



Episode 63
Working with a VA for
Interior Designers



**Mirjam: [00:00]**

Welcome to Designer discussions with Jason, Mirjam and Maria. Today we're talking about role of Virtual Assistant in Business development.

Intro: [00:08]

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Jason: (00:46)

VA's is one of the topics that I hear a lot from designers, especially the designers that are one man or one woman shops that may need help, but they are not at the point where they can hire someone full time, but they need assistance. And so VAS are usually the way that they want to go, but they ask, okay, so what do I need to look out for? First thing I would say is that you need to have the job priorities in place. So you need to know exactly what you want the VA to do, because if you do not, you're going to waste their time and waste your money. So you need to have clear job descriptions and a clear job outline of what you need the VA to do, and if you can iron out what those job duties are, and then the time frame that you believe this should be able to be done in. So do you need them 10 hours a week? Do you need them 20 hours a week? How long do you need them? So now when you go out searching for VA's, you have in your mind, okay, I'm going to spend X amount for 20 hours a week.



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Mirjam: (03:46)

I couldn't agree more with you, Jason. And I'm somewhat still going through this because I hired a VA. Well, it's probably going on three months, and I still haven't ironed out everything exactly how I'd like it. And one thing I want to add to it, you said, is like, they come in not knowing anything about your systems and procedures. So having SOP like, standard operating procedures or tutorials in place that show them how you want things done, and it's super crucial. And I failed miserably on that front because to me, I've been doing it for so long, so many things seem obvious, but if somebody comes into your business, it may not be obvious at all. And so you really have to lay it out step by step to make it easy for them. And you also have to make sure that they have access to all the different programs and systems that you're using, which actually took me a long time to just get that set up and make sure it's working flawlessly. And I'm not a fan of systems and procedures, but it's absolutely crucial that you have it in place.

Jason: (05:07)

I couldn't agree more with the policies and procedures, having those in place. What I would also say, take a step back and really look at what you're asking them to do, because what Miriam just said, nine times out of ten, whatever you're asking them to do is second nature to you. So it's easy to do. You will believe you wouldn't have to train or do anything on it because you know how to do it so easily. So why would you have to teach anybody else? But any task what you want to do, you want to either write it down or do a video. What I found is you can even use like, a program like Loom, which is actually a free program where you can screen record video and walk them step by step over all of your processes. So whatever you're going to ask them to do, do a Loom video just to show them this is the steps that you need to take to do XYZ. That way there's no ambiguity. There's not anything that they can misconstrue or say. What I thought you meant, they could just rewatch the video if they're unsure.



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**Jason: (06:17)**

One of the hardest things I found with designers is they have a hard time letting go. So once they hand over a task, they want to micromanage it. Because they're so used to doing it their way and having it done in a certain amount of time, they have a hard time letting go. One of the hardest things that you have to do and I had this happen to me. Like I said, everything we're talking about, I'm saying this because it happened to me too, is once you hand off a task, make sure a like I said, you've explained it completely. So you have either a Loon video or you have it written down, or you have a policy and procedure in there to explain it. Go over with them to make sure they know how. Let them try it out one or two times on their own to see but once you're comfortable, they're comfortable. Let it go. Seriously, let it go. One of the reasons you're hiring a VA is to free up your time to do other things. And what I like to say, you're freeing up your time to do income producing activities, what I like to call IPA. You need to free up your time to do income producing activity. So if you hire a VA, once they have the task down and you're comfortable with that, they're comfortable. Let it go. Unless the issue happens, you hire whoever the individual it is to do a job. Let them do their job. So you could focus your time on IPA income producing activities that are help grow your business. That's one of the things. And I'm saying this I had this for about two months. I had a hard time letting go. So I'm saying this to all the designers out there, let it go. Move on. Focus your time on other things that help grow your business.

Maria: (08:07)

I feel like Jason's going to bust out some of that Elsa stuff from that what is that Disney movie called? Jason, you got two little girls. What is it?

Jason: (08:16)

Oh, you talk about frozen.

Maria: (08:18)

Oh. Frozen? Yeah. Because Jason like, let it go. Let it go.



Maria: (08:24)

Okay, so next, I do want to mention there's a quick and easy way to help manage your VA and keep you on top of things and organized. And it is a free software program out there called Trello. If you are not currently using Trello boards, there are lots of videos online and tutorials on how to use Trello. But you can simply set it up where you use the cabin boards, where each column is a phase of the project, and you can put a task on the board and as that slides across through the columns of its progress, you can be notified via email what is happening on the work that your VA is performing for you. And at a glance, you can just see what's been done. Plus you can have those SOPs located there. So even if you have to go from one VA to another, you've already set up for success, even with the next person who works for you. So I highly recommend looking at Trello and using that as one of your tools to help with project management when you're working with a VA, because keep in mind, you possibly will be working with someone whose business hours are going to be different than yours. And so that's one of the biggest barriers you're going to have to overcome. That's why a lot of the comments and statements that Jason and Miriam had is that you're going to need to have everything very organized and very clear on how you want to have things taken care of. But more importantly, you're going to also have to understand that you're going to wake up in the morning and have to address things that were being done while you were sleeping. So it's going to be great. You're going to have way more stuff done. It's going to be like you have two of you and that you're working 24 hours a day. So I definitely think everybody should look at the opportunity to take on a VA. But just keep in mind, you are going to have to do some pre work to make that a success.



Mirjam: (11:24)

And I agree that is a challenge, especially because you're going to have to put in work, too, because I'm working through this right now. Because if my VA produces something, then I have to review it and make sure it's okay. So it's not like the burdens completely off of you. But it is your job to help the VA do their job because they need your direction and they need your feedback in order to move forward. So that does take some time. And it's probably something I frankly underestimated a little bit going into this, and I'm sure it'll get less overtime, but you have to be willing to put in the work to make them successful.

Jason: (12:22)

Lastly, what I'll say is once you hire a VA and you head through all this, what you want to do is document the process. Because what happens is if you ever plan to hire other VA's or you ever plan to hire other employees. This may be the start of your policies and procedures. So you want to document the process so you know everything that's happened on the good side and the bad side, so you know where you need to make changes in the future. So document the process and that will help you and your VA long term. We hope all this has helped you out and if you have any questions at all, feel free to reach out to us and we hope to see you all here next week on Designer Discussions.

Outro: (13:31)

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Designer Discussions. What was your takeaway care to share your thoughts and tag Jason, Maria and Mirjam on social media. You can find them on on all platforms@designerdiscussions.com. Don't forget to like, subscribe and leave a review or comment for this episode. From wherever you are listening.



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