan ahead for business growth
 - You might be fine for now but if you suddenly get an influx of clients or increase in sales, you may struggle
 - You might only need certain skills now, but there are other skills you want someone to have for the future

- 1. **Quick Win**: List the tasks you want to outsource, then group them according to category e.g. admin, tech etc.
- 2. Go through your list of admin tasks and work out how long each task would take a new person. Log this in your Action Guide
- 3. Plan out the hiring timeframe, taking into account future business growth

Module 3 – Find the Right VA Match for You

Key Takeaways:

- ➤ Be very specific in your job specification to help *you* select and help candidates mesure themselves against your ad
- > Ensure your requirements are realistic and relevant to your needs

Learning Objective:

✓ Define the experience, qualifications, and personal attributes you need in a VA for you and your business

What Type of Person Are You Looking For?

- ✓ Identify the experience, qualifications, and qualities you want from your VA
- ✓ Experience
 - Do you need a defined level of experience in a task or with a type of business?
 - Be specific "five years general office experience" doesn't mean much
- ✓ Qualifications
 - Do you need a qualification in a skill, for example a Microsoft Certification?
 - Don't ask for things you don't need
 - o Relevant experience can be much more useful to you

✓ Qualities

- What are the personal qualities needed that will help the VA be successful?
- Things like: reliable, accurate, responsive, detail-oriented, calm, positive, results-oriented
- Most small businesses want these attributes and they are difficult to assess
- ✓ You could have a list of 'must haves' and 'nice to haves' which will.

Set Your Parameters

- ✓ Do you have additional considerations on top of the skills, experience, and qualities?
 - Hours per week/month Refer back to the last module.
 How long do you want someone for? Is it a full or part-time opportunity? Is this a one-off project or ongoing support?
 - o Budget What can your business afford?
 - o Location Does it matter where they live?
 - Language If you want a certain language level, look for a 'native' or 'fluent' speaker
 - Time Zone Do you prefer that they are roughly in the same time zone as you to make communication easier? Do you want someone working when you're asleep so you can serve a global market?

Write a Job Specification

- ✓ Often called a job spec
- ✓ It's an internal document to use as a basis for writing an ad or discussing the opportunity
- ✓ This lists the skills, personal attributes, and other considerations
- ✓ Add in your parameters geographical location, hourly rate, and so on
- ✓ There is space for company information and values.
- ✓ It's for your use primarily, but you might want to share it with potential candidates

- 1. Quick Win: Decide on your essential parameters for a VA
- 2. List the specific experience, qualifications, and qualities you need
- 3. Write a job spec using the template provided but leave the company information blank for now

Module 4 – Use Your Job Spec To Shortlist

Key Takeaways:

- > It's not realistic to interview everyone who applies if you have lots of applications
- You need to plan a process of assessment before placing an ad to make sure you get the best fit for you and your business

Learning Objective:

✓ Plan how you will shortlist and assess potential candidates

Assessing Candidates' Suitability

- ✓ Decide how you'll make your assessments from the beginning of the process
- ✓ Make sure your shortlisted candidates have the skills, experience, and qualities they say they have
- ✓ You also want to know how they'll do the job
- ✓ How can you get a clearer picture?
 - Ask to see samples of relevant work with their application
 - Devise a short skills test (e.g. if the job involves writing, ask them to write something)
 - Put a simple 'test' in the application. Ask them to reply with the word 'banana' in the title
 - o Ask them to undertake a paid trial project
- ✓ Testing isn't trying to catch people out
- ✓ It's to help you decide who's the best match

Shortlisting

- ✓ The chances are you'll end up with more than one candidate for your job
- ✓ If you advertise on a freelancer site, you might have hundreds of applications

- ✓ A shortlist will save you time later
- ✓ Your job spec is the tool that will help you shortlist
- ✓ Measure each candidate against your job spec
- ✓ If they are lacking in an essential skill, don't take them further
- ✓ If they are a great fit for your needs, they'll make the shortlist You decide how many to shortlist (two to five or six is normal)
- ✓ End up with a shortlist of people you want to know more about by testing or interview

