

SUMMARY

VIRTUAL

FREEDOM

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Summary of “Virtual Freedom” by Chris C. Ducker

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Introduction

If you're starting your own business, then you already know that you've taken on a very demanding job. Because for every new start-up, there are a million decisions, all of which are vitally important and all of which have to be made by you. And no matter how passionate you are about your business, it's tough to find enough hours in the day to manage your staff, brainstorm your business strategies, market your products, and meet with investors. But what if you could delegate? Luckily, thanks to the advances of modern technology, you can! And it doesn't matter if you're not thrilled about the candidate pool in your area, the good news is that Virtual Assistants make it possible for you to find help even in another city or state!

However, as in the case of any other hiring decision, Virtual Assistants aren't without their risks because the right one can make or break you. That's why this summary will show you how to recruit, train, and manage a team of Virtual Assistants that will make your life easier and take work off your plate. And in addition to that, you'll also learn:

- How to effectively train someone on a different time zone
- Why your goal is to hire an assistant for the role, not the task, and:
- Why there's one job you just can't outsource

Give Yourself the Freedom to Concentrate on What Really Matters

Starting your own business often requires you to be a jack of all trades, doing the jobs of an entire staff on your own. And because each task requires time and energy, it's no surprise that, after a long day of writing checks, reviewing budgets, drafting contracts for your suppliers, and attending meetings, the owners of new startups are often too drained to spend their time doing the things that inspired them in the first place, like developing innovative new products or marketing strategies!

In fact, the author's firsthand experience proves that this daily grind is a one-way street to burnout; after a year of keeping up with this schedule, he realized that he was completely drained of any energy or motivation. And that's when he realized that it was time to make a change by outsourcing some of his work to Virtual Assistants (who we'll sometimes refer to as VAs). So, let's take a look at a brief summary of who Virtual Assistants are and what they do. The simplest definition is that VAs are members of your staff who work for you but are not in the same location as you. Working remotely, they can take on an impressive range of tasks from your business' accounting duties to office management to connecting with your staff, freeing you up to concentrate on the tasks that matter most to you. And in so doing, you can access what's known as "virtual freedom."

But if you're not already sold, then you might be interested to know that, in addition to all these benefits, there are two primary reasons why VAs are a great investment for your business. For starters, the internet allows you and your assistant to communicate quickly and easily across the miles so that it's almost like they're physically present in your office. And secondly, there's an enormous pool of available talent. Although the prospects in your area might be limited, your hiring pool gets a little bigger when you expand it to cover the entire United States. In fact, more than 42 million Americans currently work as self-employed freelancers and all of them are available for full-time, part-time, or even project-based work! So, whether you're

struggling with your new business or simply looking to hire someone new, a Virtual Assistant might be your best bet.

One VA Cannot Take on Your Entire Office's Responsibilities

But now that we've taken a moment to consider how amazing a VA can be, it's also important to remember that-- just like you-- one poor Virtual Assistant cannot handle all the work you need to outsource. If you feel overwhelmed by doing all those tasks on your own, even the best VA will too. So, even though a Virtual Assistant might be the answer to all your problems, they're not superheroes-- and you might need more than one of them. That's why you should concentrate your attention on hiring for one or two specific roles rather than dumping your entire workload on one unfortunate VA.

So, for example, if you wanted to maximize your effectiveness, you might start by hiring a General Virtual Assistant (or GVA) to manage the admin side of your business. Your GVA could therefore be the person who handles the little day-to-day tasks-- like buying stationary for the office, replying to emails, or setting up meetings-- and frees you up to focus on the tasks that uniquely require your attention. However, as you're divvying up the tasks to outsource, it's vital to remember that there's one thing you should never outsource: your content.

