

JAMES SCHRAMKO



Little Known Facts About Hiring and Working with Virtual Assistants in the Philippines - FAQ

Looking to hire Filipinos for your online business? Got questions? Listen in as James speaks from 10 years with his own team of six Filipino VAs.



James Schramko

James: James Schramko here and welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 976. Today, we're tackling the topic of Philippine-based virtual assistants. Now you may recall, I've done a previous episode on this topic about [hiring a team from the Philippines](#). And we'll link to that from our show notes on the podcast.

But today, I want to answer some questions that got put to me on social media. I let people know I was going to record this episode, and I asked, What are your questions around hiring and leading a team in the Philippines? So I'm going to address each of the questions, and I'm going to give you the answers.

Now in preparation for this episode, I actually met with my team on our regular team meeting, which we do once a week, and I put all the questions to the team, and we discussed these together. So this isn't just my opinion today. This is a collection of experience from my own experience, our team's experience. And just for reference, most of my team have been working with me for between 10 to 12 years.

And also, it's experience I've gained from having a business with my wife, which actually [recruits virtual assistants in the Philippines](#). So in my own business, I've hired over 65 people. In the recruitment business, we've hired hundreds of businesses. And then of course, my own team who work on this particular podcast, have got strong feedback, experiences, and their opinion is very relevant.

So I feel like we're coming from a place of understanding and hopefully, we're going to lift the cloud a bit on some of the questions that we're getting from you out there in business land, wanting to know how to make this work. So here we go. Episode 976.

High-level, high-trust tasks

Question was, how high-level tasks can you actually trust them with? So from my experience, you can trust your Philippine team with a very high level of task, with the appropriate time and training and making sure that you've built a good connection. So my own team members, for example, they're doing high-level tasks like bookkeeping, they're doing website stuff, they're sending out my emails.

Now, I would consider that these are high-trust tasks. So I'm particularly addressing the trust aspect here. When you've been working with your team for a while, you can trust them. As a nation, the Philippines, in general, is a very religious nation, they're predominantly Catholics, they're a very family-oriented nation. So they have good values instilled within them. And I've found them to be, for the most part, very caring, and to have a good values basis.

Now, I would say with any employee, of course, you've got to look out for things like fraud with people who aren't sort of putting in the effort that you would hope that they would put in. So we've put in a value system in our business. We have value drivers that we hire, train, and even in some cases early on, especially when we had 65 people, occasionally, we'll exit someone for those values.

So the values that we established were communication, integrity, Ninja good. So this sort of helped us understand how to operate within our business. So over time, I've been able to trust my team with very sensitive details, logins, passwords, purchasing things with credit cards, etc. If you just started out with someone, I wouldn't be handing over those things straightaway. But over time, I absolutely believe you can trust your team.

And high level depends on how high you want to go. I think later on in this episode, we're probably going to break down the types of tasks that you would put to the Philippines and the types of tasks that you might look elsewhere for.

Virtual assistant versus executive assistant

How do you define a virtual assistant versus an executive assistant? Well, a virtual assistant, I would define as someone who's not in your physical presence, so that's the virtual aspect of it. And they're assisting, they're doing the things that you need done. Now, in the case of where we had 65 people, I actually had teams, and I had team leaders, and the team leaders reported to me. I had five or six team leaders.

And I actually had, one of my virtual assistants was effectively being my executive assistant, helping me interface with the team leaders, helping me manage travel, helping me respond to inquiries, etc., very much in the same way that someone would do if they were sitting beside me in an office. So I think it's up to you. How far do you want to go with this, and what do you want those people to be doing in your organization?

How much overseeing will you do?

How much oversight do you expect of a Filipino virtual assistant versus a US versus a European virtual assistant? I would say it's probably the same. I wouldn't say there's much of a differentiator. I think this is a universal leadership thing, that oversight will be a factor of what expectations have been set from you, how clearly your team member understands the expectations, and then if those expectations are being met.

So it might be determined by the framework you have in place, so that you can check in on the deliverables. It might be the cadence that you've set for your business, like how quickly you expect things to be done. It might be how you organize or structure your processes to give you some visibility.

For example, my team check in when they're working in the morning, they just put a little post of what they're up to. And then they usually check in in the evening, what they did for the day. That gives me at a glance, in a tool like [Slack](#), the ability to see what's happening in my business without having to get on a telephone or to do Zoom calls with them and ask them what they're doing.

We're also able to meet once a week. It takes about 10 to 12 minutes to meet once a week. And that's just where we can get on the same page where we can communicate the overall health of the business, where we can hear what people are up to, and if they've got challenges, or they need some assistance, or we need to pull some resources.

Or if we want to discuss general items, like are we using certain software tools anymore? What our current sort of program is? What we're trying to get achieved over the next week or two? Those sorts of things. That's what a weekly meeting is useful for, but that's about it. But in terms of oversight, I am not micromanaging my team.



I think that's crazy to hire people and then get in their face. You might be one of those people who says, Well, it's just quicker if I do it myself. Well, if you're a micromanager, you might as well do it yourself.

Weather and infrastructure

What are some things to take into consideration with weather and infrastructure risks? Well, this one really depends on where your team is. It's kind of misleading to say, Well, my team member is in the Philippines. Like, that is a very general statement. I would then say, whereabouts in the Philippines? And nine times out of 10, a business owner will say, I don't know.

Sometimes they'll know, okay, well, they're in Cebu, or they're near Manila. But it's actually pretty rare. I would say if you're going to hire in the Philippines, there will be certain regions that are more sensitive to weather, and to electricity, shutdowns, etc.

So if you're hiring people from around that Manila built-up area, then you're going to have less sensitivity to weather events. And you're going to have more availability of power and infrastructure. Especially if a local area goes down, often people can go to the mall, and they can use a Starbucks Wi Fi or something. And I've had my team members do that from time to time.

Also, according to my team members, it's very easy to get multiple internet connections these days. You can have a couple of different providers, you can have your telephone, which you can tether. You can get a little portable modem for backup. So there's lots of things you could do as an employer, and your team members can also do to have that preparedness.