Build Excitement About Your Business

- ✓ You want someone who is interested in you and your business
- ✓ This is especially important for solopreneurs who want to rely more and more on their VA
- ✓ Attract the right person and sell your business as a great place to work
- ✓ Get them excited about the opportunity of working with you
- ✓ Point out your uniqueness. You might be in competition with lots of other entrepreneurs looking for a VA
- ✓ How are you going to explain about your company and its values?
- ✓ Complete your job spec with the additional company information

- 1. **Quick Win**: Make a rough assessment of the maximum number you have time to a) shortlist and b) interview
- 2. Decide which test(s) you want to use as part of your assessment process and how they will help you shortlist
- 3. Describe your company and its values and enter this information into your job spec template in the Action Guide

Module 5 - Find Your VA in the Right Places

Key Takeaways:

- To find the best fit for you, you may need to research different sources of VAs
- There are pros and cons of each source, so you need to decide what's best for your situation
- > Always use your job spec as the basis for drafting your ad

Learning Objective:

✓ Research sources of VAs and advertise for your ideal candidates

Finding the Right Person

- ✓ There are many sources of virtual assistants
- ✓ More and more people are working remotely, giving you more choice
- ✓ You want someone with whom you can build a relationship
 - Recommendations Ask other business owners and contacts who they use
 - Individuals Look at <u>LinkedIn</u> profiles or research online for websites of VAs
 - Agencies Some specialize, some are general
 - Freelance/Remote Worker Sites There are a variety of job hiring platforms to find VAs

Pros and Cons of Different Sources

- ✓ Recommendations
 - Recommendations are almost always best
 - But don't assume they will automatically be right for your business
 - Use the same selection method for recommendations as you would do for any other source

✓ Individuals:

- o Business owners themselves so understand the small business
- Can be highly committed
- o Often very flexible
- May work in association with others to cover if someone is sick
- May find others with different skills

✓ Agencies:

- o Offer you a range of skill sets and replacements
- Make the choice for you to save you time, but their selection may not be thorough
- Expect you to commit to a minimum weekly/monthly number of hours
- May charge more than other options
- Check your contract to see how long you're committed and if this suits you

✓ Freelance/remote working sites:

- Wide choice of candidates globally at all prices
- You do the advertising and selecting against your job specification
- You set the price
- Use your tests to get your shortlist

Advertising

- ✓ Choose one primary source of VAs which seems best for your business
- ✓ You can try other sources at the same time if you can handle the
 applications
- ✓ Or use other sources later if this one doesn't bring in the right candidates
- ✓ The ad differs from the job spec as it addresses the candidates directly
- ✓ Draft your ad using your job spec as your base document
- ✓ Your ad will vary depending on the source you use
- ✓ Even if you use an agency, write your ad first and share with them

- 1. **Quick Win**: Ask around to see if anyone you know can recommend a VA
- 2. Research sources of VAs and list the pros and cons for your business
- 3. Choose the source(s) you want to use. Use the ad example in the module to guide you as you write yours. When you are happy with the wording, place your ad with your chosen source(s) according to the procedures

Module 6 – Choose Your First VA

Key Takeaways:

- Plan your interview carefully and make sure you ask all the questions you need to
- > Ask open questions in interviews to get the most useful responses
- > Use trial periods so you can be sure they're right for you

Learning Objective:

✓ Interview and hire your virtual assistant

Work Your Shortlist

- ✓ Use your planned process to assess your shortlisted candidates
- ✓ Give any tests or trial projects to shortlist further
- ✓ Decide how many it's realistic to interview
- ✓ Speak to all the candidates to check out that they have the skills, experience, and qualities you're looking for

