

THE

VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

TRAINERS

HANDBOOK

Improving standards in the UK VA Industry
Best practice standards

WHY? P3



THE RULES P5



LIST ME! P9



Any queries please email info@societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk

Why do we need this?

Over the last 2 years, SVA have received an increasing number of complaints from VAs about the standard of training they purchased. These are some of the comments:

"I thought I'd be able to just work 5 hours a week in the evenings and have the rest of my time free. I'm working all the time because so much is unbillable" UK VA Survey: No VAs working under 10 hours a week earned a replacement PA salary of £20k+

"I was told I'd earn £35 an hour, I've sent out proposals but they all say I'm too expensive..." UK VA Survey: None of the courses had grads who on average earned £30+ an hour - it's unfair to quote higher rates to your prospects unless you have statistically valid data to back this up. The mode average (i.e. the most popular rate to charge) for VAs was £25/hour. Whilst everyone can charge whatever they like, the grads need to be aware of what is "normal" and what they can do to improve the value of the services they offer if they are going to charge more.

"I took out a loan for the training, I have no way of paying it back because I've not earned anything as a VA. I'm having to go back to work just to repay the loan"

"The training I bought was nothing you couldn't google"

"It didn't cover how you did stuff. The trainer told me to go to another trainer for that. I thought a VA start up course should cover the technical side"

"My coach said I should have a niche, but I am struggling to get any work, let alone specialise"

Additionally, SVA keeps on seeing "UK VA industry stats" quoted which aren't statistically valid - according to Chartered Institute of Marketing, to be statistically valid you need to have surveyed 10% of the subject - i.e. 10% of the UK VA industry. We know there are 2,500+ VAs currently working in the UK, so any stats should have at least 250 respondents from the UK.

Part of the problem is that anyone can call themselves a VA trainer - it is not a protected term. There are no guidelines as to what VAs should have before offering training and therefore the onus is on the buyer to make relevant checks before purchase.

To address this we invited all the UK VA Trainers and Coaches to take part in an open discussion about how we reduce these complaints.

The initiative was well supported from UK industry ambassadors as listed here. We also received significant support from the international VA community via the VA Admins and Moderators Facebook Group including allowing us to base our guidelines on their own "Core Competencies" document.

Our thanks go out to them for giving their time and support to this issue.

VA Industry Leaders involved:

Caroline Wylie,
societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk

Amanda Johnson,
vact.co.uk

Jo Munro,
thevahandbook.com

**Jo Sparkes &
Steph Middleton-Foster,**
vapromag.co.uk

John Palmer,
vaconference.co.uk

Gwen Backhouse,
(UK Outstanding VA 2018)
curlwsecretarial.co.uk

Michelle Smith,
(UK Outstanding VA 2017)
valueaddvirtual.co.uk

Naomi Campbell,
(VA of the Year Scotland 2018)
vavelocity.com

Joanne Hawkins,
North West VA Conference

Annabel Kaye,
Koffee Klatch

**If you would like to be
involved in future discussions,
you are very welcome!**

Please contact
info@societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk

Why should we care?

Sure - it's a case of buyer beware. But here's why the whole VA industry should care about the professionals offering training to newbie VAs:

- **Letting down clients:** Every time one of those newbie VAs goes back to a "proper job", their clients are left thinking that VAs are unprofessional and unreliable. It reflects badly on the industry as a whole. Next time you speak to a prospect at a networking event and they recall the VA they worked with who disappeared 6 months into working with them, it makes it incredibly hard to convince them you won't do the same.
- **#CollaborationNotCompetition** is something truly unique to the VA industry and many of us have benefited personally from it, it would be a shame to lose that ethos. Some of the stories have been really heartbreaking - it's upsetting to be associated with an industry which is treating newcomers so badly, especially when welcoming newcomers has been such a special part of the industry for so long.
- **Holding VA trainers to the same standards as UK VAs:** SVA asks all VAs to move towards better standards and best practice via the Approved VA scheme - VA trainers should be held to the same standards. Just like when we first established those VA standards back in 2007, we now need to do the same for VA Trainers.