The warning sign, the red flag is if you're having weather events, and you don't hear from your team, it might be that they don't want to do the work, because it's actually pretty easy for most people, most of the time, to get cell network and to be able to send an SMS to someone else in the team and a text message, or to call them old school and say, We're having a weather event or an electricity situation. Can you please let everyone know that I can't do my work right now?

I have a team member who doesn't get electricity for the bulk of the day because she lives in a regional area. And what that means is that she does most of her work at nighttime when the electricity is on. So when the electricity comes on, she does her work in that period. And so that's actually worked out pretty well. This team member has been with me for 10 years, and it hasn't been an issue.

In fact, when we're talking about this in the meeting, I wasn't even aware that they were out of electricity for most of the days, but it doesn't matter because I don't demand people be working at a particular time in my business. I'm more interested in getting a result for the pay. So we have a little mantra, a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Maybe that's an Aussie thing.

But if I'm paying the money, I just want the work to be done. How it's done is really up to the team member. So if you're dealing with people who are further up the main island, or further down the main island, or in the lower regions of the Philippines, you may have a lot more issues, and the smaller the town you go, the smaller regional areas, there are other factors to consider.

Yes, the infrastructure might not be as good. The weather events may be more extreme. You also may find as you get further away from the regions, the type of candidate you get may not be the same. I'll give you an example. A lot of the people we source from my wife's business, [VisionFind.com](https://www.visionfind.com), are coming from call centers, and a lot of them have been working near Manila.

So they're dealing with a pretty busy culture, they're very fluent in English, they're used to working and living in built-up areas. So the infrastructure is pretty good. Notably, they probably have a slightly higher cost of living, so you may need to pay a little more to be competitive for that type of candidate. But you'll probably get a better kind of candidate.

How good are they at critical thinking?

Is it true about the stereotype, Filipino workers don't have good critical thinking skills? Whew, this one got a bit of a cool reaction with my team. I'll be honest, they found it a little bit offensive. They're just normal people folks, they're just like you and I. They did say that because people go through school and university, and then they used to go into a call center, the default setting is that they're going to be trained to be told what to do. Okay?

So that is true. They are trained to be told what to do. So they're very, very good at following instructions. And this is probably where this question comes from. If you put them in an environment where they are able to think for themselves, and they're required to think for themselves, but you haven't set that up properly, you might be confused about what they're capable of.

That's okay. What I've done is deliberately helped my team come out of that box to unlock them, turn on their critical thinking. You do that by setting up the environment. You say, Hey, you're no longer a caged battery hen in that call center, you're now in an organic, free environment. We want to think, we want to test things, we want to try things.

It's okay to make mistakes, as long as you're doing it with the best interests of our clients and for the business to move forward. We talk about things, use Socratic techniques, ask questions instead of giving answers. Find where they want that structure and where they're happy to sort of stretch into new things.

Not all of them are going to be suited to it. My experience has been the ones who have traveled more, or have been away from corporate a little bit longer, tend to develop really good critical thinking skills. So I believe it's possible. I've seen it, my team are great thinkers. They often come to me with suggestions.

They say, Hey, I've just noticed this, these sorts of videos seem to go better with this topic. Or I saw that we had these sequences, but I think we can roll three of them up into just one and achieve the same result. These are examples of critical thinking, they're definitely coming from my team.

I think the Filipinos are great critical thinkers as long as you set up that environment, and you have a program or a process for developing them. So if you're getting someone straight from an office or a call center, you need to work on that. Give them encouragement, give them a great environment.

Finding particular experience

How does one find a virtual assistant who has particular industry experience, i.e. legal or contract drafting skills? The other one I hear about a lot is someone who can run paid ads, someone who does design, someone who builds websites.

The short answer is, I haven't really focused on that. Okay? There's lots of marketplaces, there's jobs boards, there's referrals, there's all the typical places you might do. I have not done that. So I'm not qualified to tell you the answer for this particular one. I do know people who can hire people with skills, but they're actually fairly rare, and there's a lot of downside, okay?

The upside is you get someone with the skill straightaway, you can plug them in. The downside is they're generally not going to last that long, because they're most likely getting work with other people. And they can often command high rates, and they may be taking on multiple employers. Okay, so there's a downside. If you find people on these popular jobs boards, there's a good chance that they're kind of street smart with how it all works, and you're not quite sure what you're getting.

What I do is I pull them out of call centers or places where they're not really looking to work for the kind of clients that I have online, but they have become aware of it, and they now want to do it, and they want to go out of a call center. And they want to come and work for you at home on the computer, and they're happy to learn the skills.

So I went for a longer-term approach. What that means is you build loyalty, they are getting a lot of job satisfaction from getting new experience and new skills. And over time, they become a superpower. And they're really happy in the environment, because you've all worked together for a long time. That's the way I've done it.

So I believe you probably can get people with great skills, I just haven't gone down that path. In fact, there's some skills I don't look to the Philippines for, certain skills like high-level design, high-level paid traffic, search engine optimization strategy. Those sort of things, I will often go to a Western supply. I'll get a Western supplier, Western business, a Western agency.

And this is important, I'll plug them into my business. I'll just create access for them in [Slack](#), and I'll have them collaborating with my team. So they give us the strategy, they give us the thinking behind something, or they give us the words to use on a page if they're a sales copywriter, or they set up campaigns and they ask us for resources like images, creatives, etc.

So I will take the Westerner supply, plug them into my Philippines VA team, and they work in collaboration and concept to get the end result. And that's a great hybrid model. You don't have to find people with an industry experience all the time. If you're in an industry like legal or contract drafting, consider hiring fresh VAs in a batch, like get two, three, four of them, and train them up together.

Now when I used to run Mercedes-Benz dealership, even before that, I was actually a sales manager. And I used to hire two to four salespeople at once. And within two weeks, I could take anyone, an airline pilot, or a student, and I could have them comfortably selling a motor vehicle within two weeks of training, they are actually at a higher level than most professional car sales people, which actually is a pretty low bar. But they were very good.

