

Founder's Guide to Working with Filipino VAs

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We wrote this guide to compliment Spencer's popular "Founder's Guide to Hiring an Operations Team in the Philippines." It draws upon our personal experiences and insights gleaned from working with talented VAs (virtual assistants) over many years (shoutout to Angeli, Karyn, Rio, and Shang!) as well as observations from other founders who have successfully built remote teams in the Philippines.

- Rio & Spencer

For a real-world example of the kinds of tasks you can delegate, see our [list of 221 tasks you can give to a VA](#) ^[a].



Communication and Collaboration

Working remotely with someone on the opposite side of the world is hard.

Think about what can be asynchronous

- Your VAs are in a time zone very different from you. There is a culture in the Philippines where people will work the night shift to overlap with you but consider if that is really needed. Your VAs will be happier and stay with you longer if they can work during their daylight hours.

Lean into project management and accountability tools

- Track tasks, deadlines, and progress with tools like Asana and Notion.
- Track time with a tool like Clockify to better understand where hours are going.
- Communicate with tools like Slack and WhatsApp

Provide Clear Instructions and Expectations

- Set clear expectations for response times and help your team understand what tasks should be prioritized.
- Clearly define tasks and project goals, leaving no room for ambiguity. Use tools like Loom to record yourself doing a task that will be repeated many times. Have your VAs create written SOPs from your videos.

Foster Open and Honest Communication

- Your VAs may initially default to trying to hide what is challenging them. Review time sheets to gain a better understanding of the situation.
- Encourage your team to over-communicate — especially about any delays or challenges they might face.

Building a Strong Working Relationship

Create a Culture of Appreciation and Recognition

Filipino culture seems very driven by appreciation and shame.

- Public recognition for a job well done goes a really long way.
- Consider having a feedback-based bonus system. I rate everyone on my team on a scale of one to four in a few categories every two weeks. The total score corresponds to a bonus.

- Celebrate work anniversaries (ask another one of your VAs for help sending a gift) and other personal milestones.

Invest in Your VA's Growth and Development

VAs are motivated like any other member of your team.

- Help your VAs understand your company's culture, mission, and values.
- Give your VAs a budget to invest in work-from-home tools or software to be more efficient. Consider buying them computers in some cases.
- Consider offering training programs or give your VAs an annual self-improvement budget.
- Consider inviting your VAs to all-hands meetings.
- Help your VAs understand how they can grow with your company.

Understand Your VAs' Motivation to Work Remotely

Many of the best VAs work remotely because they need to be at home to help children or elderly family members.

- Being flexible when it's inexpensive is a great way to attract a larger pool of candidates and higher-quality talent.

Learn about Filipino Culture

- Filipino culture has a lot of overlap with American culture, but your team will really appreciate it if you are curious about their experiences and try a few words of Tagalog, too.
- Consider visiting the Philippines once you have a large team there. Your team will really enjoy getting to meet you and you'll have a much better perspective on their lifestyles and culture.

Additional Tips

- **Establish clear payment terms and expectations from the start.** Ensure both parties are aligned on payment methods, frequency, and any potential bonuses or incentives.
- **Be mindful of security.** Use tools like 1Password to securely share logins and other information.
- **Foster a sense of community and belonging, even in a remote work setting.** Consider organizing virtual team-building activities or online social events to connect and engage with your VA.

- **Regularly review and update your processes and workflows as your business grows and evolves.** Ensure your VA is equipped with the necessary tools and resources to succeed.
- **Most importantly, treat your VA with respect and appreciation, recognizing their valuable contributions to your company's success.**

Conclusion

By following these guidelines and building a strong working relationship, you can harness the immense talent and potential of Filipino VAs, helping your company move faster and do more. Remember, a successful partnership is built on trust, communication, and mutual respect. Invest in your VA, and they will invest in your company and its future.

p.s. If you're (potentially) working as a VA, here's how to do a great job

While this guide is primarily aimed at founders, it's equally important for VAs to understand their role in fostering a successful working relationship. Here are some tips on how to be a valuable and effective team member:

- **Be Proactive and Communicative:** Take initiative, ask questions, and communicate any challenges or concerns promptly. Don't wait for your employer to reach out to you – keep them updated on your progress and any potential roadblocks.
- **Be Organized and Detail-Oriented:** Maintain a structured workflow, utilize project management tools, and pay close attention to details. This will help you stay on top of tasks and minimize errors.
- **Be Adaptable and Flexible:** Embrace change and be willing to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities. The startup environment is dynamic, and your ability to adapt will be invaluable.
- **Be Reliable and Accountable:** Meet deadlines, deliver high-quality work, and take ownership of your tasks. Your employer should be able to trust and rely on you to get the job done.
- **Be a Team Player:** Collaborate effectively with your team members, offer support, and maintain a positive attitude. Even in a remote setting, fostering a sense of teamwork and camaraderie is crucial.
- **Be Passionate and Engaged:** Show enthusiasm for your work and a genuine interest in your employer's company and goals. Your passion and engagement will be contagious and contribute to a positive work environment.

- **Have the Right Tools:** Make sure you have a reliable internet connection (along with a backup) and a computer capable of doing the work. If your computer is limiting how quickly you can do your tasks, consider asking your boss if they might be able to help you get a new computer once you work for them for a while.
- **Embrace Upskilling and AI Tools:** New tools are being created every day. If you can keep on top of these changes, you have the opportunity to become much more valuable to your company, earn more money, and make a bigger impact at your company. Consider setting aside a few hours each week to research how new tools might be able to help you do your regular type of work faster and share things that work with your employer!

By embodying these qualities and actively contributing to a productive and positive working relationship, you can establish yourself as an indispensable asset to any startup team. Remember, your success as a VA is intertwined with your employer's success. By working together, communicating effectively, and supporting each other's growth, you can achieve remarkable things and build a lasting partnership.

Links

- a. spencerburleigh.com/post-images/web/221tasks.pdf