It is in all UK VA's interests to promote best practice in the VA Training community.

What are we talking about?

The terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' are often used interchangeably in a personal and organisational development context as the difference between them is not clear cut.

Common skills for coaches and mentors are strong interpersonal skills, and include, good listening skills, good questioning style, suspending judgement, giving constructive feedback, checking understanding and providing focus. The value of these key attributes are that they clarify issues, solve problems and change patterns of behaviour to help the individual to learn, and develop.

Coaching relies on the agenda being set by the individual (learner) finding their own way forward, and them being committed to their course of action. Coaching tends to be about achieving specific and measurable goals / task focused.

While, mentoring can be 'directive' and provide specific advice where appropriate it is often about sharing of knowledge, experience and opening doors for an individual to access opportunities they would not have otherwise done so.

The CIPD give a great summary of the difference: **"A coach has some great questions for your answers; a mentor has some great answers for your questions."**

So why do some VA Trainers, call themselves a coach and a mentor – well part of what you're paying them for is the ability to pick their brains and learn from them – in whichever manner is most appropriate for you, so they could be there to help you find the answers within yourself or to guide you on what has worked / not worked for themselves or others in the past.

Amanda Johnson, VACT

For the avoidance of doubt, SVA is ONLY interested in those who are charging money for start up VA courses or books as an "all in one" solution.

It is not our aim to stop VAs from sharing knowledge, or exploiting their skills by training other people in that skill. The main aim is that standards of coaching, mentoring and training improve to get the best results for virtual assistants in the UK.

Amanda Johnson helpfully defined "coaching" and "mentoring" for us, because there is sometimes confusion about what they mean and what you are purchasing.

Core Competencies for Virtual Assistant Trainers:

What should a VA Coach have?

Experience

5+ years' being a VA **OR** worked with 20+ different clients, 3+ different industries, offering 3+ different skill sets as a VA (not as an employee).
5 years' experience training other people (as a VA or as an employee) **OR** a recognised teaching qualification.

Marketing Ability

Should be able to demonstrate at least 10 different ways to attract VA clients effectively.

Privacy Compliance

Should be registered as a Data Controller with ICO.

Any group coaching sessions should also have a privacy disclaimer at the beginning and get agreement from all parties before commencing.

Accuracy

All learning and marketing materials should show the source of any data quoted.

All learning and marketing materials should include what VAs will require to complete the course (time/resources/pre-existing skills/commitment).

Complaints Procedure

Should have a written complaints procedure in place which is publicly displayed.

Integrity

Recognise intellectual property law (and not encourage plagiarising marketing materials or software piracy etc.)

Illustrates
#CollaborationNotCompetition in their business.

Legal

Should understand the legal responsibilities of running a business - including Distance Selling Regulations, PECR, GDPR, MLR, employment law, contract law and reasons for/against being a limited company as a VA.

CPD

Coaches should commit to continuing professional development (CPD) themselves - either formal or informal training of at least 10 hours per year - and will also make sure they engage with latest industry research such as UK VA Survey, small business statistics etc.

Insurance

Training providers including coaches, mentors, online trainers etc will have the appropriate professional indemnity insurance to cover their coaching work.



Core Competencies for Virtual Assistant Trainers: Explanation of rationale

Experience

5+ years' being a VA **OR** worked with 20+ different clients, 3+ different industries, offering 3+ different skill sets as a VA (not as an employee).

5 years' experience training other people (as a VA or as an employee) **OR** a recognised teaching qualification.

Time served doesn't necessarily equate to experience... However, it does show they've been able to sustain themselves for a long period of time which would suggest they've had experience with lots of different clients, lots of different skills and evolving their business model as the industry changes.

Being able to demonstrate that you have built a successful, sustainable VA business over a period of time cements your expertise and broadens your knowledge of the different kinds of VA model, risks over time, and trends within the industry.

