3 Tips When Hiring A Virtual Assistant

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Most business owners today look for a virtual assistant with a job description itemized something like this:

- Pulling enrollment reports;
- Engaging on social media posts to up my views;
- Growing network;
- Help with messaging new people with my guidance;
- Emailing current customers about deals;
- Creating round-up style posts from existing content;
- Writing and scheduling social posts on various platforms;
- Social media posts (short article writing, post research and creation);
- Digital admin tasks;
- WordPress theme updates;
- Funnel builder; and
- Email automation sequences.

Plus: A B.A. or B.S. in advertising, business, marketing or a related field, and five years of experience in marketing or advertising.

This isn’t a made-up job description. Business owners are looking for an “all-around” virtual assistant that just does not exist — a unicorn. In case you find one, could you send him, her or them over to me? I’d love to study this elusive specimen.

This approach is wrong. Let me tell you why. One: You’re finding a needle in a haystack. You might want to save money by hiring a single person to do it all, but actually, you don’t. Two: You might not be aware that you are expecting mastery of five completely different skill sets: administrative, customer service, social media management, article writing and customer funneling.

Instead, let me share with you three recruiting tips for hiring the optimal virtual assistant for your business.

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1. Hire based on vertical skills

Let’s first define lateral and vertical skills, especially when thinking about work in the digital economy. In a Medium article, Gauti Sigthorsson explains that lateral skills cut across specialist categories, while vertical skills can be technical, procedural and discipline-specific.

When thinking about work in the digital economy, lateral skills might be the ability to prioritize tasks and sort them into a manageable order, leading from idea to execution. They are skills that can be used in different industries. In contrast, there is a depth to vertical skill sets. Sigthorsson elaborates that “the potential for mastery of a body of knowledge and skills that differentiates the dabbler from the expert, the home cook from the professional chef.” Vertical is specialized skills in the same field.

With that said, how do you hire based on vertical skills?

Let’s say you are looking for someone to do customer support. You should consider outsourcing a business-process professional to become a customer-service agent. Do you know why? One: Most customer-service agents work during U.S. hours to support U.S. clients. Two: It would be easy for you to teach someone who speaks great conversational English over the phone. All you have to do is teach that person the product knowledge. Then they would be able to use their customer-service knowledge to support a new product.

I would bet that it would be harder to take a website technician and train them how to do customer support for a product than to teach a customer-support team member who already knows how to handle a customer. (Though again, if you know someone who’s an exception, send them my way.)

You should understand that every virtual assistant can be trained for any skill and has the potential to grow together with you in your business. As they set an example with their work, they can also set an example to other team members. They all have the capacity to be a leader.

2. Consider at least two years of tenure

Yes, you read that right. It’s actually not about the work experience for me. It’s about longevity and commitment. How much time did the potential virtual assistant spend in their previous companies? At VA Staffer, we have hired hundreds of virtual assistants for ourselves and our clients, and we’ve found that hiring people who have at least two years or more in the same company demonstrates loyalty and that they’re not always job-hopping.

If you see someone who stayed in a company for six months or less, that should be a red flag. There’s got to be a reason why. Either the virtual assistant couldn’t keep their value

proposition, or they have a commitment problem.

