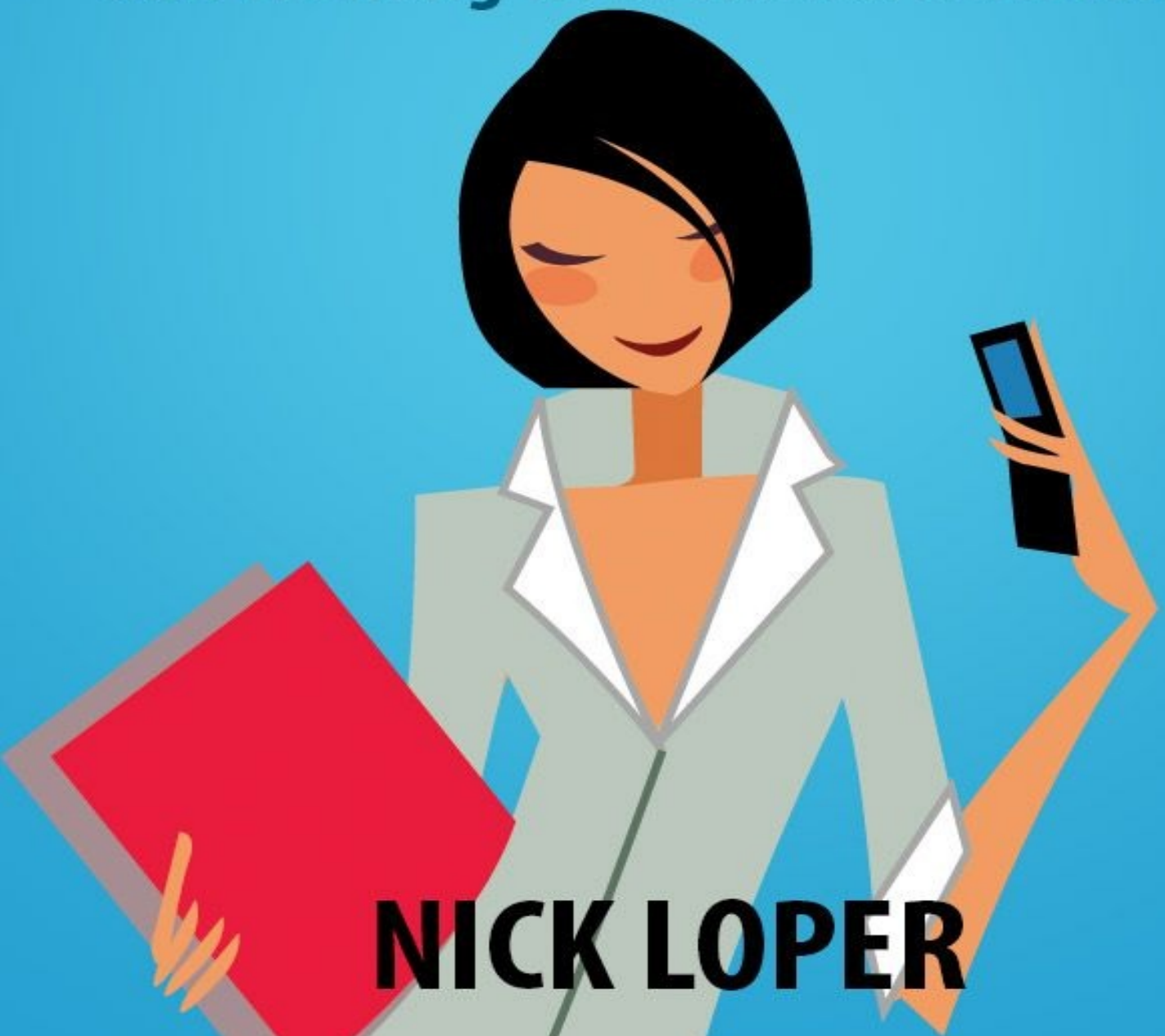


VIRTUAL ASSISTANT ASSISTANT

**The Ultimate Guide to Finding, Hiring,
and Working with Virtual Assistants**



NICK LOPER

Virtual Assistant Assistant:

The Ultimate Guide to Finding, Hiring, and Working with Virtual Assistant

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VirtualAssistantAssistant.co

Virtual Assistant Assistant: The Ultimate Guide to Finding, Hiring, and Working with Virtual Assistants

This book is intended for informational purposes only. You should consult with an attorney or CPA if you have any questions related to the tax and legal implications of working with virtual assistants.