If you don't have that experience, we want to see that this person has good skills to pass on. If someone is paying for training, the bottom line is, they want to make money - so the ability to get new clients is absolute. We want to see they have experience in different kinds of VA clients too, so different industries and marketing different services would be key. These should be gained as a VA, not as an employee - retaining clients as a VA is a skill separate to those a PA would have, and this is what people pay VA trainers for. Whilst a lot of different clients may suggest they've not been able to retain them, having a good variety of different kinds of clients and what they need is essential to gain experience in working as a virtual assistant. Having experience as a trainer is also important. Just because you are an amazing VA, it doesn't mean you will make a good teacher.

Marketing Ability

Should be able to demonstrate at least 10 different ways to attract VA clients effectively.

Again this relates to showing a depth of experience...

We know face to face networking works really well for VAs - but that's of little use to someone who lives on a Welsh hillside or who has childcare issues early morning/evenings. VA trainers should be able to demonstrate a variety of ways to get new business.

The trainer should know what are currently effective ways of marketing VA businesses are - e.g. Twitter is much less effective than it used to be.

Core Competencies for Virtual Assistant Trainers: Explanation of rationale

Privacy Compliance

Should be registered as a Data Controller with ICO.

Any group coaching sessions should also have a privacy disclaimer at the beginning and get agreement from all parties before commencing.

We expect data privacy from the VAs, the VA trainers are handling hugely sensitive data about clients' businesses. They should be held to the same account.

Accuracy

All learning and marketing materials should show the source of any data quoted.

All learning and marketing materials should include what VAs will require to complete the course (time/resources/pre-existing skills/commitment).

The source of the data makes a huge difference - we've seen examples where a sample size of ONE business has been used to produce "research". Any data should have its source listed.

Trainers stressed that they often get people not completing courses simply because they lack commitment and they felt it was unfair to be judged on that VA's progress when they hadn't even completed the course.

We've also had examples where franchises have taken fees from VAs, given them materials, and then refused to grant a licence to operate or a refund because the franchisee failed to have pre existing skills. They've also been gagged from speaking publicly about it because of the franchise agreement they signed.

Complaints Procedure

Should have a written complaints procedure in place which is publicly displayed.

Trainers want to know if VAs aren't happy with the course they purchased. If possible, the complaint should be addressed to someone who didn't do the training with the VA.

If offering online courses or videos, there should be some way of adding this information onto the course materials.

If you are unable to resolve this dispute with the training provider, please email info@societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk.

Core Competencies for Virtual Assistant Trainers: Explanation of Rationale

Integrity

Recognise intellectual property law (and not encourage plagiarising marketing materials or software piracy etc.)

Illustrates
#CollaborationNotCompetition in their business.

We need to encourage the VA trainers to believe in #CollaborationNotCompetition... All of them at some point have benefited from this. They should be giving something back.

Additionally, we need the VA trainers to be epitomising integrity and not nicking blog posts off each other!

Legal

Should understand the legal responsibilities of running a business - including Distance Selling Regulations, PECR, GDPR, MLR, employment law, contract law and reasons for/against being a limited company as a VA.

These are the kind of questions you would expect a VA coach to understand - or at least to know enough about to forward a VA onto a legal resource when they get asked about them.

CPD

Coaches should commit to continuing professional development (CPD) themselves - either formal or informal training of at least 10 hours per year - and will also make sure they engage with latest industry research such as UK VA Survey, small business statistics etc.

