

Making the Decision

Do you like the work?

Probably...no, definitely the most important question of all. Do you like working at your computer? You'll be spending an unbelievable amount of time doing just that, so if you don't like it, you'll be miserable and ultimately that will be reflected in the success of your business.

Do you have the skills?

You will hear over and over in our industry, "Having a computer does not make you a VA." For that matter, having significant administrative or secretarial experience doesn't make you a VA either. A VA is equally skilled at all the areas necessary for a successful practice...and more:

- Administrative
- Typing
- Sales abilities
- PR abilities
- Marketing skills
- Verbal and written communications skills
- Etc.

Do you have what it takes?

Some characteristics are essential qualities to running your own business. In approximate order of importance:

Drive

Drive encompasses many attributes including, but not limited to, energy, self-motivation, initiative, dedication, commitment, ambition and being tireless in the pursuit of success. You simply **must** have drive in order to make a success of owning a business (or super amazing luck!).

Simply put, the more you invest in your business in terms of time, energy, creativity etc., the more successful your business will be. If sitting back and waiting for your new business line to ring sounds like part of your plan, you might want to re-think your decision.

*"Inspiration to keep going when things are tough: I had the great honour of attending a seminar at which J. Merelle Rodrigo was the speaker the one phrase that she said that really stuck with me was **"If it is meant to be, it is up to me."** When you are the business everything falls on your shoulders. You can't blame anyone else and you have to be the driving force. Give yourself pep talks, celebrate the triumphs and learn from the mistakes."*

*Francesca Frate, Owner/Operator
AdminConcepts - Your Administrative Connection
<http://www.adminconcepts.net>*

The Ability to Think

Hopefully the ability to think sounds ridiculous to you. If it does, then that's probably because the ability to think is ingrained in you. In order to be a success you must be able to think your way through your new venture. **Creative thinking** will play a large roll in your marketing efforts and **critical thinking** will enable you to know what plans to go ahead with and the ones that might be better left for later or perhaps discarded all together. **Analytical thinking** will help you to solve problems and discover solutions outside your own abilities. We can't possibly be experts at everything, but if we're thinking, we can always find a way around our weaknesses.

Good Interpersonal Relationship Skills

Starting your own business doesn't mean you won't have to deal with difficult people anymore. Unfortunately, it also means politics will not become a thing of the past. Now you'll be dealing with these types of people because you need their business or want to avoid burning a potentially lucrative bridge. Remember that there are just as many difficult clients as there are bosses. You will always have colleagues (fellow VAs), subcontractors, suppliers, and others on whom you can rely. It is nice to have the power to control the people you deal with and those you don't, but now your immediate earnings will be directly related to your decision to keep or cut loose that difficult person.

The truly successful VA is positive and cheerful, emotionally stable and socially conscious. Building strong relationships with your clients, colleagues and even your competitors is key to building a strong, professional reputation and a strong professional reputation is key to building a successful business.

Communication Skills

Communication encompasses many different mediums. Verbal, written, facial expression and body language are all methods of communication.

You must be able to communicate effectively in all areas. Poor grammar and telephone etiquette are not acceptable. For example, writing 'you're' in an email when you should have written 'your' could mean the difference between getting the job and never being considered again.

Your body language must back up your message. When presenting your 30 second speech to a potential client you must look them in the eye, put your shoulders back and smile.



The better you are able to communicate and deal with different (and sometimes difficult) personalities the better off you'll be.

Deal well with....	And they will...
Bankers	lend you money
Subcontractors	work harder...for less
Suppliers	provide product or services at low cost and with quick turn around times

Customers	hire you, keep you and provide referrals for you
Colleagues	subcontract to you and/or refer you.

Technical Abilities

Technology seems to change every day. The savvy VA keeps up with the changes, knows how to implement them, and has a superior support structure on which she can depend to help her when something comes up with which she is unfamiliar.

Basically, you must have an all-encompassing knowledge of your market, the services you are providing and the products you need to provide those services.

Can you afford to start a VA practice?

It can *almost* be guaranteed that the day you open your doors there will NOT be a line-up of clients ready to hire you.

There are two ways to go about starting your practice: full-time or part-time. Pros and cons of both will be covered later in this book.

Either way, there are certain requirements in terms of equipment or supplies that are necessary to any VA, and these are not inexpensive. We'll get into the details later, but suffice it to say that you'll probably need approximately \$2000 to start up your business if you're starting with nothing. You may already have a computer, printer, etc., in which case the start-up costs will be less.

Running your own business means that sometimes you make less and sometimes you make more. Do you have some savings, family who will help out financially, or another income provider in the home to fall back on during the uncertain start-up phase?

"Always remember your online 'persona'. You wouldn't go out to meet your clients in sweats and torn clothing, nor should your appearance online appear shoddy. Ensure your website is as you would want your store shop to appear; clean, informative and free of typos and grammatical errors. This also extends to any time you present yourself online including chat rooms and forums, try to maintain as much professionalism as you can. Remember, your next client may be reading your forum entries and if you can't be bothered to appear coherent and intelligent, why should they be bothered to hire you?"

Kate V. Kerans
Kerans Virtual Assistance
<http://www.yourvirtualparalegal.net>

The Reality of a VA Practice

It is important to understand that, in addition to the above noted qualities, you walk into this venture with your eyes wide open.

- It is hard work to be successful.
- Long hours can be tiring – are you physically strong?
- It is sometimes lonely working by yourself.
- The fear of failure can be occasionally overwhelming.
- The kids will still get sick.
- The dog will still chew your shoes.
- Company will come to visit or stay and you'll HAVE to work.
- Vacation time can be hard to come by.

Summary

As you can tell, starting and developing a thriving VA practice is not for everyone since... it's not easy! The statement that covers it best is: You're about to embark on the journey of starting your own business. You will be an entrepreneur as well as a business owner and the nature of your business is to provide administrative and other support services to small businesses. First and foremost you are now a business owner. If you're considering a VA practice then you **probably** have the administrative or secretarial skills but the real question is, "**Are you prepared to be a business owner?**"

And the answer is....

Yes, you've got it all and you are seriously committed to starting a VA practice; you are ready to **be a business owner.**

Remember that a positive attitude is half the battle and keeping it through the occasionally tiring and stressful start-up period is often tough to do.

Given that you possess all of the qualities listed above, the following pages will provide you with everything you need to launch a successful VA business.