Interviewing

- ✓ Types of interview questions: open, closed, hypothetical
- ✓ Don't include questions that aren't relevant to the job
- ✓ Design two kinds of questions: general and specific
 - o General: "Tell me about your experience of remote working"
 - Specific: Relate to your own business peculiarities
- ✓ Set up interview sessions and confirm details
- ✓ The interview should be 30 minutes to an hour.
- ✓ Use <u>Skype</u> or <u>Zoom</u> for interviews. This checks they have basic tech knowledge and tools
- ✓ The interview isn't an interrogation. Give them time to ask
 questions and discuss points with you too
- ✓ Red flags in interviews:

- They don't show an interest in your business
- They can't give you concrete experiences of remote working
- They aren't prepared to be flexible on working hours (if relevant)

Choose the Right Person

- ✓ Pick the candidate who is the best fit to become your VA
- ✓ Take them on for a trial period of 1-3 months
- ✓ Let down other candidates politely
- ✓ Sign a contract. If you employ someone directly then:
 - Make sure you're following any relevant employment laws in your country
 - Set out the parameters you have agreed
 - o Decide if you need them to sign a non-disclosure agreement
- ✓ If you use a company or agency, make sure the contract reflects what's been agreed on
- ✓ If there is no outstanding candidate, then look again at your criteria, your ad, and where you're searching. Tweak and try again.

- Quick Win: Check what you need to include in your contract for your country
- 2. Put in place any test or trial period and assess the results
- 3. Write your interview questions and set up interviews

Module 7 – Set up Stellar Systems and Standards

Key Takeaways:

- Businesses run more smoothly when they use systems and have standards to work to
- The right tools will help you and your VA communicate and keep on track with tasks

Learning Objective:

✓ Set up the systems and standards you want your VA to follow

Systems & Standards

- ✓ Put systems in place to help you and your VA get results smoothly
- ✓ Detail work standards to explain your working practices clearly to your VA
- ✓ A work standard is a written description of how a process should be done
- ✓ It helps produce consistency
- ✓ It documents best practices and provides a baseline from which better methods can be developed
- ✓ Standards help you get what you want and help your VA to see
 what they're aiming for
- ✓ Share examples of past work
- ✓ Design step-by-step processes for the key tasks you want your VA to handle
 - Examine how you do things now and lay it out in a checklist or flow chart

Productivity Tools

- √ VAs need access to any tools you use
- ✓ Don't share everything with them if you feel uncomfortable

- ✓ Find tools that will work for your business to help work flow
- ✓ Rethink your use of tools you already use
- ✓ Introduce new ones
- ✓ <u>Asana</u>, <u>Basecamp</u>, and <u>Trello</u> are good for task management
- ✓ <u>Dropbox</u> and <u>Google Drive</u> for sharing documents and files
- ✓ <u>LastPass</u> for handing over your passwords securely
- ✓ Todoist for 'to do' lists

Set Realistic Expectations

- ✓ Be clear what you expect and when
- ✓ Agree on deadlines
- ✓ Take into account that your VA may have other clients
- ✓ Accept they may be slower than you to start with on certain tasks
- ✓ Be available for support

- 1. **Quick Win**: Re-evaluate your current productivity tools. Will they work when you're collaborating with someone else? What else do you need to introduce?
- 2. Design the step-by-step processes for the key tasks to hand over to your VA
- 3. Review these processes before you share them with your VA by answering these questions:
 - a. Can my VA achieve this with their current level of skill?
 - b. Can they achieve what I want in the hours I've employed them for?
 - c. What extra support will they need initially to complete tasks to the standard I've set?

Module 8 - Onboard Your VA for a Smooth Start

Key Takeaways:

- > A VA is an employee like any other and needs to be welcomed and made to feel included, even if you never meet them in person
- > Your VA will need training, so plan for that before they start

Learning Objective:

✓ Design the onboarding and training activities for your new virtual assistant

Importance of Onboarding Your VA

- ✓ Your VA will be key to your business success
- ✓ Make sure you take onboarding as seriously as you would with a physical hire
- ✓ Establish a strong connection from the start
- ✓ Remember they are a person too

Sharing Your Business Vision and Values

- ✓ Your work with your VA will be most successful if they buy in to your vision
- ✓ Find ways to explain what you and your business are about
- ✓ Share the business's values with your VA
- ✓ Build the training program on a framework of your values