Your content is what you provide to your customers. If you run a wine review blog, then your content might be informational articles, videos, and wine-tasting etiquette guides. Likewise, if your area is business advice, then your content is the tips you provide, be it through a podcast, a website, or a series of e-books. In short, your content is what makes you unique. It's what gives you a business to run. It's also what makes you successful because, contrary to popular opinion, the most successful businesses aren't the ones that spend a lot of money on marketing or that are at the top of Google's search rankings, but rather the ones that can provide their customers with the most compelling and relatable content.

So, even though it might be tempting, don't outsource your content to someone who has no idea what you're doing and no sense of the passion and message behind your work. Instead, keep it real, keep it up to your standards, and that way, you can be confident in the caliber of the content you're delivering. In fact, your VAs can even help with this indirectly, because they might not be working on the content for you, but they can free up more of your time so that you can craft your best content.

Working With VAs is a Learning Process

Because they're working remotely, working with VAs might sound easy, as if it's free from the typical hassles of onboarding new staff. But nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, training a new VA is very much like training a new and physically present member of staff. The only difference is that the learning process comes with a few unique curveballs of its own. The author learned this firsthand in his own attempts to onboard his very first VA.

For example, in the beginning, he struggled with finding the right balance of authority and independence to give his Virtual Assistants. In some cases, he gave them too much freedom and it backfired, while in other cases, he didn't give them enough room to do their jobs. But on the bright side, his process of trial and error provided him with some valuable insights that shaped his future hiring policies and his understanding of how to train VAs. For starters, he learned that you should never sacrifice quality for cost. Good VAs aren't cheap; they can cost anywhere from \$900-\$2,500 per month and that can be tough for a start-up. So, even though it might be tempting to hire the least expensive option, Ducker cautions that it's actually quite reckless.

After all, they might not be physically present in your office, but that doesn't mean they're any different from your in-house employees or that you should hire them with a different set of standards in mind. So, if you wouldn't hire a real-life office manager with no admin experience, you shouldn't do it with a Virtual Assistant either. These same considerations should also be in place when it comes to your VA's location. Because cost can be a significant factor for many businesses, another tempting (but very risky) option is outsourcing to someone in a developing country because the labor will be cheaper.

Now, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't be an equal opportunity employer or that a VA from another country wouldn't be equally as

qualified as a candidate from the US. Rather, the concern in question is the matter of time zones. Because as tempting as it might be to save a buck here and there, it won't be quite so appealing if you want to post a hot new video and you have to wait six hours to get a reply from the person in charge of the videos for your website. In fact, time zones can become such a burden that, in the long run, you might find you're losing out on money and peace of mind alike. So, before you make a hiring decision based on price alone, it might be helpful to consider these factors.

Your VAs Need Attention Too

Even though you may never see them in your office, your VAs are still people too. They might be virtual, but that doesn't mean they require any less attention or training than the employees you see every day in real life. This is one good rule of thumb to keep in mind when you're hiring a VA and the same is true of the fact that you should hire for the role, not the task. To explore what that means in a little more detail, let's imagine that you're looking for a VA who can edit videos for your website. So, your first thought might be that you need to find the best video editor around. But that's a prime example of hiring for the task with no thought to what they'll ultimately bring to the role of VA. And if, in the long term, you need someone who can shoot your videos or upload them or do some basic office work in addition, "the best video editor around" might not actually be the best fit for your job.

So, in other words, don't limit your scope to the simple matter of the task at hand; think "big picture." It's also important to bear in mind that you don't have to understand every detail of exactly what your video editor does, but you do need to know enough to make a sound hiring decision. At this point, if you have to hire for a few roles that you don't really know much about, it might be tempting to outsource your hiring as well and pass this task on to yet another VA whose sole job is hiring.

But don't do that. Because your company is uniquely yours and exists because of your vision, you don't want to sacrifice the opportunity to grow a team that fits your needs. So, if you want to truly be in charge of your start-up, you need to be in charge of recruitment as well. Sure, it might require a little bit of extra work, but it's worth it to research the roles and actually learn about the roles you're hiring for. Once you know more, you'll be able to identify that perfect candidate when you meet them. Starting with a good job description can help. When crafting your job description, clarity is of primary importance because you need to be clear with both yourself and

your candidates about what you're looking for in a VA. The more clear you are, the more you can be certain that you'll attract the right candidates.

