

What can a Virtual Assistant do for you?

By working virtually, a Virtual Assistant (VA) can support multiple clients at any one time and most of us have anything between three and eight clients simultaneously, depending on the volume and frequency of the work that those clients need.

A VA can pick up many tasks and can also be a “second brain” for you, helping you keep on top of your To Do list and projects. Whilst you can have a Virtual Assistant that just does odd bits of work here and there, the real value is having one that works alongside you every week. They get to know you and the business and can then really start to make a difference to your working life by freeing up your time. Here are some of the ways that can work.

The hand of the king

This can be a really strange concept for those not in this position, but we assistants (whether real life or virtual) really love seeing our clients succeed. That is where we get our kicks.

We are happy to beaver away in the background getting things done and supporting. We have the ear of the “King” or “Queen” and often are responsible for passing on their wishes to others, communicating on their behalf and being a strategic advisor on occasion.

We provide support. This doesn't make us subservient. Our work is part of your

role – you’re the ideas person and we scoop those up and follow through. It’s a different kind of role and takes a certain kind of person to not be the one on stage doing the dancing. We’ll be at the back (in our home offices) with a clipboard making notes and checking that the catering van has arrived on time.

Moral support

Whether you’re running a business of one, four or 200, being you can be lonely because you can’t always talk to everyone about what’s going on. It isn’t appropriate to have a vent about a team member to another team member. You might have a board that you can talk to, even a peer, but they are no doubt insanely busy as well and it’s not the best use of their time.

But your VA can be an outlet for that. As external suppliers, VAs are ideally placed to hear confidential information. We don’t have any personal skin in the game if someone has made a mistake or resigned or is going through a tough patch with a client. We’re one step removed. We can hear the download, letting you get it off your chest and then move on with your day.

Sounding board

For solopreneurs, VAs may be the only other person in their business, and therefore the only one that they can talk to in order to think through ideas. This is not to be underestimated! When your business is just you, it’s easy to get stuck in a rut. Having someone to talk to and bounce ideas off can refresh and reinvigorate you, especially when your VA can then move forward with some of those ideas to test them out and see if they are going to be runners.

Talking out loud can also help you organise your ideas and brainstorm new ideas. When you talk out loud, you are forced to turn your ideas into something coherent as you speak so the listener can understand, which makes you make sense of what is in your head. Questions, or a lack of understanding from the listener, are a prompt to re-jig that thought or explain it more cogently.

Second brain

VAs don’t just take a task from you and return it, they actively manage projects and have their finger on the pulse of what’s going on. Holding in your head everything that needs to get done for clients, for internal folk, for prospects, for the kids, for your partner and for your friend’s birthday next week is a lot.

Even if you use a task management system so it’s all written down, it’s still in your head as well because it’s on you to remember to look at the task system

and then do it. This mental load is exhausting if it's all yours. A VA will take some of these things off you AND help you remember what needs doing.

Meeting support

Meetings breed actions, and you might want to have a VA join you in some of your meetings to take notes and potentially take some of your actions away. Some VAs are happy to support you in meetings, some are not. Whilst having someone join a meeting and take notes for you is an absolute joy and a weight off your mind, it is a) not everyone's cup of tea, so don't assume your VA will take this on unless you have asked when you hired them and b) can be a chunk of time that quickly adds up.

There are meetings and there are meetings. For a 30 minute internal team meeting "please record the actions and a short overview" is one thing, but to officially minute a board meeting or an Annual General Meeting, particularly if you're in a regulated industry or have very formal committee meetings, this is complex and a fairly specialist skill so you'll likely need to hire specifically for that. Minuting is a task that everyone assumes a VA can and will do; however, there are a handful of people that love it and are experts and the rest of us avoid it like the bubonic plague. Remember that when you hire a VA it's not like having an employee – as a PA we may have had to do minutes as part of our job, like it or loathe it, as a VA we can say "no thank you", unless we signed up to it upfront.

This is an adapted extract from *How To Work With A Virtual Assistant* by Kathy Soulsby author and founder of *Personally Virtual*.

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