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IS OUTSOURCING A DIRTY WORD?

The O word.

Let's talk about it.

In today's political discourse, few words have been demonized as much as outsourcing. Outsourcing has become the scapegoat for all our problems: from deficits and unemployment, to corporate greed and tax evasion. In his State of the Union address, President Obama even declared, "*No, we will not go back to an economy weakened by outsourcing.*"

But is outsourcing really all that bad?

I mean, we all do it.

Last night, did you make dinner yourself or did you go out? Did you grow the food yourself? Did you wash the dishes by hand or did you put them in the dishwasher?

This year, did you do your taxes yourself, or did you hire an accountant? Was your accountant human or did they take the form of software, like Turbo Tax?

Outsourcing is a fact of life. I need a computer for my work, but have no idea how to make one myself. So I outsourced that task to Dell. It was an easy decision.

Simply defined, outsourcing is a way to procure what you need **more effectively** than you could do yourself.

How we determine what "effectively" means though, varies by each situation. In basic terms you can think of three factors to measure effectiveness:

1. Lower cost
2. Greater speed
3. Superior quality

For example, you probably could do your taxes yourself, but it will probably take you a long time and might not be as accurate as having them professionally done.

Outsourcing is about using resources efficiently. But while efficiency is universally praised, outsourcing remains vilified. Why?

Outsourcing has an image problem. The image that comes to mind is the American worker who loses his job to a lower-priced doppelganger in India. I don't mean to make light of this situation because it definitely does happen.

And no one is advocating sweat shops or abusive employee-employer relationships.

But what about the thousands of small business owners who outsource critical elements of their operation every day? These entrepreneurs are creating value not just in their own communities, but

communities around the world as well.

Say you have an idea for a killer new website, but don't know how to program a website. You could sit down and spend months or years learning html and php and web design, or you could hire someone who already has these skills. Your website gets built much faster and you start attracting customers sooner. In this way, **outsourcing accelerates value creation.**

The other misconception about outsourcing is that it's all overseas. You might be surprised to learn there is a thriving outsourcing economy right here in the United States. Look at the busy marketplace on Elance or oDesk and you'll find thousands of talented local professionals ready to work.

Outsourcing doesn't have to be a dirty word. After all, anything that promotes efficiency, productivity and value creation can't be so bad.

This book is about how to make outsourcing with virtual assistants work for you and your business. You'll learn how a virtual assistant can save you time, earn you more money, and help you live the life you want.

Let's get started.

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Section 1:

What is a Virtual Assistant?

Simply put, a virtual assistant is someone who works for you remotely.

If you need help, either in the operations of business or just in your busy personal life, a virtual assistant can be a saving grace.

A virtual assistant can serve as a personal assistant, but thanks to our wired world, they no longer need to work from a desk right outside your office.

I have to admit, when I think of personal assistants, I used to have some glamorous and outdated vision of secretaries from decades ago like you might see in *Mad Men*. It's either that, or Smitherm, Mr. Burns' right-hand man in *The Simpsons*.

Nowadays though, you don't need to be a high-powered executive or the richest man in town to have a personal assistant of your own. In fact, you can find qualified virtual assistants under \$5 an hour if you know where to look.

The aim of this book is to show you:

- How a virtual assistant can save you time, money, and sanity
- How to hire the best talent for the best price
- How to work effectively with your VA to achieve your goals

The 3 Types of Virtual Assistants

Virtual assistants come in 3 types:

- Task-based virtual assistants
- Project-based virtual assistants
- Virtual employees

1. Task-Based Virtual Assistants



Task-based virtual assistants specialize in **short, one-off tasks**. Normally these are mini-projects, like appointment setting or online research, that you could take care of yourself, but instead choose to outsource them for the time-saving benefits.