So, how do you craft the perfect job description? Well, for starters, a good job description is precise, clear, and easy to understand. You can accomplish this by using bullet points to highlight exactly what you're looking for in a VA, what the role requires, and what experience you want your ideal candidate to have. And once your job description has attracted the right candidate, the next step is the interview. Although you may have conducted your preliminary correspondence through an impersonal means like e-mail, it's important to make the interview personal. So, use something like Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangouts and get as close to meeting them as possible.

How to Train Your VA

If that sounds a little like the classic Disney movie “How to Train Your Dragon,” the good news is that training your VA is a lot less scary and luckily for you, they don’t breathe fire or come with sharp teeth. But they do need training, just like your in-house hires, and that’s why we’re going to take a look at three things you want to remember when hiring your VA. For starters, clarity doesn’t end with the job description. Sure, it’s important to be very clear when outlining your expectations for an applicant at the start, but your communication shouldn’t stop there. If, for example, you’ve hired a GVA to manage phone admin for your office, then you need to let them know exactly what you’d like them to do. Don’t leave them to intuit anything or waste time trying to figure out what you meant; just be clear with them up front.

The next step is to let them know that they can and should ask for help whenever they have questions and that their freedom to do so never expires. Your new employee shouldn’t be made to learn through trial and error; just tell them clearly what you expect and take time to answer their questions. This process should be repeated any time a question comes up, no matter how long they work for you. And finally, the last step is to be aware of time zones. In previous chapters, we’ve discussed the potential risks of hiring a VA on another time zone, but if you’ve decided that’s the best fit for your job, that’s okay! Training someone in a different time zone can be tricky but it doesn’t have to be impossible; it just takes a bit of careful planning if you want to avoid answering questions at 2 a.m. This is where communication is especially handy because there is no “one size fits all” guide to communicating across time zones; you’ll just have to work closely with your VA and find out what works best for both of you.

But when it comes to some other basic elements of training, here are a few tips you can keep in mind. Mixing up the types of media you use when training your VA can be helpful because it not only keeps them engaged, it connects with a variety of learning styles. So, where possible, employ

online, audio, visual, and written training materials to effectively communicate with your trainee. As an added bonus, if you take the time to develop solid training materials that can be used again and again, you'll save yourself a lot of time in the long run because you won't need to constantly update sloppy materials. You should also be aware of cultural differences when you're hiring overseas. For example, if you hire a Filipino VA and use ALL CAPS when you're emailing them, they will interpret this as shouting and thus, will feel confused and offended. Simply being aware of these differences can help you avoid resentment and miscommunication.

Final Summary

Virtual Assistants can revolutionize your work life by giving you the opportunity to delegate daily tasks and focus on the aspects of your business that matter most to you: your creativity and innovation. However, it's important to remember that your VA isn't some robot that exists in your iCloud; they're a real person, just like any member of your in-house staff and they deserve the same training, clarity, and communication you would provide for any other employee. And although it's awesome that they can work from a town or a continent away, this distance necessitates a new learning process that you need to be aware of when onboarding your Virtual Assistant.

So, make sure that you're aware of best communication practices, cultural differences, and the potential pitfalls of working across different time zones. You'll also want to make sure that you're clear from the beginning by crafting a job description that plainly and explicitly outlines exactly what you're looking for in a VA. It's also beneficial to remember that you want to hire for the role, not the task, and that you should think "big picture" when making hiring decisions. This will help you find the person who's right for every part of the job and not just one aspect of it. And last but not least, there are two things you should always keep in mind when hiring a VA: never outsource your content and never outsource your hiring. A VA can revolutionize your company but you shouldn't expect them to do all your work for you and neither should you outsource so much that you risk losing your originality and control.



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