

Virtual PA ... How did I ever manage without one?

Once upon a time, every successful manager had a Personal Assistant, so it seemed to me. Back in the 1990s, when I worked for IBM, managers had an air of calm effectiveness about them – making important decisions, achieving goals and spending time with their staff – without breaking sweat.

Nowadays, we all seem to be rushing around doing a-million-and-one things, and I'm not sure how much is achieved as a result. So, what's changed?

Sticking with the IBM story ... By my recollection, the workplace started to change in the recession of the early '90s. IBM made the biggest corporate loss in history and started shedding staff for the first time. All of a sudden cherished PAs were replaced by Secretarial Groups providing support to 4-5 Managers. This was a big deal at the time, and it turned out to be the thin end of the wedge....



Self-Sufficiency Rules, Okay?

Now, with only a part-available Secretary, the effective manager couldn't rely on getting the same service. He had to learn how to do many things that his secretary once did. Technology enabled that – and being an IBMer, there was no excuse not to get stuck-in – and the more you relied on yourself the less you relied on your Secretary.

In the consultancy side of the business, we were full-on self-sufficient and working “in the field” meant we had to be – it was do or die. We even encouraged clients to follow our example ... after all, this was modern management at work.

There was a common belief that this was “more efficient”, but in reality the manager had less time for decision-making, achieving goals and tending to staff because they were doing more admin is this ringing any bells yet?

So, as time moved on, we became used to our new world. We prided ourselves on being self-sufficient, showed off our newfound IT skills and believed we were part of a “new breed of effective professionals and managers”. We worked extra hard and put in long hours - the family inevitably suffered – but we soldiered-on, because there was light at the end of the tunnel.... so we thought.

As it turned out, there was just more toil. We blamed the lack of time on technology – no quiet time, always available, too many interruptions. We went on time management courses to get a grip, learn how to cope with “information overload – the new skill for the Millennium – but the simple fact was, we just needed some help.

I see many small business owners running the same race today. They have the technology, the laptop and Blackberry, trying to do it all themselves. But, they just need some help too.



The Return of the PA

It seems we're coming around full circle. People are starting to realise that being self-sufficient is great in an emergency, but doing your own admin stops you doing the important work like selling and customer-facing work – in short, generating income. I realised this when I met an experienced PA and started receiving some help for the first time a few years ago. I didn't realise how much I needed help until I had it – perhaps this is true for you too?

When you analyse it, people first look for help with handling telephone calls - a real person to take messages whilst you're doing "real work." In reality, always a different person, not understanding your business (or you), just taking messages and not adding value ... these are all reasons why business people are increasingly looking to Personal Assistants again.

The problem is full time PAs are expensive. Salaries, employment costs, office equipment - not to mention management hassle – are off-putting. The solution, at least in part, is technology ... the baddy, turned hero. Fast internet, voice over IP telephony, cheap PCs and printer/scanner/copiers and low cost collaboration mean your PA doesn't have to sit outside your office door anymore!

Looking for a PA today ... try a different lens.

Virtual PAs Have Arrived!

Modern technology allows most of the traditional PA activities to be conducted over the internet. Apart from making refreshments and welcoming guests, practically everything else can be done remotely. And I mean remotely, in fact, from anywhere-to-anywhere in the world at no extra cost.

My PA can do an astonishing array of things "virtually" ... more than I would have imagined:

- **Telephone calls** ... Dealing with enquiries, taking orders, sorting out problems
- **Typing reports** ... Digital dictation allows her to use typists all over the world
- **Personal help** ... Managing my diary, emails, travel, events and expenses
- **General admin.** ... Post, marketing, research, purchasing... the list goes on.

If you're over-stretched and in need of help, I suggest you consider this new phenomenon of getting yourself a PA, but take a look at the new alternative first – **the Virtual PA**.

And, if all you really need to employ someone for is tea and handshakes, it's the best argument I've heard for self-sufficiency this Century! You can leave the rest to your virtual PA.

If you would like to find out more about Office Lifeline's [Virtual PA Services](#), you can contact me on 01926 659 120 or via email at denis@office-lifeline.co.uk

About the author

Denis Pelych is a professional Management Consultant specialising in e-business technology and practice. He spent many years with IBM Consulting Group and went on to establish [The National B2B Centre](#) at Warwick University. He is now a Director of [Viretec Consulting](#) and [Virtual HQ Solutions](#), and both businesses help people to exploit IT and the internet to the full.

