

The 7 Mistakes of Delegation

Mistake 1 - Are you going to end up with blisters?

Choosing a great VA is a bit like choosing a pair of new shoes; Do they fit? Do they suit you? Do they support you well? Get it wrong and you'll end up sore and disappointed. So how do you avoid the pain and make sure your new VA is a great fit? Research is key! You're looking for 3 important qualities:

1. Confidentiality
2. Discretion
3. Initiative

but there's more to consider so here's a list to help.

1. Specialisms - you wouldn't go to a butcher for bread so apply the same here. Experience really is the best teacher.
2. Data protection/confidentiality agreements - better safe than sorry! If a VA won't sign a confidentiality agreement, alarm bells should be ringing.
3. Consistency - don't let yourself be passed from pillar to post - you need an allocated VA if they're going to learn your business.
4. References - a good VA loves to share their happy customers' references! Not got any? Run as fast as you can.....

Finally, remember, someone great on paper may just not gel with you. It happens, it's no big deal. You're only human after all. So focus on finding the right VA for you because with the right person backing you, your business will fly.

Mistake 2 - Frozen with fear?

If you'd love to be singing 'Let it go' but can't quite find your groove, there's a one word reason - Control. There's no denying it's a hard one to get right: Too little and you're deemed a failure. Too much and you're uptight.

Sound familiar? You're not alone - in fact it's the biggest challenge most people face. You may know that micromanaging and perfectionism are common traits in entrepreneurs but can really hold your business back.

You need to take 4 simple steps:

1. Start small - don't run before you can walk. Hand over something basic with minimal consequences if it goes wrong.
2. Build gradually - once you're happy with the completed task, try something larger or more important. Go at a pace that you're comfortable with.
3. Be realistic - it takes time for a VA to learn your business and preferences. If things didn't go to plan, ask yourself if you could have explained more or given better information to improve the outcome.
4. Move forward together - building a relationship with your VA where trust and understanding increase your confidence.

If you're still not convinced, look at any famous business owner and ask yourself how they got there: If you can't imagine Richard Branson on the phone ordering stationery supplies or Bill Gates on hold for a business insurance quote, there's a reason. Delegation makes dreams possible!

Mistake 3 - Less haste, more speed

If you're someone who expects instant results, you'd better stop reading now. Yes really! There's nothing here for you. A VA can promise many things but overnight perfection just isn't going to happen. In a world where everyone expects immediate results, the simple fact is some things just take a little time.

No one goes on a first date expecting to be married by the end of the night; good relationships take time.

It's the same with working relationships - the best ones grow slowly and last. So how can you get the best from your VA?

Here are the 3 golden rules of investment to get the best out of your VA. Give them information about:

1. Your Business - background, products, services, USP, competitors, values, plans.
2. Your Expectations - attention to detail, confidentiality, professionalism, turnaround times.
3. Your Preferences - communication methods, travel preferences, hotel requirements, budgets, pet hates.

Thinking 'I could have done it quicker myself'?

Well yes you probably could the first time or even the second.

However the next time you won't have to do it at all. Think how much time that will save!

Mistake 4 – Back to basics

So when it comes to delegating, can you guess the one simple mistake you can easily avoid? Mmm thought not! You see, it's so easy to over complicate everything these days that we often overlook the basics. Anyone can delegate. After all it's not hard. Delegating well however is a whole different story! Imagine you're in need of a hotel for a business trip.

You call your VA 'Book me a hotel for tomorrow night in London' Job done. Delegated. Off your radar. Until you arrive at 9pm and find you're in a broom cupboard at the wrong end of town and they don't even serve food that late. You could have got better, for less and with loyalty points on your favourite hotel chain's card. Except you forgot to tell your VA all the information. The one simple mistake.

So how can you delegate better next time? Follow our 3-point plan:

1. Be clear and specific - if you want a double bed and a cooked breakfast, tell your VA. If you need parking or a quiet room or access to a gym, make sure you let them know. A good VA works hard to please their clients but nobody's a mind reader!
2. Expect questions - a good VA will ask relevant questions to make sure they get it right, so see this as a positive - in fact, worry if they never ask you any. Making sure they understand your needs is the key to a successful relationship. Tell them your travel preferences properly the first time and they'll know for any future bookings - saving you both time and money.
3. Give your VA access to your systems and accounts - just think how much time you'd save if travel invoices were saved directly into your Dropbox accounts folder or your travel bookings and references added to your diary. Adding these additional small jobs can really streamline your systems and make life easier.

The result? You're now delegating like an expert!

Mistake 5 – Take it from Radiohead

So you've discovered that good delegation achieves results and you're happily working with your VA. The perfect end to the story? Not quite! It's easy to feel so liberated by this new way of working that you overlook one key fact. The bill.

You've spent two month's budget in one, you can't afford the next month and you're back to square one. Juggling and struggling on your own again. So how can you avoid this classic mistake, and to quote Radiohead, make sure you have 'no alarms and no surprises'?

1. Never leave your budget open ended - a good VA company will ask you to set a budget or a maximum weekly/monthly amount. This is your safety net.
2. Prioritise the key tasks that you need doing - it's easy to just work down your list but ranking tasks by deadline, importance or the time involved ensures the most critical jobs get completed, helping you most.
3. Monitor ongoing tasks - if it's hard to know how long a task might take, ask your VA to come back to you to discuss it after a set period of time. You can then make a call on how it's going, whether to let them carry on or if you'd rather finish it yourself.

Easy when you know how and the secret to a long lasting, and affordable, relationship with your VA!

Mistake 6 – Do you have the gift of the gab?

Could you talk for Britain or are you more the silent type? More importantly, have you even analysed your own communication style? Stop for a minute and think about your preferences. Text? email? a quick call? Are you someone who wants updating after every step of a job, or happy to wait for a weekly review?

Our top 3 tips for successful communication are:

1. Clarity - tell your VA how you want them to get in touch, how often and when not to disturb you. If you want to empower them to make decisions, that's great but if not, make it clear that you expect them to check back for guidance.
2. Responsiveness - projects almost always need some clarification or decisions along the way so make yourself available. There are some things only you will know!
3. H.O.T - Dan Oswald's great acronym is easy to remember. Communication should be **H**onest, **O**pen and **T**wo way!

Mistake 7 – Are you listening?

So let's think about feedback - want to hear some? I think you're doing great! So that's our feedback but now back to you: when did you last ask anyone else for any? Who? Well start with your VA!

Top questions to ask include:

1. Do they have access to everything they need to do their job?
2. Is there anything you could do that could make them work more efficiently or support you better?
3. Can they see any ways to do jobs quicker, better or cheaper?

And don't stop there! Get feedback on your VA too: ask colleagues, suppliers and even clients if they were dealt with professionally, promptly and politely.

So there you have it - our 7 mistakes to avoid. You're now ready to go to work and put it into practice and I'm sure you're convinced that a VA is the way forward.

Hurrah! I knew you'd see the benefits but now let's deal with the big question on your mind: Where do I start? Fear not - help is at hand. I'm not going to abandon you now when you've come so far.

Here's a handy recap of some of my top tips:

1. Most tasks can be outsourced - go through your to-do list and think about which ones you could delegate now.
2. For longer term or complicated tasks, invest time upfront with your VA to build the knowledge of your business and a good relationship that will lead to cost savings long term.
3. Start small to establish trust, give your VA the information they need and track your projects to see they're going to plan.

So if you'd like to get everything ticked off your to-do list, give call us on 0191 666 7890 or drop an email to info@sage-va.co.uk.

We look forward to helping your business thrive.