And so I believe two weeks of good training will get you some fairly decent skills, unless it's something someone has to go to university for, or learn for years upon years upon years. Or if they have to have a natural God-gifted talent, like some of these designers and illustrators. I don't think people can learn some of that stuff. I think you just have it within you, like the best artists are just artists, right? It's inside there, for whatever reason. So not all roles can be trained.

Red flags to watch out for

What are the red-flag, do-not-hire warning signs? I would say if someone doesn't show up for their appointment, or they're late, that would probably be a red flag for me, especially if they didn't communicate it in advance. If you're finding that the basic level of English or comprehension is not that great, or if the hardware is not decent, they will all be potential red flags.

Also a major red flag is if the person they want you to pay is not them. That might mean there's issues with them being able to have a bank account, etc. I haven't heard of that happening very often. But when it does happen, there's usually something going on in the background.

So I've seen a few little things in the past where someone might not actually have a computer so they're trying to do their job interview from an internet cafe, which is where they intend to do all their work, that's probably not practical. I used to feel that having a hardware was essential for having an online job.

So we ask our candidates for a screenshot of their hardware specs, we get an Internet Speed Test, we check for English and comprehension, and for general levels of thinking. And of course, when you have a process like calls or tests that need to be done, if they're not being completed, then that automatically weeds people out right there at the front door.

If they get sick within the first few days, or the first week, that would be a red flag. That would be a common one for a shy culture who can't say to your face, Listen, I don't like you or your job, and I don't want to work here. It's just easy to phone in sick. Okay, so that's probably a sign. They might not like working in your joint.

So I would say that would be a red flag if they don't show up after you hire them, if they're sick very quickly, or they've got a family member sick or whatever. Now this happens a lot. But generally, people work around it, and you may not always find out about it. You might find out about it later. Okay? Why does it happen? I've got my own theories.

I'm going to say probably the diet and the environment is not as healthy as some other places. Like, there's quite a lot of pollution, there's quite a lot of American-style fast food. I would say, you know, unless you educate them a little bit, a lot of people have diabetes, there's a lot of people who have weak immune systems. I don't think they're eating great food, and they're definitely not breathing fresh air in some of these places.

So I would say that's potentially a factor in general health terms, which is one reason that I talk to my team about things like food and exercise, and diet and stuff, we talk about this a fair bit. And also, I provided insurance, like health insurance for my team, which is something you can do. American companies are very familiar with this, because all the American employees are always looking for health care.

In Australia, it's not such a big thing because Australia's got very good health care provided by the government, which of course, we all pay for. But it's kind of like free medical, is the way people consider it. In the Philippines, it's not the case. You really need to have some kind of coverage to be able to get through hospitals, etc.

I found out, I don't know if this is 100 percent true, but I think it is, if you go into hospital, they're going to make sure that you can actually pay them before they let you out. So make sure that you're aware of these things. Most people, generally, if they're working in a VA role, they probably don't have a lot of savings saved up, like pretty much every Western employee, they probably spend about the same amount that they earn. So they're not building a bank. Generally, in the beginning, they're going to have a pretty short runway when there's an emergency or problem. So be aware of those things.

The things you wouldn't hire for

What tasks wouldn't you generally hire for? Anything super specialized, I'm generally going outside. Paid ads, graphic design, SEO strategy, copywriting, these are all things, apps, etc., these are things that I'll go outside the Philippines for. Things that they're very, very good at, would be support. They're great with content wrangling.

So editing, putting words on websites, building the websites. If you've got a great platform, like I use Kleq, there's actually no code with Kleq so that's actually amazingly easy for a VA to learn. But then there's some people who can learn the coding over time, my team have. They can send out emails, they can do your bookkeeping, they can manage your scheduler, they can reply to people after things in your inbox, etc. They can manage your inbox if you want.

So lots of the general stuff that I imagine most small business owners are spending way too much time on. You should definitely not be editing your own podcast, you should definitely not be doing your own bookkeeping, you should definitely not be logging in and updating too much of your website stuff. You shouldn't be doing your emails, you should definitely not be doing your own support. Okay, these are things that Filipinos are amazing at.

Biggest cultural difference from the west

Biggest cultural difference between a Philippines VA and hiring someone in Australia. I'll tell you the one that's the most important. When you hire someone in Australia or America, it's not going to be too long until they rip off your business. I call this the Western way. They basically get to know your business model. They get to see your profit. They get to learn your customers, and eventually, they go and deal directly with your customers, and they take your team with you and your business model and start competing with you.

I've seen this hundreds of times. That is one thing I have not seen in the Philippines. I've not seen the Western way play out. So one thing I love about the Philippines, they're just so loyal and so values-based. They are wanting to support you and for you to be successful, not to rip you off and compete with you. So I love that about the culture.

Other things. When I had US-based supply for my websites, what I found was over time, they got more expensive. And in the end, frankly, when I switched that work to the Philippines, it got done in much quicker time at a much lower cost. So I think there is some kind of competitive threat. So that's something to be mindful of.

A knack for service

Someone asked, how is it the Filipino assistants are the best in terms of communication responsiveness, attentiveness and agreeableness? Look, I mean, that's a lovely thing to say. But I think they're a service-based culture. If you look at where they make their money in the Philippines, it's export labor. Their biggest market is American companies buying their labor, they are very aware of supplying labor.

If you go into hospitals anywhere in the world, if you go on a cruise ship or at the hotels, you're going to find Filipinos everywhere. They're very hospitality and service-oriented, because they've got family values, and they're raised to be polite. So, I know that's a generalization. But my experience is they're very, very friendly, nice people. And they're very, very willing to serve. And they like to please. So that's good.

Where I've had to really tune my team is I've had to stop them from doing things that would just please me because sometimes I needed them to do the things that got us the best result. I'll give you a classic example. When I met with my team one time, I was just sort of looking over someone's shoulder, and I noticed that they were updating a spreadsheet and then flicking across to Basecamp, which is what we were using at the time.