Examples of possible tasks:

- Find three pet-friendly hotels in Austin, TX, and send me a link to their Trip Advisor pages
- Get car insurance quotes
- Pick 3 Napa wineries and make tasting reservations for Saturday for 6 people

Task-based assistance is usually **sold as a monthly package** that includes a set number of requests. There is a pool of VAs available, and each handles different tasks from different customers as they come in.

Starting at just \$25 per month, this is the cheapest form of outsourcing available.

In most cases, you won't have a dedicated point-of-contact, which can be a downside depending on the kind of jobs you might need done. Some task-based VA companies do offer dedicated support for a premium price-point.

Still, it can be a **great way to practice delegating** and get your feet wet with a virtual assistant for a minimal investment and commitment.

Leading Task-Based Virtual Assistant Companies:

- *Fancy Hands (USA)* – Starts at \$25/mo. for 5 tasks.
- *My Tasker (India)* – \$39 for 30 tasks per month.
- *Efficise (Pakistan)* – \$45 for 30 tasks per month.

2. Project-Based Virtual Assistants

A project-based virtual assistant is a **freelance contractor** who helps you with a one-time project, and nothing else.

Perhaps you need a website designed, some articles written, or an iPhone app programmed. If you can't (or don't want to) do these things yourself, a virtual assistant is the way to go.

The best resources for finding freelance virtual assistants are the global marketplaces of Elance, oDesk, Freelancer.com, vWorker.com, and others. These sites allow you to post your exact requirements for free, receive bids from qualified workers around the world, and choose which one you like best.

For project-based VAs, I've spent as little as \$5 and as much as \$10,000 and beyond. It all depends on the size and scope of the project. Obviously, the bigger the project and the more money that is at stake, the more carefully I'll review the candidates.

The ecosystems of the various freelance sites mentioned are a good place to start for portfolio samples and reviews, but I would recommend going outside the walls of that site as well. See if you can find this person or company on Google, LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter. What are other people saying about them?

If your project has business-sensitive material, you can request the freelancers sign a non-disclosure agreement before they get all the details. Most won't hesitate, and it's crucial they know all the expectations and specifications upfront so they can provide an accurate bid.

Finally, if you're spending significant money, don't initiate the project without an interview. Actually speaking to your freelance virtual assistant can make a huge difference and help uncover any potential language barriers and misunderstandings down the road.

3. Virtual Employees

The primary focus of this book will be on the third type of virtual assistants: **virtual employees**. Virtual employees are part-time or full-time workers that help you in your business, just as an in-house employee would. The only difference is they do it remotely.

A virtual employee is a single, dedicated resource for your business. This is a person you will train and **work closely with on an ongoing basis**.

It's the best of both worlds; this type of virtual assistant can handle the work of both the task-based VA and the project-based VA, in addition to your business process outsourcing.

With a virtual employee, you can negotiate whatever working hours fit your needs and your budget. Many VAs prefer to work full-time for a single employer, while others are perfectly content balancing multiple bosses at once. In that case, their work never gets boring if they are reporting to 4 different clients, all contracting for 10-hours a week!

The rates for a virtual employee will vary from less than \$5/hr all the way up to \$40/hr or more depending on their geographic location, experience, and areas of expertise. In some parts of the world you can get a full-time VA for as little as \$500 per month.

I prefer to work with virtual employees because I believe it is **the most effective outsourcing method** over the long-term.

Why Hire a Virtual Assistant?

A virtual assistant can help you regain control of your life at a sometimes surprisingly low cost. When we think of personal assistants we might think of high-powered CEOs and A-list celebrities, but 21st Century technology has brought the personal assistant within reach of almost everyone. Because of our wired global society and low telecommunications costs, a virtual assistant can work for you from just about any corner of the world.

