

## **FRESHBOOKS BLOG INTERVIEW: MAY 2014**

**Tell us a little bit about yourself and your business:** My name is Jan DeProspero and I am president and founder of Virtual Outsource Solutions in Davie, Florida. My business supports financial planners so they can spend as much time as possible meeting clients and prospects while we handle back office and administrative tasks.

**What is a Virtual Assistant:** I prefer Virtual Consultant to Assistant because the relationship is not so much the role of an administrative assistant but that of a true partner/collaborator. A VAC is a highly skilled entrepreneur who provides a myriad of support services remotely via phone, fax, and internet based technology.

**Why did you decide to become a VA? How has the experience turned out? What has been different than expected/surprised you?** I decided to become a VAC after working with an advisor for about 8 years in the role of office manager. I enjoyed the fast paced environment, and being a part of making a real difference in people's lives. I became a widow at a very young age and I know the difference it would have made in my life if I had had the guidance and foresight a good financial advisor can provide. There is an enormous need to keep up with new technology in the Financial Planning industry so I am constantly learning new ways to assist my advisors in running a more streamline, efficient, client driven practice.

In starting my business I hoped to be able to support multiple advisors while still achieving life balance at home. I am able to work full time and still drive my youngest son to and from school or take part of the day to be at an important event for my family. Since becoming a VAC I have been able to achieve that balance. What has surprised me most is the difference a good VAC can make to a small business.

**How do you identify the qualities of a great VA?** I would suggest making checklist of the qualities or must haves of the VAC role. Remember, he or she will be representing you to your clients. Are they: professional, a good communicator, confident, positive, self-driven, open minded, trustworthy, patient, innovative? Do they keep up with the latest industry related technology? Are they consistently learning, attending conferences, seminars, etc. that keep them current?

**Why outsource:** Partnering with a VAC reduces stress, protects cash flow, eliminates administrative hassles and allows the business owner to focus on what he/she does best resulting in business growth and bringing in new revenues. With a VAC you get the flexibility to outsource tasks and projects as your business requires without a financial commitment to a full time employee. You pay only for the time required to complete the work project. You save on salaries/vacations/benefit pay/employee overhead, office space and equipment, training and continued ed, and you never pay for unproductive time.

**What advice do you have for business owners who might be**

**looking to hire a VA?** A VAC is a very personal choice, not only does the VAC need to be good at what he/she does, there needs to be a synergy. I often relate to prospective clients that I only take on clients who match my core values. When hiring a VAC you first need to determine what you need help with, a good question to ask yourself if you don't know where to begin is "What is most broken?" Collaborate with the VAC on how he/she might be of assistance. Explain how your firm operates, your business culture, ideal client, etc. An experienced VAC will be able to jump in asking you specific questions and can then make recommendations based on industry/technological experience. Speak with several VACs to get a feel for who you feel most comfortable working with, who compliments your style. If the VAC will be front facing, i.e., speaking with your clients directly, be sure that they are polished and professional, have a good speaking voice, and are able to field difficult questions. I would recommend a background check and careful review of the VAC contract with regard to confidentiality. You may also ask that the VAC sign your own confidentiality agreement as an added layer of protection. Also ask about the software/equipment he/she has in place. How would they protect confidential information when say emailing one of your clients? What type of backup system do they have? Would they be housing any of your information on their computer/server or only accessing your system remotely or through the cloud? Next you should "try before you buy". I will often tell a prospective client that we can "date" awhile before we get married. I suggest a ten hour monthly retainer to start and in my contract either party can end the agreement at any time.

**How do I decide what type of work to outsource to my VA:** I suggest keeping a notebook next to your workstation for a week. Make a list of the things you are doing, are they client facing? Growing the business? Increasing Revenues? If not they are probably not a good use of your time and should be outsourced.

**What makes you awesome?** I think VOS's unique differentiator is that we LISTEN closely to our clients' needs and rely on industry best practices to meet those needs. When a client is successful, we are successful. We are very adept at designing and implementing workflow processes that help to provide a highly efficient client driven organization. Often times, one key person in the office has the majority of the intellectual capital of the running of the office and it is housed in their mind and not actually written down as documented processes. When this key person leaves the office experiences a kind of upheaval. When processes are in place anyone coming in can follow them with a minimal amount of support and training.