And I said, Hang on a minute. What did you just do then? And they said, Oh, I'm just updating Basecamp. And I said, Before that. They said, Oh I was just in the spreadsheet. And I said, What's the spreadsheet? And they said, Well, that's what we're using to do the work. But we also then put it into Basecamp.

And I said, Why do you put it into Basecamp? And they said, we put it into Basecamp because you want us to put it into Basecamp. And I said, Wait a minute, what do you mean? And they said, Well, we've got Basecamp so we know when you look in that that you want it to be... I said, I've only got Basecamp because that was the tool that we chose as a team to get the job done. But if you find that the spreadsheet is better, let's use a spreadsheet and get rid of Basecamp. So don't do it for me, do it because it's the right thing to do for the business.

And so from then on, we went to Google Docs, and we had 38 people in that team were pretty much running our whole SEO business, which was a million dollars plus per year, \$100,000 a month business out of a Google document. And we ditched Basecamp. Sorry, Basecamp, but you can't compete with the almighty Google.

In any case, it was an interesting discovery. Your team members might sometimes do something to please you, but it's not the ideal thing to do. So once we broke that down, and they now know that it's fine to bring me ideas or whatever that might not please me, but they're the right thing for the business, that's actually what pleases me. Hope that makes sense.

How to be ready for your team

How do you ensure that your business is ready for them, i.e. systems, processes, communication, etc. to understand the difference in the culture to make the experience amazing? This is such a great question. This displays empathy, it displays awareness. You do need to be ready for your team. You can't just hire someone and then put them to the side, give them no training, and then a month or two later decide that you can't afford them anymore, and then get rid of them.

I mean, these are people, they're not cogs in a machine. Your Philippines team members are human beings. When you visit them and meet them and go to their house and share meals with them, etc., and do activities, you realize these are human beings, they're people, right?

So think about it from your point of view. When you joined a business, when you started a job, if you've ever had a job, or you went somewhere, even if you hadn't had a job, if you went to a camp, or you went to university or somewhere and you were new, what did you want to happen? You wanted your orientation to be nice, you wanted people to welcome you, you wanted them to be excited that you're there.

When you bring them in, give them a walkthrough. Like, tell them about your business. Why is the business here? What do you actually do? Who do you serve? What are you hoping to achieve from this new hire? And then in terms of systems, you can build the systems together. You know, in my previous example, where I was saying that my team were using a different system than what we actually had, they were building a better system. And I just had to be aware of it, and for us to get rid of the system that was not the ideal system.

Some people put so much work in recording a whole bunch of stuff and listing everything and putting it everywhere. And they create wikis, which I hate. They got so much stuff that someone comes in and they just lock up and next thing you know, you've got a few sick days, and then you're on to the next VA. Don't do that.

Start together, say, Hey, I don't have systems or processes yet. We don't have a communication style. But I'm so glad you're here, and we're going to develop it together, and I'm going to give you my attention. And I'm going to give you time, and we're going to work through this together. Let's do this today. And then tomorrow, we'll talk about tomorrow, and then a week from now, we'll have made a lot of progress.

And I suggest you fire up Google or something similar and start your standard operating procedures with them. And as you teach them things, let them document it. And then they can do it from then on, or make them a Loom video, or, by all means, give them a procedures manual, if you've already got one.

Even better, give them a buddy, someone else who's already working there who went through the exact same role, and say, Hi, this is your buddy, they're going to take you by the hand and show you everything we do. And then check in with them very, very often.

When you have to let someone go...

How to let go of a VA without feeling bad? Okay, so there might come to a point where you have to let go of a VA. One thing we see with our recruitment agency at [VisionFind.com](https://www.visionfind.com), we have a replacement guarantee. That is, if we find you someone, we check their English, we check their basic skills, that they have a computer and that they have internet connection.

And you've interviewed them, and you've decided or done a test task even, you decided to take them on. If they leave within 30 days, we replace them, because we're pretty confident with our system and our recruitment and the feedback we have and the repeat clients are off the charts. Okay, so there's that.

Sometimes when people leave, it might be your fault, it could be that you're a really bad leader or a manager, or that your company is toxic, or that they had a bad experience or not good onboarding, or you didn't take the time to understand anything about them or where they're from, or even learn a single word of their language, like basic stuff that's just not done. Could be that.

Or maybe it's legit, maybe they're just not performing. They didn't get their expectations met, they're not following the training, you know, these things could happen. You discover something that's terrible, and they have to go. So the way I look at this, just in general, right, no matter where you're hiring from, if someone's moving on, this is how I think about it.



Generally, the situation was often created by the person, by their performance. And I was taught early on, one of these big thick folders behind me on the wall is that you're looking at the behavior of the person, not the person themselves. So address the behaviors.

You say, Look, your performance, the way that you have acted in this role, is not meeting the standard that we set out and talked about, that we provided training on, that we have had revisions on. We're at a point now where it's sustainable, okay? So the time has come now where we're going to make that role for you redundant. And we'll give you appropriate notice, and I'm sorry that it didn't work out, it would have been great for us. It's obviously a setback for us, a setback for you, but I'm going to free you up now to go off and find your dream role somewhere else, just not here.

So think about the behavior. Be open and honest about the situation. Of course, check regulations or laws, if you are hiring in your own country. There can be major problems or challenges around this. If you're hiring in the Philippines, and you're in America, or the UK, or Canada or the USA, there's very little laws around this situation. Like you could say, Sorry, it's not working out. And here's your last pay, you don't need to come to work tomorrow type situation.

It's never good. It doesn't feel good as a human. In most of the cases, it's where the team member hasn't performed, so I can feel better about it because if they had performed, they'd still be there. So they made the choice to leave, not me. All I'm doing is calling it what it is.

Now, if you are not a good business operator, if you haven't had coaching from me and my membership, for example, and you've made terrible mistakes, and you can no longer afford this person, that sucks for them. They might be great, and you've got to let them go. What I found is, it's often good to rehome them.