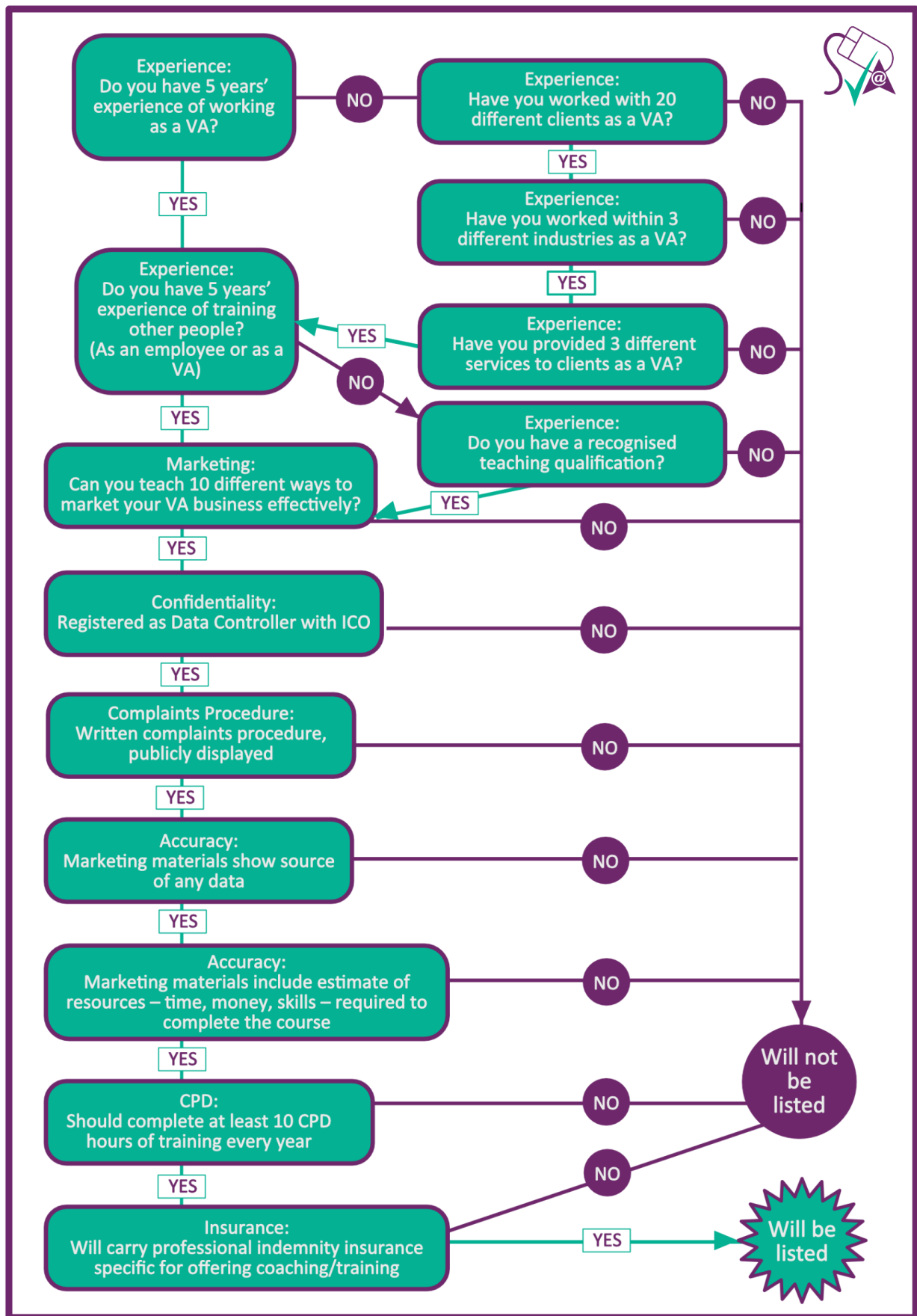
Especially if not currently trading, VA coaches and trainers need to keep up with this fast moving industry. E.g. If you used the Twitter advice from 5 years ago as a social media trainer, it simply would not work - the world has moved on. Having said that, it's difficult for very experienced VAs to access suitable training for themselves, as a lot of the resources available are aimed squarely at new start VAs. We suggest a minimum of 10 hours' CPD per year, either formal or informal.

Insurance

Training providers including coaches, mentors, online trainers etc will have the appropriate professional indemnity insurance to cover their coaching work.

We expect VAs to have it, coaches should have it too. It should be specific training insurance, not VA insurance.

Should I be a virtual assistant trainer?



List me!

We hope the information contained in this white paper is useful both to Virtual Assistants seeking training and those looking to offer VA training. SVA is willing to list VA coaches and trainers for free on their website as long as they are willing to abide by these rules.

PLEASE NOTE:

SVA reserves the right to remove any trainer at our own discretion.

**Email info@societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk
for more info**



SocietyOfVirtualAssistants.co.uk