Design a Training Plan

- ✓ Training is a vital part of development process
- ✓ It's unlikely they'll know your processes and systems without some training
- ✓ Training remote workers isn't as easy as sitting next to them and

showing them

- ✓ You need to be more methodical.
- ✓ Use screen capture tools to make demo videos of processes e.g. <u>Snagit</u>, <u>Jing</u>, and <u>Screenflow</u> (Mac only)
- ✓ Use screen sharing to demonstrate 'live'
- ✓ Complete a training plan as part of their onboarding experience
- ✓ Assign dates to your training activities
- ✓ Set aside regular training time

Practical Onboarding Tips

- ✓ Ensure they have access to everything they need
- ✓ Introduce them to any other members of the team
- ✓ Organize a group <u>Skype</u> / <u>Zoom</u> call for everyone
- ✓ Make sure they have the contact details of those they need.
- ✓ Check to see that they are okay and don't need anything else

- 1. **Quick Win**: Decide how you will share your company information and values
- 2. List your VA's training needs and develop a training plan using the template in your Action Guide
- 3. Develop an onboarding plan for your VA

Module 9 – Delegate for Success

Key Takeaways:

- > Having a VA means letting go and delegating tasks to them
- Follow a system to delegate to them so they can achieve the results you need

Learning Objective:

✓ Plan how you will delegate to your virtual assistant

Delegate Effectively

- ✓ Learning how to delegate is one of the most important skills to scale a business
- ✓ It can be challenging if you've always done everything yourself
- ✓ Use a delegation process to get the results you want
- ✓ Prioritize what needs to be delegated and when
- ✓ Delegate effectively to free up capacity for you to work on other aspects of your business
- ✓ Successful delegation also motivates the other person
- ✓ Ensure the necessary resources are available to do the task
- ✓ Explain clearly what you want
- ✓ Know the strengths and limitations of your VA so you don't make unrealistic requests

Delegation Best Practices

- ✓ Here's a step-by-step delegation process to follow with your VA:
 - 1. Give an overview of the task
 - 2. Describe how it fits in or adds value to other tasks/projects/initiatives
 - 3. Explain expected outcomes
 - 4. Clarify guidelines for success
 - 5. Provide any step-by-step instructions
 - 6. Agree how/when to communicate while doing the task

Do's and Don'ts of Delegating

- ✓ DO ask delegates if they feel thoroughly prepared for the task
- ✓ DO move from hands-on to hands-off as soon as possible
- ✓ DO intervene when absolutely necessary, but only at that time
- ✓ DO indicate that you are available for support but let them get on with the task
- ✓ DO give them feedback on their work
- ✓ DON'T short-cut briefings take your time to explain clearly
- ✓ DON'T surreptitiously take back a task
- ✓ DON'T deny them the chance to learn by interfering too much
- ✓ DON'T micromanage
- ✓ DON'T say or hint that you doubt their ability

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

- ✓ Poor delegation produces negative experiences with VAs. For example:
 - Work not completed on time when no time scale was agreed with the VA
 - Work not completed to an acceptable standard when the standard wasn't explained to the VA before they started working
 - VA needing to check constantly about a process when the process wasn't explained at the outset
- ✓ Follow the delegation process and the do's and don'ts to improve your chance of success
- ✓ Get familiar with delegating effectively
- ✓ Invest time now when your VA is new to save you time later

- 1. **Quick Win**: Write down your experience of delegating to date, both being delegated to and doing the delegating. What worked? What didn't?
- 2. Go back to the list of tasks you compiled in Module 2. Prioritize these in the light of current business needs and the strengths of your VA
- 3. Plan how you will delegate your top priority task using the step-bystep process in the module

Module 10 – Manage Your VA for Maximum Results

Key Takeaways:

- Managing remote workers requires care and preparation
- Put in place a performance management system

Learning Objective:

