

# Core Competencies for Emerging VAs (Written Second Edition) Alliance for Virtual Businesses Core Competency Committee

Oftentimes the need to subcontract projects to other VAs becomes a desire and necessity for the busy VA. The collective experiences of many busy VAs are varied from very pleased to extremely dissatisfied. After Dale Noles of *Virtual Accuracy Companies* and Sharon Williams of *The 24 Hour Secretary* put their minds together regarding similar negative experiences of subcontracting to other VAs, an idea was born. That idea grew from a concept to reality over the course of a year and a half.

Believing that neither Sharon, principal of the Alliance for Virtual Businesses, nor Dale, President of the Core Competencies Committee, have all the answers, they decided to poll the collective VA Communities with a question, **"If there were standards / requirements an individual had to meet before they could start a Virtual Assistant business, what do you think they should be and why?"**

The results of this question were staggering to say the least. Well over 250 Virtual Assistants from around the globe responded. Some responses were angry, others were incomprehensible, but most provided very enlightened feedback. So, Sharon and Dale compiled the responses into a single document that spanned 80 pages and began the process of combining and organizing the list to a more manageable size.

The results of the compilation were whittled down to four pages of a very descriptive "Core Competencies" list. Participants from numerous countries volunteered to be on the committee created by Sharon and Dale to help structure and support this list of competencies during the 2006 OIVAC conference call on "Where Do We Go From Here?" This group got together and began the long and tedious process of evaluating and fine tuning. In an effort to help expedite this daunting task, one of the committee volunteers, Cheryl Callighan, was asked to serve as Vice-President on the committee.

The committee diligently worked to carefully scrutinize and review these competencies so the end result was indicative of the views of all the VAs represented by the "Core Competencies for Emerging VAs (First Edition)". When they got to the point of having a solid list that all agreed on, they sent this information to 17 Virtual Assistant Training Organizations to ask for feedback.

The committee took the responses from the Virtual Assistant Training Organizations and went through them much like the initial compiled list from the individual Virtual Assistants.

They believe this document called the "Core Competencies for Emerging VAs (Second Edition)" will serve as a guideline for prospective VAs considering opening a Virtual Assistant business. The intent is not to limit a prospective VA from starting a VA business, but rather to indicate the core competencies any VA should exhibit when operating a business and working with clients.

The "Core Competencies for Emerging VAs (Second Edition)" consists of five core elements, **Professional Skills, Personal Skills, People Skills, Education** and **Office Standards**. Each core element is broken down to include the essential ingredients originally provided by the 250 plus VAs and the additions of the 17 Virtual Assistant Training Organizations.

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The core element of **Professional Skills** contains numerous components, making this element the driving force of any Virtual Assistant business. Competent VAs possess the drive and determination to help their clients succeed; understand their ideal client and how their strengths can greatly improve the client's life and business; put their client first by being resourceful in finding appropriate solutions for the client, whether those solutions include the VA or not; and are a good fit for their client.

**Collaboration** is another important component in the **Professional Skills** category. It essentially means the VA possesses the ability to work as part of a team and to effectively contribute solutions, offer suggestions and make recommendations to problems the client may experience.

In any situation, **Communication** is a necessary **Professional Skill**. It includes excellent customer service, verbal, non verbal and written communication skills. Competent communicators have the ability to drive a discussion to a positive outcome and possess excellent listening skills. These essentials will assist a VA to stay in business for a long time.

Another trait of a competent and successful VA is the ability to accept and/or delegate any given task or assignment effectively and wisely.

**Established Productivity** is a competency that shows the quality of the VA's work and often includes client testimonials and/or having verifiable references to provide when asked.

Another core competency is **Executive Presence**: the ability to be and act professionally in all circumstances. This includes dressing professionally along with any materials that may be displayed for the public to view.

Having a **Professional Attitude and Aptitude** for business is critical for a VA's business success. VAs should have a basic understanding of business operation and budgeting. They should: know how to create a business and marketing plan; have a basic understanding of bookkeeping; have the ability to maintain accurate records; utilize contracts and agreements; and manage time effectively.

Competent VAs exhibit outstanding **Professional Integrity**. They adhere to a set of ethics binding on their conscience, and admit to and correct mistakes. They outsource or refer a client who requires services they lack the skills to provide and never knowingly procure another VA's client or subcontracted client. They never discuss subcontracted rates with a contractor's client. VAs respect the copyrights of colleagues and others' intellectual property. In essence they avoid plagiarism, software piracy, etc. Additionally the competent VA upholds strict client and colleague confidentiality.

The core element of **Personal Skills** is the root of a VA business. A high level of proficiency in the services of their chosen niche, good organization skills, good spelling, grammar and punctuation skills and a basic understanding of web and computer technology are essential.

**People Skills**, another core element, includes the ability to be articulate, respectful, tactful, confident and passionate.

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The core element of **Education** is broken down into two sections: **Structured Education** and **Education of the Marketplace**. A new VA should have five years of relevant work experience or have completed a recognized virtual assistant training program. They possess basic office skills, are proficient with software programs they use, and are proficient with email, the Internet and instant messaging (IM) programs. A competent and successful VA constantly pursues education for their professional development. **Education of the Marketplace** includes sharing their knowledge with the VA community and a willingness to educate the public.

The core element of **Office Standards** relates to the needs of any virtual office. The minimum office set up a VA needs to thrive includes a reliable computer, an Internet connection, a backup system, a phone, currently accepted and widely used business software programs or a program suite that their clients use, and a reliable antivirus software program.

The five Core Elements have been assembled with the global participation and feedback of over 250 VAs and 17 virtual assistant training organizations. It is not an exclusive list to starting a Virtual Assistant business. It is the combined expectations of what those VAs and organizations believe clients are looking for when searching for the perfect VA. Even if a VA does not have each of these "Core Competencies" they are still able to operate a VA business.

To see the list of Core Competencies or to find out more about the Core Competencies Committee, visit

[http://allianceforvirtualbiz.com/resources/education/core\\_competencies\\_for\\_emerging\\_vas.html](http://allianceforvirtualbiz.com/resources/education/core_competencies_for_emerging_vas.html).