So if they came from our agency, for example, send them back. They'll get a job straight away. If you've got a friend or whatever, or you're a member of my community, you could put them up in the forum, you could say, Hey, I've got this person. They're brilliant at these things, and I don't have enough work for them, or I'm changing my business model or whatever. Someone will snap them up straight away.

Remember, and this is very important. Your Philippine team member is most likely supporting five or six other people. They're paying for the family member's food bills. They're putting a kid through university, a couple of nieces or nephews. They're probably paying for the accommodation where they're living. They might be supporting a few other people, like paying for medications or hospital bills.

You don't know what's going on unless you go deep, and they probably won't tell you. But rest assured, they're probably the highest income earner in the family. And their role is very important, and they need that income, which is why most Filipino team members will default to safety mode. Safety setting on.

Do whatever it takes not to lose the job. And that means sometimes they won't risk it, they won't make errors, they won't do too much critical thinking because if they do and lose a job, it's game over. So you need to take the safety off. Say, You know what, we're taking the safety mode off, we're playing for real, and we're going to have fun, and we'll break stuff, and it's okay. And you know, this is an exciting place to work.

And they will like, wow, this is exciting, this is fun. They're not going to get that anywhere else. The thing that really stands out for me from having a recruitment agency is just how many bad employers there are. So if you've got people leaving all the time, that's something to think about.



How to manage expectations

How do you manage expectations with a VA? Talk to them, document it, have a list of expectations, here's the expectations we have for your role in the business. And these are the expectations you can have from us. I'll tell you one that's important. You need to pay people on time or early every time.

I've paid my team three or four days early, every single pay, which is twice per month, and I pay them in their own currency in pesos. Since I started having these team members back in 2009, I think, every single pay twice a month since 2009 has been early, never missed it. That's how someone builds rapport and loyalty, right? They don't mind working for me, because they will get paid.

The other thing that I communicate in our team meetings is that we are holding enough cash reserves to make the payments for them for the next few years. So there's no situation where we're going to run aground or run out of money, and their job is at risk. So that, again, takes the safety mode off. We can really play now, we can have fun.

Guarding against data breach

Okay, given the recent data breaches in large corporates, I can presume this is talking about Australia, which has happened a lot lately. A telecommunications provider, a healthcare provider, they've had big data breaches and subsequent ramifications, security and data protection measures, what can you do?

I would recommend, and I have with my own team, I've said let's put on two-factor authentication. Okay, let's all use that. So that if our device gets hacked, so I have no issue about my team. Like, there's no way my team member, who's worked with me for 11 or 12 years, is going to hack my business. It's not going to happen, right?

But someone might hack them, they might get fished, their computer could be stolen, anything could happen. I hope it doesn't. But if it did, we've got two factor authentication. We also use a password management tool, not because I don't trust them, but just because it's much easier to have one password management tool that they can all just click on.

And if someone leaves, as a matter of process, we update the passwords anyway, even though it's probably an extra layer of security. We constantly review software, and we sunset software that we're no longer using, we delete it, and we remove it off our system. So only having things live that need to be live. If they are live, then they're two-factor authentication.

We also do little things like when I travel, I use proxy servers, VPNs, etc. My team use them a lot, because they might want to simulate that they're in Australia, so we don't get locked out of some of the software tools that we use as a team. And we can use a password management system. And of course, build trust over time, so that you know that you can trust your people.

And in the unfortunate event that your data gets hacked or breached, you might want to be able to establish that you've taken fair and reasonable protocols to stop that happening. I'll tell you a story about something that happened to me that sucked. And it's going to come up in a minute, I'm sure.

And by the way, a lot of the data breaches in Australia happened in Australia. So you know, nobody's safe just because of where you live. Probably, the bigger the company, the bigger the target. Little companies like ours, hopefully, are much less of a target for these people.

Why doesn't it work?

Top reasons why it doesn't work out and how to avoid. It's usually a bad leader, a bad manager, or not having a good hiring selection process, like not being clear on the type of person that you feel like you could work with, and not giving them enough training or setting expectations, and leaving it too long.

It only takes two weeks to know if you've got a dud or not, two weeks. In two weeks, like, most people can fake showing up on time for a week. Two weeks is getting a bit of a stretch. You will know within two weeks if you've got serious concerns or questions, because you will have done your training, you will have checked in regularly, you will have set expectations and started getting some evidence that they're coming through. After two weeks, between two weeks and the end of a month, absolutely you would know. Don't hold someone for six months hoping they'll come good. They won't, most likely.

This person said that their experience didn't work out, but they blame me, not the candidate. That's at least honest. And it's very common, so common.

How to pay your team legally

What's the correct way to pay them legally? The rules are a little bit loose on this. So if you're in a country like Australia, or the UK, or America, Canada, etc., generally, your team in the Philippines will probably be viewed as an external contractor, so basically a foreign contractor. And so my understanding is, and I'm not a taxation specialist, I'm not a lawyer, right, so this is not advice.

My own opinion is that they're not going to fall within the Australian situation of payroll tax, superannuation, etc. So you're just making a payment to a contractor overseas, and they deal with their own tax and retirement, etc., and health funds, but I pay my health funds for my team anyway, as I mentioned before.

And so what that situation means is that it's up to you to set a framework. There's lots of ways you can pay your team. You can pay them with Wise, it's formally Transfer Wise. You could do a bank transfer. I still use PayPal, just because I collect quite a lot of money in PayPal. My team all have PayPal, and I like to pay my team in their own currency. PayPal has a feature called mass pay.

One of my team members actually prepares a CSV file, they send it twice per month, about three to four days early, up to five days early, they send me the CSV file, I log into PayPal, I upload it, and hit send, and then the pesos hit my team's account. I pay them twice per month, every month. And if they need the money, they'll withdraw the money from PayPal.

So you've got to allow a day or two for that money to get from their PayPal into their bank account where they can now go and get it from an ATM or use it to buy things like food. Okay, so I would say an appropriate way to pay your team would be twice per month, pay them in pesos, and make sure they get it early. You can't go wrong with those fundamentals.

