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VIRTUAL ASSISTANT INTERVIEW

Susan Brady, Ratoath Co. Meath, Ireland

Lisa Melton

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In finding a person to interview for this assignment I went online and searched for virtual assistants through the online search engine. In doing so I came upon a Website at www.virtualassistant.ie and simply clicked on the contact us link; there I sent an e-mail for a request for interview.

I received a reply from Susan Brady, a virtual assistant, who lives in Ireland. I ask the following questions and she responded to each question quickly. I was ask to send her a copy of my report, in order for her to put it on her Website for future virtual assistants to view:

- 1.) How did you become a virtual assistant?
 - a. I started my own business March 07, after leaving a full-time job as an Ebusiness manager at Corporate Express Ireland. I wanted to try out working for myself, as my daughter was 11 months old at the time and working full-time no longer suited me.
- 2.) What type of education and experience did you have that prepared you for this position?
 - a. I have a degree in international marketing and languages. I have studied Web design (html), and I have a post graduate diploma in journalism and media.
- 3.) What personal qualities are necessary in order to be successful?
 - a. I think you need to have a “can do” attitude and be prepared for working on your own. I think the risk of going into business for oneself doesn’t suit everyone; most people who approach me via my Website are interested in me giving them employment; when VA’s work independently and have their own business. So for that reason, I feel you need an entrepreneurial streak to take on that element of risk.
- 4.) Where is your workstation located? What equipment do you have? What software do you use?

- a. I work from my home in Ratoath Co. Meath, Ireland—about 60-70% of my work is based at home while 30-40% is spent visiting my clients.
 - b. I have a Dell Inspiron 6000 although I'm about to upgrade to a Dell M1330. I also have an Asus E Mini-laptop, a combined printer and copier (Dell) as well as a separate Canon scanner.
 - c. I use Windows 2000—the office package and the Adobe Creative Suite.
- 5.) What do you find the most challenging about your work?
- a. When you start your own business all decisions are down to you. I came from a medium-sized company with an IT, Sales, Marketing, and Accounting Department, but when you start your own company you take on all these roles yourself. To begin with it can be difficult as you don't have these teams of people around you to refer to on a daily basis. However, after the initial discomfort with this situation, I find it liberating to be completely in control of the direction my business takes and for that reason I would never go back to full-time work. The rewards for working as a VA far outweigh any negatives. I now have more time with my daughter and my husband, a healthy income (higher than in my previous full-time career), a less stressful work environment, and a fulfilling career that gives me the best work/life balance I could ask for.
- 6.) What tips would you give a potential virtual assistant?
- a. Start saving—build up a nest egg of at least three months wages, as things may be slow when you start your business. Promote yourself locally by printing up flyers and distributing them on notice boards around your local community. Small businesses require the most help and many are very willing to work long-term with a competent skilled VA. Be prepared to do some traveling to visit clients. It is my experience in Ireland that VA work is not completely virtual—there is quite an element 30-40% of my time is spent with customers having meetings. These meetings help build a relationship between you and your client and help ensure that these clients stay with you for the long-term rather than for one-off project. If you have children you will need some childcare to cover visiting clients.
- 7.) Would having a certification in MVA/PVA make a difference in your job? How?
- a. Not at the moment, the qualifications would not be that well known in Ireland and I have to say that if you have the skills and background that you will get business based on standard University and College qualifications.
- 8.) What were your reasons for becoming a virtual assistant?

- a. I had returned to work full-time after having my baby daughter and decided that the stresses of my job and the long hours made me feel that a change was necessary. I thought about working part-time and then I heard of the idea of VA. I set up my own Website and left the company. I had savings so I was in good position to start. I became a virtual assistant because I felt that I couldn't continue in my existing job; however I am now very happy to have a successful thriving business and hope to expand and enable other VAs to get started in this new industry.

From what I have learned through this interview, a person who is considering becoming a virtual assistant has to be a independent, determined person, who has the experience to show their clients that they are perfectly capable of doing the task they are ask to do and finish it within the time needed. This person would also have to make sure they are ready to apply themselves to this type of job through financial planning, space planning, and equipment and software planning. This is not the type of job a person could just decide to do without experience and a lot of researching themselves as well as the aspects of the job. So before considering this path as a career, ask yourself this question, "Can I make it on my own?"