But what can a virtual assistant do for you? Nearly anything that doesn't require a physical presence. Virtual assistants can accomplish an amazing variety of tasks including:

- Scheduling appointments and responding to phone calls or emails
- Online research and travel arrangements
- Accounting and bookkeeping
- Article writing and online marketing
- Event planning
- Customer service
- Or just about anything else you can think of

If a virtual assistant can save you even just an hour a day, wouldn't that be worthwhile? Yes, it will cost you a few dollars, but you have to consider what your time is worth. An extra hour to spend working on truly **meaningful projects** or with friends or family can yield a priceless return.

A virtual assistant will free up your time to focus on sales or higher-level strategic business activities. For example, you may be bogged down with low-value administrative tasks that take away from your high-value work.

At its most basic, work can be broken down into **activities that make you money**, and those that don't. Why spend time on those that don't?

You can train your virtual assistant to do whatever task you need done. This is especially valuable if you have certain simple, repetitive tasks that take up a lot of your time.

I've met too many entrepreneurs who are stuck working in their business instead of on it; a virtual assistant could be their ticket to growing profits and **personal freedom**.

Take Control by Letting Go

This is my story. Does it sound familiar?

My first experience in hiring a virtual assistant was when I had an idea for a website. If I wanted to turn my idea into reality, I had a couple options:

1. I could learn how to build the website myself.
2. I could hire someone who already knew how to build it.

Since I was busy working full-time already, I decided it would be a more efficient use of resources to hire someone else. Using Guru.com I met a web developer who became my first "virtual assistant." That was in 2005 and we're still working together today!

A few months later, the website launched and continued to grow each year. I was very excited to see

my little side project turning into a viable business.

In 2008 I decided to quit my job and focus on the business full time. It was totally rewarding and I was feeling **the rush of entrepreneurship**. Unfortunately it was also taking up all my time.

I knew I needed help but wasn't sure what to do. That's the problem with being your own boss; there's no one else around to make the tough decisions for you.

Like many small business owners, **I had trust issues** over letting someone new into my operation and sharing "trade secrets." I thought whoever I hired would do poor quality work - or worse - copy my idea!

The other issue? I was scared of the time it might take to hire, interview, and train a brand new employee in my systems. Sure it might save me time and headache in the long-run, but in the short run I've got work to do!

This is known as being "**too busy chopping down trees to sharpen the saw.**"

Well, after a particularly brutal month, I reached my pain threshold and overcame my fears. I finally took the time to "sharpen the saw" and haven't looked back since.

With my newfound free time I was able to zoom-out and focus on some bigger picture projects I had been neglecting. On top of that, I was able to leverage the expertise of my VA to generate new business ideas and tactics I had never even thought of.

Every entrepreneur reaches a ceiling, the natural limit of what they can accomplish on their own. If you're happy working up to that ceiling, that's totally OK.

But my guess is if you're reading this, you want to bust through that ceiling and achieve even more business, financial, and personal growth.

Virtual Assistant Benefits

The way I see it, there are three main benefits to **hiring a virtual assistant**.

Save time

The reason most people start looking for a virtual assistant is because they are simply too busy, and they know a virtual assistant can save them time. By offloading your routine time-consuming tasks, a virtual assistant can literally **add hours to your day**.

Imagine using those hours to meet new clients and explore new business opportunities, catch up with friends, or spend more time with your family. Time is our **most valuable resource**, and the one we tend to end up wasting more often than anything else.

Save money

Virtual assistants can save you money in a couple ways. First, if you are already considering hiring an in-house employee, a virtual assistant is **a much cheaper alternative**.

They can also help save you money in the tasks they perform, whether it be researching online deals or improving the **return on investment** of your business's marketing efforts.

Save headache

To many customers, a virtual assistant is **peace of mind**. You have someone on call to help deal with whatever life throws at you.

Plus, when you use a **virtual assistant company**, you don't have to worry about things like payroll processing, employment taxes, fair hiring and firing regulations, providing equipment and office space, and other stress-inducing problems.

How Much is Your Time Worth?

Do you know your effective hourly wage? Although this calculation has become somewhat clichéd in recent years, it's still important to understand what an hour of work should be worth to us.

If you work a standard 40-hour week and make \$50,000 a year, what is your effective hourly wage?