For shorter onboarding, do this

Best way to go about reducing training and onboarding time with better hiring. Do a test before you hire them, pay them for a test task, that's totally acceptable. If you pay them for tests, you'll have a pretty good indication as to their ability, and then what you've got to work with. When they come on board, give them procedures or give them a person to take them through the training or you do it yourself.

Don't overwhelm them, of course, and give them a realistic stepping stones to move forward through the business. I've found within two weeks someone is in my business is doing a pretty reasonable job. And they've had no experience in our industry whatsoever. And they've become superstars over time.

How much bandwidth can you expect?

What are the limitations and bandwidth, typically, for a Filipino VA, for example, social media, if we supply the content, etc? The main limitations are their natural abilities. So things like design or whatever, there'll be limitations. There'll be limitations in terms of how safety focused they are versus how risk-taking focused they are. And that's mostly a factor of you, the employer.

There'll be limitations in terms of time or availability, in case they get rolling brownouts or electricity setbacks, or if they do get weather-affected, or if they have a family illness, these are things to take into account. Some of those things are not within your control. But a lot of things are, like what region do you hire from? Are you hiring close to the city?

What experience does this person have in their previous role? Were they a team leader of a call center team, for example? Like, almost everyone in my business worked in a call center. And many of them were leadership, they had people under them, so they already demonstrated fantastic ability, and that's why they're so good at support. And that's why they're able to do critical thinking.

So in this case, you need them to extract the media, create shorts, create TikToks, etc. If you show them, they can do it. So all of my media, my podcasts, my videos, everything you're seeing me publish comes from my team. So that's an example. None of my team had experience in social media or shorts or TikTok, or whatever. Like, when they started with me, TikTok probably didn't even exist. So you can train them over time.

The best way to train someone is to show them an A paper. You want someone to write an A paper, show them an A paper. You know, I might show them a video and say, This video is amazing. I want videos like this. Can we do it?

And they said, Yeah, of course we can. And they did.

You'll be amazed what they're capable of over time. Unbelievable. So as long as you train them, or show them good examples, and you give them time, and you hire the right people, yes, I believe you can take that all in house.

The matter of holidays

Let's talk about holidays. This is something really important. They are a very family-based culture. So I would encourage you to give your team Philippines's holidays. They get a lot of holidays. And they even make them up as they go. Like they just add one here or there. Right? There's a website you can go to, and we'll list it in my show notes, that lists all [Philippines's official holidays](#), so you can verify it.

I've just found it so much easier to say, Take all your Philippine holidays off, be with your family, have a great life. That's great. So there are some times when in Australia, there's a public holiday, but not in the Philippines. I've noticed that they tend to be working. There are times when there's not a holiday in Australia, but there is a holiday in the Philippines, and we just roll with it.

I don't mind, because we're set up to be able to cater for support on an ongoing basis for our customer support is pretty much answered seven days a week anyway. So they take turns on a roster, which I don't see or organize. But apparently they do it. They're self-organized around that. But I would encourage you if you can let them have their own holidays, that would be great. But they will observe other holidays if you need them to.

They'll also work different time zones. You want them USA time zones or UK time zones, they can do it, because a lot of them have been working night shift already. They'd just rather do it from home than in the middle of the city, after one-hour Jeepney ride in the stinking heat and pollution.

Don't expect it all of one person

By the way, when you're talking about people cutting up, editing videos, and sending out emails, and posting socials, and managing comments, that's not one person's role. Okay, please be realistic about this. Get a couple of people. Some people, they've got this perception, Oh, I need a VA because I need someone to do my website, send my emails, do my social, do my comments, my bookkeeping, answer my customer tickets.

And they think that this is going to be one person. Some of them even asked, What's the hourly rate? And they think they're going to have them for 10 hours a week. Are you kidding me? Forget that. Hire them for 40 hours a week full time just to get them in your team. What does it cost? Right?

It's going to cost you around 26,000 pesos for a junior per month, or around 35,000 to 45,000 pesos per month for someone with a fair bit of experience or maturity. And then it's going to cost you 50,000 to 60,000 pesos for a superstar per month. Now you can go to Google and look up what that costs in US dollars or Australian dollars or whatever. But that's how much you pay per month for them to work in your business full time.

Let's stop this, What's their hourly rate nonsense, okay? And stop this, We're going to have one person do all this stuff for like five or 10 hours a week. You're kidding yourself. Okay, you've got to get a couple of them. But let's just break it down. What does it actually cost? Right? It might cost you \$1,500 or \$2,000 a month to have two to three incredible team workers in your business fulltime who are dedicated to your success. That's where the magic happens.

Sustainability over efficiency

And there's a comment here, the more efficient I can make it, the better. Wrong. Don't make it efficient. Okay, don't over optimize your team. Don't burn them out. How long can people go at peak performance? Like, you take an Olympic athlete, like the fastest swimmer in the pool, or the fastest runner on the field, and you run them at full speed, you know, how long will they last? Like, 20 minutes?



This is a marathon. Don't be as efficient as possible. Just be reasonable, be as reasonable as possible. Why have my team stayed with me for 10 to 12 years? Because I'm not burning them out. I give them time off. I don't push them. We do one major project here and there. And then we have a rest, right? We do some hard work, we ease back a bit. It's okay. You don't have to over optimize them.

I'll break it down for you as simply as possible. I've got a team of six people, right? Let's just say that team costs somewhere around like, I don't know, \$100,000, \$150,000 a year. All I'm thinking about is if I can make a million or \$2 million a year, and pay \$150,000 to have everything in my business done for me that I don't want to do, is that a good deal?

Maybe I could get it down to \$80,000 a year if I really milk them and work them hard. But then I'm going to have to keep fixing that broken, like for just that little bit extra, I'm basically going to burn them all out. And they're going to hate working for me. So don't be as efficient as you can be, please. Be as reasonable as you can be and look for the long play.

The value of learning new skills

So this person is at the stage, he's looking for his first VA, he's so excited for this episode. Well, I hope it's delivering. The question: I'd like to help them grow their skill and be able to utilize them for different tasks. If I set aside a portion of the week for just learning new skills, watching videos, tutorials, would that be something they would find valuable?

