

GULFSHORE BUSINESS

What to Ask Before Hiring a Virtual Assistant

BY GRACE DONNELLY



Using a **virtual assistant** may be a viable alternative to the expense of hiring an additional employee.

Whether you want to delegate some day-to-day tasks, get extra help with a short-term project or develop a long-range business relationship with an individual who can offer support in achieving a variety of goals, there likely is a virtual assistant qualified for the position.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Make a list of the responsibilities you want to assign to a virtual assistant. This step will help you search for someone to hire and establish expectations.

Sharon Williams, a virtual assistant with more than 20 years of experience and founder of The 24 Hour Secretary, a Maryland-based company, says she requests that business owners bring a written list to the initial meeting.

“I go through an interview process with potential clients,” she says. “They ask me questions and I also ask them questions about what their goals are, what their passion is, what do they see as the role that I should be playing as a virtual assistant?”

WHAT INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS ARE NEEDED?

A virtual assistant will only be beneficial if you find someone with the skill set and experience relevant to your industry.

Discuss these specific skills during the interview process so you will know if someone is the right fit for your business. A virtual assistant often can direct you to another person better suited for the job.

Ryan Schwartz, a real estate agent in Naples, has hired and fired several assistants, both virtual and local, in the past year in his search to find someone with excellent people skills and knowledge of the region. He found that a local assistant made more sense for his needs.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL YOU NEED TO TRAIN A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

Virtual assistants offer experience and knowhow for practically every industry, but additional training might be required in order to familiarize them with your specific systems and methods of operation.

“It created more aggravation by losing time training them,” Schwartz says of some past assistants. Think ahead about the specific processes you will need to teach a new virtual assistant.

HOW LONG DO YOU PLAN TO EMPLOY A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT?

If you need a virtual for a specific project or period of time, make sure he or she has the skills you need in order to avoid losing time to training. However, if you’re looking for a long-term assistant, you need to think of him or her as a valuable part of your team.

“If [clients] see [their virtual assistant] only as a task-oriented individual, I’m not sure how long that relationship will last, versus someone who can be a sort of partner with you and grow your business over time,” Williams says.

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

The most important thing to remember is that you get what you pay for when hiring a virtual assistant. Discussing compensation from the outset is key, Williams says.

Many assistants charge about \$20 per hour, but individuals with more experience, skills and certifications can bump that rate to between \$50 and \$100.

Williams says it's imperative to consider that many virtual assistants also are business owners.

“They want to develop a relationship where they become an integral part of the operation,” she says, “and the client knows they’re working with someone who can provide additional insight, grow their business and achieve their goals.”