✓ Manage your VA effectively to ensure tasks get done how and when you want them

Managing Remotely

- √ There are particular challenges to managing remote employees
- ✓ You don't meet the person every day
- ✓ You don't get to chat around the water cooler
- ✓ You need to know what they are doing but you can't see them
- ✓ You have to trust them
- ✓ But also establish a process of work review
- ✓ The systems you established in an earlier module will help you both stay on track
- ✓ Use other tools, e.g. time tracking software, to monitor performance

Managing Performance

- ✓ You need to get the work done effectively
- ✓ Measure their performance against your expectations to ensure they
 are working as you want
- ✓ If you don't, you'll end up frustrated and disappointed
- ✓ Your clear standards and processes will help you spot when there's
 a problem
- ✓ Use a simple four-stage model:

- o Plan
- Act
- Monitor
- Review
- ✓ Share your model with your VA so they know what to expect
- ✓ Use coaching skills to help with difficulties

Communication is Key

- ✓ Communication is important for all entrepreneurs
- ✓ When you work globally, it's even more so
- ✓ Decide how often and how to keep in touch with your VA
- ✓ Choose what works for your business, your schedule, and your VA
- ✓ Establish a communication plan
 - o E.g. daily email updates, weekly meetings on Skype / Zoom
 - o Use tools like Asana, Basecamp, Todoist
- ✓ Put a communication plan in place and review it

- 1. **Quick Win**: Brainstorm the particular challenges you think you will experience when managing remotely and identify how you will overcome these
- 2. Plan out the four stages of the performance management system and what you will do at each stage
- 3. Set up your communication plan

Module 11 – Develop Your VA for Future Growth

Key Takeaways:

- > You want to keep your VA with you for as long as possible
- Find methods to motivate and develop them to encourage them to stay longer

Learning Objective:

✓ Motivate your virtual assistant and develop their skills, so that your business will benefit over the long term

Motivation

- ✓ You want your VA to do their best work for you, so you need to keep them motivated
- ✓ They expect to be paid the rate for the job
- ✓ But money isn't always the prime motivator
- ✓ Being respected, feeling they're doing a job well, and receiving praise are often just as important
- ✓ What motivates you may not be the same as what motivates your
 VA
- ✓ Find out what motivates your VA by asking them and seeing for yourself over time
- ✓ Consider reward systems for a job well done. For example:
 - Bonuses
 - Gifts
 - Pay raise
 - Team offsite or working 'vacation'
 - Professional development opportunities (e.g. a conference or training course)

How to Develop Your VA

- ✓ You want to keep your VA for as long as possible.
- ✓ They should be helping you build your business
- ✓ Leverage their strengths
- ✓ Identify their potential
- ✓ Find out what more they would like to take on
- ✓ Build on what was in their original job spec when they're ready
- ✓ Provide training for what they're interested in
- ✓ Delegate more over time
- ✓ Become less hands on to give you time to do other things
 - o What will you do with the time you gain?
 - o How will this advance your business?

- 1. **Quick Win**: Plan the rewards you could give in your business for a job well done
- 2. Identify the development opportunities for your VA's future
- 3. Plan to use the time you free up to advance your business. Answer these questions: What will you do with the time you gain? How will this specifically advance your business?

Module 12 - Review and Refine

Key Takeaway:

- Assess the value of your VA to make sure they are achieving what you want of them
- Use what you've learned to expand your team when the time is right for your business

Learning Objective:

✓ Consolidate and implement your learning and plan future action steps so you can achieve the goals you set for this course and develop further

Next Steps

- ✓ Review your VA's input and make adjustments as necessary
- ✓ Think about what else you need to outsource
- ✓ Make a list of additional tasks that need to be covered
- ✓ Build your remote team by following the steps in this course

What You Learned

- ✓ What have you learned about hiring and delegating to remote workers?
- ✓ What difficulties have you encountered?
- ✓ How do you plan to address these?
- ✓ What further steps can you take to become comfortable with the process?

- 1. Decide what else you need help with and how you could go about building a team
- 2. Answer the course review questions and use the action plan in the Action Guide to record your goals and what needs to happen next