

VACS in the Hats

by Melanie O’Kane

This article is the property of Melanie O’Kane. You may not copy, redistribute or otherwise use this article without the express written permission of Melanie O’Kane. Copyright violators will be prosecuted to the fullest. Contact Melanie O’Kane at melanie@madtyping.com.

The time has come. The time is now for you to think about subcontracting your services. But how? How do you attract a client like that? A fellow VA who wears so many hats? Why – speak to their value of time, of course. They are no different than what they purport. Their clients can’t do it all and neither can they, those funny-hatwearing, overworked VAs. So come one, come all. Come to the How-to-be-a-good-subcontractor Hall. And learn the many ways to attract, those overworked VAs, who wear so many hats.

Your Virtual Assistant Clients (VACs) really aren’t that different than your other clients. They are customers, after all. But because you are subcontracting with a colleague, there are some subtle nuances you should be aware of to ensure these business relationships are successful.

Keep it professional. A VA client deserves the same respect and professionalism as a non-VA client. Even if you painted your VAC’s toenails at the last IVAA Summit, all of that “personal stuff” should take a back seat to your primary purpose as a service provider, which is to process exceptional, timely projects in a cost-effective manner.



Sub fee or no sub fee, that is the question. Although it is an accepted practice for subcontractor VAs to charge a lower (subcontractor) fee, it may not always be appropriate. For instance, a lower fee would be in order if you were performing tasks that the VAC already offers. If the VAC can do it but is delegating the task to you instead, a lower fee would be in order. However, if the outsourced task is one that the VAC does not provide, charging your normal rate would be appropriate. These arrangements should be discussed, agreed upon, and documented in the contract prior to any work taking place.

Be reasonable when accepting projects. Your meat and potatoes probably come from clients with whom you’ve directly contracted. So don’t overextend your services as a subcontractor if you realistically can’t work it all into your schedule. The lure of making some extra money may displace your good common sense.

Remember, there are only 24 hours in a day!

Be honest about your skills and software capabilities. Again, the lure of making some extra money can be tempting. But your reputation is on the line if you promise something, and then can’t deliver. For instance, if you don’t have a particular software to complete a task, say so. The VAC will respect your honesty and can most likely find another subcontractor who does have that software. This doesn’t mean the VAC will never work with you again. To the contrary, they will see your integrity and find “other” things for you to do that are within your software capabilities.

Be a team player. Because that's exactly what you'll be when you subcontract with a VAC. - The "coach" is the client, the person from whom the projects originate.

- The "quarterback" is the Virtual Assistant Client (VAC). This person has been given the ball and the choice of running with it or passing it to another player.
- The "wide receiver" is the subcontractor (you). The quarterback feels you have the best chance of making a touchdown, so the ball is passed to you with the expectation that you'll not only catch it, but you'll take it across the goal line without being tackled by opposing forces.

Always reply to task requests as quickly as possible. Put yourself in the shoes of your VAC. Imagine delegating a task to your subcontractor via e-mail, but the subcontractor never replies with a "yea" or "nay" message. You, as the VAC, wouldn't really know if the subcontractor got the request and can take on the project. So it's important to reply to all task requests as quickly as possible, which reassures the VAC that everything is set and s/he can move on to task #2, and so on.

Respect the special privacy and non-compete issues when subcontracting with a VAC. After all, their clients might make good clients for your business. That's why many VACs have their VA subcontractors sign non-compete agreements, which are usually worked right into the main subcontractor agreement. Even after the time period of the non-compete clause has expired, think very carefully before you actively try to solicit business away from a VAC you've subcontracted within the past. You know what they say about burning bridges.

Your subcontractor agreement or theirs? This comes up quite often, especially when the VAC has used subcontractors in the past. If the VAC hasn't used a subcontractor previously, make sure you use a sub agreement in lieu of none at all. Always protect yourself, even if you're engaging VAC clients who also are your friends. If you've ever watched those courtroom television programs, you'll know that the majority of the people entering that room are either friends or related. Don't think that your situation is any different from theirs.

Getting paid. Perhaps one of the biggest problems I hear about across the board is the issue of not getting paid according to contracted terms. This can be even trickier when subcontracting with a VAC. To use our earlier analogy, if the coach doesn't pay the quarterback, will the quarterback still be able to pay the wide receiver (you)? Don't be afraid to bring this up during initial conversations with a new VAC. Make sure that you'll get paid, regardless of whether the coach has coughed up the money or not. A good VAC will have enough money on hand to pay their subcontractors whether the coach comes through on time or not.

And for all you long-timers out there who are still trying to do it all yourself, isn't it about time you thought about delegating some things to other VAs, who are just looking for that big break – much in the same way you were when you began your business? The VAC/subcontractor connection is a very unique, rewarding, and productive relationship. Give it a try; you just might be pleasantly surprised!

Melanie O'Kane is the Owner of MAD Typing and Consulting (MADTC), a professional virtual assistance (administrative support) firm headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, serving clients throughout the United States and Canada. MADTC specializes in executive administrative support; proofreading, editing

and formatting; transcription; PDF conversion and form creation; event registration assistance; and e-mail newsletters. To learn more about Melanie and MADTC, visit her online at <http://www.madtyping.com>.