Yes, they would. I mean, they do it at Google. I tell my team, they go through the training courses, watch videos, learn stuff, play with new software, whatever. Do whatever it takes for you to be amazing in your role and to enjoy a role and have a great life, okay, within our business, and they do.

They do watch videos, they do learn stuff, they do go through analytics. Definitely, people will value growth, personal growth, and skilling up, even over money. It's very important. And this is a healthy attitude. I think you're going to have a great hire.

How competitive is the market?

I'd love to know more about how it's evolved. Is it competitive to get good VAs? And wouldn't it be great to know what they're looking for these days too? What can help you retain the great ones? Such a great question, right? This mindset is what's going to make you successful as a hirer.

So yes, it's more competitive than when I started hiring VAs. This is why we created an agency VisionFind.com, because the agencies that we found out, they sucked. They had people just coming around like a revolving door. They come and then they go out somewhere, they get a bad experience, they come back, and they're just like retread tires on a car.

Then there's other agencies that are like, so convoluted and so difficult. Like they want all these applications, they charge a fortune, they get paid. And then they pay their team, and they pocket the difference. And they sort of burn out their team members. And that's great for them. But I don't think it's great for the team member.

The way we work is a one-time recruitment fee. And then that team member works for you. And you pay them directly, and we butt out of it. Okay, so that's very, very good for the team member and very good for you. It's not as good for us, of course, we just get paid once. But we actually founded VisionFind.com to support and help my clients and to support and help Filipinos who want to work for Westerners.

So we're bringing them from call centers, mostly. The people we bring are not looking for jobs on the jobs boards. So it's competitive if you're looking on the jobs boards, you're competing with every other employer with all the commoditized people who are looking for jobs on jobs boards. If you want to get access to candidates that no one else is looking for or able to see, then that's definitely an advantage, a competitive advantage.

So yes, it's competitive. Yes, the rates have gone up a bit over time for the team members. But I feel like you can still do it. There's a lot of people in the Philippines. I'm not sure, the population is somewhere between 85 and 100 million people. And the vast majority of young Filipinos speak English. Very good English. So there you go, big market available for you.

Can you get around the exchange rate?

What's the best way to organize payments without getting screwed on the exchange rate? I've mentioned the way I pay before. And I don't mind paying the exchange rate, even in PayPal, right, over the years, I've probably paid a lot of exchange rate.

What's more important to me is that my team can bank on their specific agreed amount in pesos, twice per month. Then I'm not making them currency traders. Don't be selfish about this. It's a cost of doing business. If you have to cop on exchange, cop on exchange. I believe it's better than paying in US dollars because if you pay in US dollars, they're going to be copping the exchange. So you're basically making your team members, someone's got to pay. I'd rather it be me and that my team members can just focus on being awesome team members.

How to avoid churn

This question, how have you been combating churn attrition rate when the average stay of a Philippine employee is between one to one and a half years before they move on? You're doing it wrong. Simple as that. This hasn't happened to me.

If that's happening, you're getting the wrong people from the wrong place, or you're just not an employer of choice. Okay, so look in the mirror first, see what's going wrong in your business. I've got people who have had Philippine VAs six, seven, eight, 10, 12, 15 years. Like, they will stay, if the place is good.

Qualifying candidates for skill

What is the best way to qualify a VA for any given skill? Anything from bookkeeping to QuickBooks, extracting videos, etc? You can pay to do tasks. You can ask them for their portfolio of what they've worked on before. And be open to the fact that some of these people won't have done it ever before and need training.

If you can take on that person, you will get a better person, I believe. It's not that hard to train someone to pull a one-minute clip from a 60-minute video. It's really not that hard to train someone to do bookkeeping with QuickBooks, because QuickBooks provides training. So my team member knew nothing about Xero. And they're able to do my bookkeeping every day. And my accountant checks the numbers and moves things around every now and then.

But there's all sorts of training. If they've got a question, they ask the question and we answer it. But the best thing is, I don't have to sit around at my table with a bunch of receipts once every three months, I'm never doing that again for the rest of my life. And I studied to be an accountant in the very early days, and I hated it so much, which is why I'm doing this podcast.

And if you can use Loom, even Slack these days has got huddles, you can talk to your team member in real time and take them through stuff together. I like collaborating with my team occasionally. When we migrated my website recently, I actually got on a little huddle with my team member, we open up a Google Doc, and we work on it together, and it's fun.

We're collaborating and doing stuff together. We haven't done that for a while. It was a big project. But I'm happy to roll up the sleeves because I'm one of the team members as well. We're all a team.

How high do pay rates run?

Love to know the pay rates for particular roles and experience. This one concerns me. I've had some ask for Aussie salaries, okay? I checked with my team on this. This is false news. Really. The pay rates of juniors, 26,000 pesos per month, to seniors, middle of the road, 35,000, 45,000. Very, very good, 50,000, 60,000. Okay.

If someone's earning a lot more than that, you know, you might find someone who's getting 100,000 pesos per month, but they're probably like a CEO of a call center with 300 reports for a big American company. Like they'll be very westernized and pretty savvy and extraordinarily experienced.

But I've not hired those types of people. I don't know many people who do. My team don't know anyone who's earning that kind of money. The agency hasn't encountered many people ask for it. If a Philippine-based person is asking for a Western salary, it would be very unusual. They have a very low cost of living compared to Western society.

And also, there's competition. Like, we can hire from anywhere, so I guess they'd have to be very, very good to convince someone that that's worth it, because there'd be some advantages for you perhaps hiring a Westerner at Western rates who could sit beside you or has been through Western society cultural things and has a different tempo on things and a different level of awareness. So there are some cultural differences, but you might as well pay the Western rates, you might as well have a Westerner.

Seems post pandemic, some assistants want equivalent. Okay, look, the pandemic definitely brought people online, but again, they're bringing them to the main marketplaces, which we don't populate anyway. I don't.