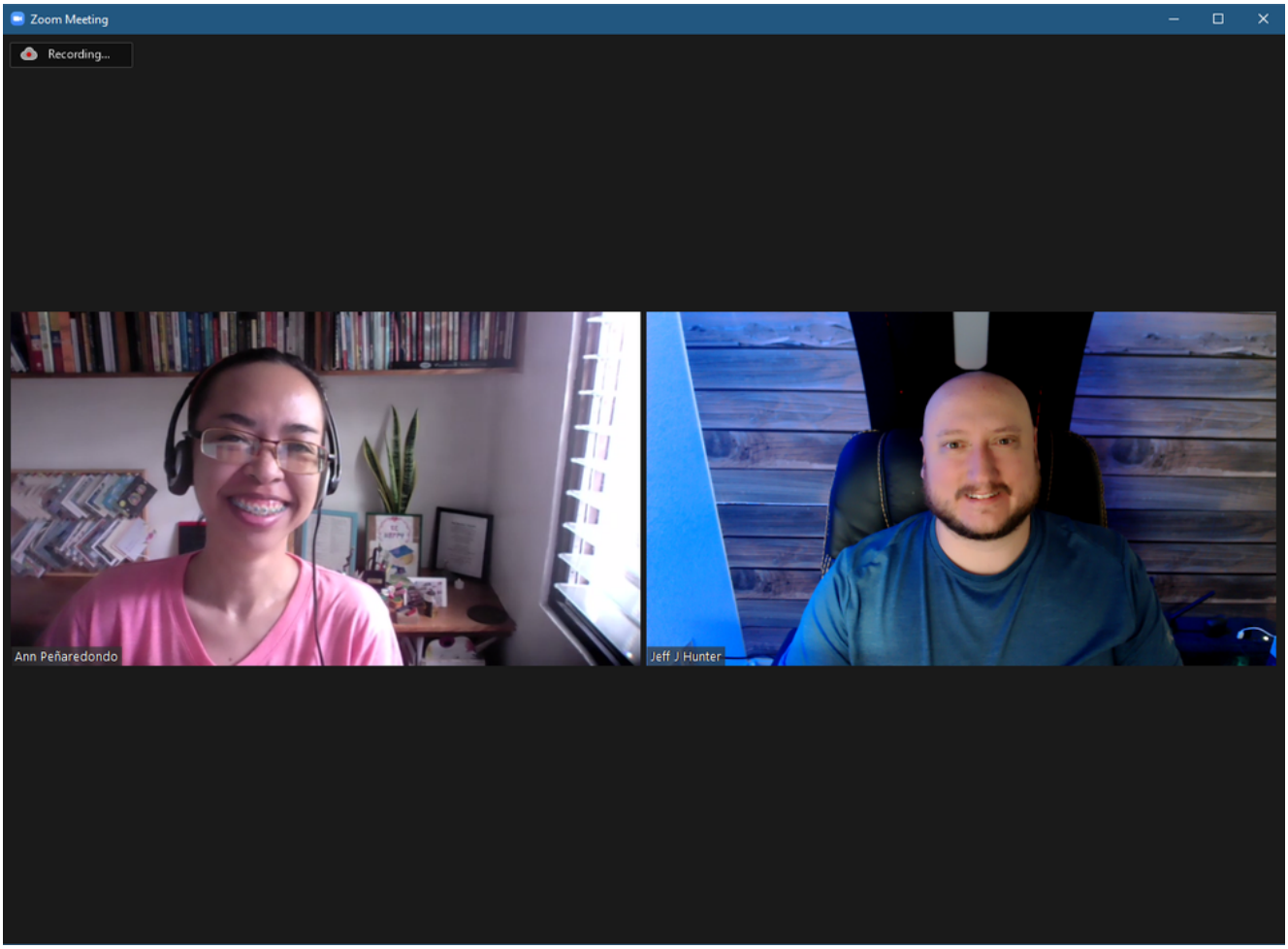
3. Make your interviews experiential

During the interview, test your potential virtual assistant on certain things that will show up on the job. Ask them directly how they would work through different scenarios. You will find patterns of behavior that can help you decide whether a person would be a gem of a hire.

I know I said earlier that every virtual assistant can be trained for any skill. The only thing that can't be taught? Work ethics. Do they show up in the interview on time? How have they managed to communicate with their previous superiors? How do they respond to urgent turnaround times?

Strong work ethics, such as showing up to meetings on time, being a good communicator and even taking full responsibility over a delayed task or an under-promised value, are critical to your business' work culture and growth. If a recruit falls short of these standards, your interviews should tease that out.

And while I'm not too big on certifications, let me sum up what you should do rather than insist on seeing credentials: Go big on your interviews.



Bonus Pro Tip: Do more video calls

It’s very easy to be disconnected with your virtual team members but it’s crucial that you maintain a bond just as you would in an office setting. I use video on every call with my team to keep that feeling of connection and collaboration.

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Remember, when you are hiring a virtual assistant or anyone for remote work, make sure that your applicants demonstrate a minimum skillset that’s applicable to the role and have shown not to be a job-hopper. And dig deep on your interviews to make sure they have what it takes to be a successful part of your team.

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