Well, take 40 hours a week multiplied by 52 weeks in a year and you end up with 2,080 working hours. \$50,000 divided by 2,080 hours is roughly \$24 an hour.

If you make \$100,000 and still work only 40 hours a week, your rate is \$48 an hour.

Now you can see where hiring a VA at \$5 or \$10 an hour starts to make a lot of sense.

Use the worksheet below to calculate your own effective hourly wage:

Annual Income	\$ _____	
Hours per Week	_____	Hours
Work Weeks per Year <i>(hey, maybe you only work 9 months a year)</i>	_____	Weeks
Total Work Hours <i>(multiply hours x weeks)</i>	_____	Total Hours
Effective Hourly Wage	\$ _____	
<i>(divide Annual Income by Total Hours)</i>		

Lawyers, accountants, architects, and other professionals tend to think in terms of “billable hours.” Billable hours are time spent directly on revenue-generating work.

I think a billable hours mindset can be applicable to nearly everyone. **Focus on what rings the cash register and delegate the rest.**

What's Your Excuse?

As mentioned previously, I had some doubts and hesitations before I was ready to hire a virtual assistant. Sometimes these excuses can become paralyzing, so I thought it would be important to address the three most common ones in more detail.

At various times I've been guilty of all of these:

1. I Can't Trust a VA

Many solo entrepreneurs, myself included, are so used to doing *everything* themselves, they find it hard to delegate *anything*.

I was afraid my virtual assistant would do poor quality work that might end up hurting my business. Or worse yet, I feared they might even try to steal my ideas. The more people I talked to, the more I found this to be a really common fear.

Indeed, it can be scary to open the doors of your business to someone new (and potentially someone half-way around the world).

However, if you never overcome it, you're stuck doing everything yourself. I hate to say it, but **you don't have a business; you have a job**. What if Steve Jobs or Bill Gates had never hired any help?

The quality of work issue can be overcome by hiring a talented VA, giving them specific guidelines and expectations, and training them in your systems.

And the concern that your VA might steal your ideas? I've been working with VAs since 2005, and I have never once had this be an issue. I'm sure it's happened somewhere in the world but I can't imagine it being a serious problem. If that's all that's holding you back, ask your VA to sign a non-disclosure/non-compete agreement.

2. I Can Do it Better or Faster Myself

If you've been doing a certain task for years, it's probably second nature by now. And I don't doubt that you can do it better or faster than nearly anyone else. You shouldn't necessarily expect your VA to outperform you right out of the gate – instead you should ask, “What would be the best use of my time?”

If you're spending hours each day on tasks that could be delegated to a virtual assistant, I'm almost positive you could use those hours more effectively to grow your business, close more deals, strategize for the future, or just spend more time with your family.

3. I'll Lose Too Much Time Training Them

We'll take a closer look at training later in this book, but the training time requires a long-term mindset. It's true you'll need to make a time investment in training at the onset of your virtual assistant relationship. However, that investment can generate exponential returns by freeing up hours of your work schedule for weeks, months, or even years to come.

So what's your excuse?

What a Virtual Assistant Can Do for You

Aside from fetching your coffee and picking up the dry cleaning (although now there are *local* VA companies that facilitate these kinds of tasks), there's really no limit to the kinds of jobs a virtual assistant can do for you.

Here is the unofficial giant list to get your juices flowing:

1. Add images to your presentations or blog posts
2. Answer phone calls
3. Archive old files
4. Audit your bills
5. Backup your data
6. Brainstorm new business opportunities
7. Brainstorm topics for new blog articles
8. Build backlinks to your site
9. Build spreadsheets
10. Check your other VA's work
11. Check your website for broken links
12. Compile mailing lists
13. Compile motivational quotes
14. Conduct keyword research
15. Conduct market research
16. Coordinate conference calls
17. Coordinate meetings and appointments
18. Create a "keep in touch" schedule for people you don't see often
19. Create a budget
20. Create a database
21. Create a diet plan
22. Create a list of forums relevant to your business
23. Create a marketing plan
24. Create a meal plan
25. Create a playlist

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