Power outages and storms

So power outages, monsoons, etc. Look, they either wait it out, or they go to the mall. The malls are open, they can go to the mall, they can get the work done. It'll probably happen without them even telling you. That's what I've found. Just for context, I live in the Philippines for several months a year. I've visited the Philippines for the last 10 years. I have cultural insights.

I've tried to get internet connected to my house. It was challenging, you know, there are challenges. Sometimes, if someone lives in a unit, for example, or a condominium, the internet might be controlled by the building owner. But now, there's so much availability of portable carts and Wi Fi. It's very easy. I was able to get two or three systems up and running instantly.

And then to get the cable, I actually had to go to the office, and I had to wait in a queue for like, an hour and a half. It was annoying, but it's possible. Okay? And after that, I have redundancy. I had two or three internets. It's really rare that I'm not able to do my business when I visit the Philippines. So I imagine that if they're not getting connectivity at some point, they just don't want to.

Why not just hire from the West?

Question here, why not just hire more Americans and make less profit? America first, especially when you already make a great profit. You do you, right? Good on America, you want to hire Americans, go and hire Americans. I've done it. I did hire Americans, I hired Americans for my very first support role. The guy was okay until he wasn't okay. And then my team took it over. And they were amazing.

I hired a Western website developer, he was building me WordPress sites, the price kept going up and up and up, the websites took longer and longer and longer. And in the end, I moved it to my Philippines team. They did the job much quicker, much cheaper. They were amazing. So just, you know, pound for pound, it wasn't really a comparison that would make it a choice for me to hire in that situation.

The worst thing that happened in that case was my American supplier, upset with losing the contract, so to speak, switched off access to my own support Basecamp for my clients, and then sent my clients an email saying, Hey, now you can buy websites cheaper directly, because you no longer have to buy item through James, this was to my own clients.

So the Westerner, basically, attempted to destroy my business. And it was very, very unfortunate. And basically, there's no reason that I would pay a surplus to have that labor when my team are just so good. But your mileage may vary, like you maybe have a bad experience in some countries, so you like another.

So that's just my own opinion. But I also don't see the point of making less profit when I've got a good situation. We have a great situation where we can comfortably pay my team for a long, long time. We're not in any jeopardy, we are at no risk. I take that money and invest it somewhere else. And I look after the legacy of my family. And that money gets put back into the community, you know, when I buy things and whatever.

So I'm okay with how I'm doing me. But you, by all means, America first if that's your thing. And I'm also not American. So I guess if I was going to go down that path, I'd probably be aligning more with my own country, which makes sense, right?

Integrating Filipinos with Westerners

What are the best ways to integrate a Philippines-based assistant employee with an existing UK? This is a great question. I like the hybrid model. What I've done with my clients when they're getting stretched is I say, Look, with your team member who are typically Western-based and often in an office, I say, Go out and tell them, Good news. I'm getting you an assistant. So let's recruit someone, and they're going to take a lot of stuff off your plate so you can work on higher level tasks.

They're usually thrilled about it. They get their own assistant, the assistant loves working with someone in the actual office. They don't really mind as long as whoever's working with them is polite and easy to communicate with, and delivers on their promises, and sets clear expectations, etc.

I would also meet your team members. This is huge. If you go to the Philippines and meet your team, you're going to increase your productivity and the relationship by multiples, like double, triple, quadruple. For me, going to meet my team just took it to the next level. I'm friends with my team. We understand each other. You know, we've worked together for a long time.

We've done so many activities together, from pistol shooting, to surfing, to restaurants, to eating meals, to going in vans to scenic locations, etc. Like just doing stuff, getting to know people, these humans, they're great people. And we have a fantastic thing together, you know, we're living life together, we're on this journey through life together.

And we're all doing our part for the business to move it forward, and it's very rewarding. We all know the customers, we all know each other. We know what people like, don't like, what they like to do when they go on their retreats, and we just support them and nurture them. I want my team to have a great life. I want them to have a fantastic life. I'm always talking about having a great life. I want them to have a fantastic life as well. And I really hope they do.

Getting better applicants for the role

How can one get better applicants and follow your instructions not to send canned messages? Just get out of the rat race. Use a company like VisionFind.com, and have them go and screen your candidates for you. And then they'll just arrange an interview with your candidate. You can do some kind of a paid test task, paid test task, and then you're not competing with everyone else.

You've got the exclusive on this candidate while they're with you, as long as you're responsive. If you don't respond to us for a week or two, we'll probably send them to someone else. But that's how it works.

So there we go. That's episode 976. I hope I've covered some of your questions on finding, hiring, leading, managing, working with your team in the Philippines. The overarching message I want to leave you with is that your team members in the Philippines are people. They're just like you and I.

They breathe oxygen, they've got blood in their veins, they eat food, they watch movies, they play games, they enjoy their work. They're not like mud hut villagers running around in a grass skirt, right? Like, they're just normal people. And you can have the best relationship. So many companies have teams in the Philippines, you might as well join their ranks.

If you do want to help with it, of course, I recommend [VisionFind.com](https://www.visionfind.com). That is a business, I'm a half owner in that business. So I have a vested interest in the success of it. We do great work. My wife has put together a fantastic team there. If you're patient and you are ready to train someone, and you've got expectations that you can build someone up over time, then you're going to get great candidates for that.

If you go to the jobs boards or you're doing another path, great. Look, I can't speak to that. That's not my field of specialty. Good luck with it. I hope you have a great time. Also, I'm interested in your comments, feedback or questions about this episode. I love doing the solo episodes when I get a chance to.

This one, 976, was inspired by your questions. Every question I've answered in this episode is a question that was put to me on a [Facebook post](#). I will put a link back in that Facebook post. To all those people, thank you so much for your questions. They're amazing, and I hope you get the results you're after.

A man wearing a grey baseball cap, glasses, and a red and blue plaid shirt is shown in profile, gesturing with his hands as if in conversation. He is sitting at a wooden desk. In the background, another person is working on a laptop. In the foreground, a woman's hand is visible, holding a pen over an open notebook. The scene is set in a modern, casual office or workspace.

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