

Are You Ready for an Assistant?

When is it time to hire an Assistant? What, exactly, should you have the Assistant do? How do you find and hire a competent person that will stick with you? How do you effectively manage, delegate and supervise an assistant? How many hours should you hire an assistant for? What is the best way to pay an assistant? Can you get the Assistant to pay for themselves?

These are the right questions. The right answers will make you more productive and profitable with more personal time for you.

When is it Time to Hire an Assistant?

There are three times.

First: Are you losing leads? Are you losing quality of service? If an Assistant worked for you ten hours a week, five days a week, two hours a day; do you believe that you can earn at least three times the Assistant's wages directly from capturing lost leads and better quality service? If so, it is time to hire an Assistant with the job description and skills to help you convert and sell more leads and raise quality of service.

Second: Are you averaging three or more sales per month? Have you earned over ten thousand dollars in Real Estate sales income for at least three months in a row? Do you feel like you are on a roller coaster of activity and inactivity? If so, it is time to hire an Assistant with the job description to work with your listings and pending contracts to free you up from the administrative drag of your active periods.

Third: Do you want to improve your quality of life and take time off with much greater ease? If so, it is time to create the job list for an Assistant to give you freedom.

What, exactly, should you have the Assistant do?

Start now by writing down the job list. From the time you wake up until you hit the pillow, think about what you are doing and what has to be done, write down the things you would and/or could have the Assistant do for you.

Notice the categories, for example listing, pending, marketing, advertising, web, administrative, bookkeeping, etc. Label the jobs or separate the list into these categories. Consider jobs you are doing that have a low dollar value; jobs that are taking you away from cultivating and growing your business. Consider the tasks that either you don't do well, or you won't do; but they need to be done to achieve the success you desire.

Hiring Note: Despite this original job list, during the hiring process clearly prepare the Assistant for change. Indicate that the job duties are fluid based on the changing market, changing rules, forms, seasons, changing personnel and success of the team. That despite the original job list, new jobs and priorities will arise. The job may be substantially different six months down the road or it may be the same. Prepare them for change.

How do you find and hire a competent person that will stick with you?

First and foremost, successful hiring is based on the job list above. From that list you are able to determine the skills, strengths and personality that will be required. Once you determine those you know what you are looking for. Post ads as well as word of mouth requests. Require that candidates send you résumés. Select the strong résumés and conduct brief phone interviews to check for phone skills and demeanor. Set a high standard and don't settle. With the few candidates that have potential conduct a live interview (at least thirty minutes with a thorough list of prepared questions) focused on the skills that will lead to success on the job.

Carpenters have an expression, "Measure twice. Cut once." Indicating that the care you take before you make the final decision ensures that you make the correct decision that saves time, money, and frustration. The same principle applies to hiring. It is best not to hire at the first interview. Allow a brief time, overnight is fine, for you and the candidate to come up with final questions and concerns. Then at the second interview be clear on your expectations. Prepare them for the most challenging realities of the job. Get their agreements that they can handle those realities and ask for proof by having them relate situations in which they have experienced these situations.

Be rigorous in your hiring process and you will hire the right person the first time. The extraordinarily common mistake most Agents make in hiring is to skip the entire hiring process and simply hire someone who is available or who has some apparent experience.

Even if an apparently terrific candidate is available don't hire them immediately. Have them provide a résumé and go through the entire hiring process with the other candidates. At the end, you will know you have the best person and more importantly, they will respect the job and respect you more with a well deserved sense of pride.

Warning! Don't shortcut the process. Your chances of success drop dramatically if you do.

How do I manage, delegate and supervise?

Successful management, delegation and supervision are based on hiring correctly with the job list and hiring process described above. During all three interviews, on the phone and the two live interviews prepare the candidate for your management style. If you have seldom or never had an employee, then describe your lack of experience and the learning curve that both of you will experience as you develop your style.

Delegation without training leads to failure. Similarly, delegation without supervision leads to mediocrity and dissatisfaction. A key reason for grouping the Assistant's job list into categories is to facilitate the training and delegation. Checklists are the secret to shortening the training period, ensuring successful delegation. Checklists are the secret to making supervision supportive and motivational versus critical and painful.

Supervision never stops. Therefore, conduct weekly meetings dedicated to both ensuring work is done well; dedicated to examining the quality of work; and to perfect systems, processes, and checklists. As the jobs transform you, the Agent will want things done in specific ways or you may simply want an improvement. The continuous supervision with weekly meetings dedicated to continuous improvement creates the context for you to build the business you envision as a respected leader with the cooperation and enthusiasm of your Assistant.

How many hours should an Assistant work?

Not too many; many Real Estate Agents have little or no experience at having an employee. And most successful Agents are particular (fussy) about how the work is done. Therefore, they are reluctant to trust someone else to do it.

These two characteristics, inexperience and the quality concern, often lead to a slower training process in which the Assistant is underworked. Therefore, a first Assistant is best hired for ten or fifteen hours a week. So that early in the relationship, during the training process, when the Assistant may have idle time, it is less costly as the Agent learns how to fill a modest number of hours.

The specific schedule of ten or fifteen hours per week is very important. An Agent needs the Assistant on the job every working weekday. So that no matter what day the Agent makes a sale, takes a listing, encounters a problem or needs help, the very next working weekday the Assistant is there. Otherwise the Agent and Assistant's work overlaps creating havoc.

How Will I Pay for an Assistant?

This is a question that has many answers. First you need to consider the type of position. Is this a part-time, full-time, licensed, or non-licensed? What is the scope and responsibilities?

Compensation must only be tied to things that the Assistant can control. For example paying a percentage of income to an administrative Assistant is unwise and de-motivating since the Assistant has no direct control over the income. This may be appealing as the Agent's production is increasing. If the Agent continues to raise production the compensation tied to production becomes prohibitive to the Agent. Or, if production declines it becomes a de-motivator to the Assistant.

There are several compensation options available; hourly, salary, percent of top or bottom line, set dollar amount per transaction, percent of each sale that the Assistant is directly involved in and referral fees. Which is best depends upon the position, responsibilities and experience of the potential Assistant.

Can I get the Assistant to pay for his or herself?

Aside from freeing up the Agent's time, is there a way for an Assistant to actually generate or facilitate income? Of course, generating consistent mailings, web postings, e-mail blasts, send referral and house gifts, and more. A licensed Assistant could hold open houses, make initial calls to expireds and for sale by owners, respond to leads and more. Depending upon licensing and State laws the Assistant could receive bonuses for income generating activities.

Summary

Hiring an Assistant may be a big step for some. It is apparent that there are many steps and processes in hiring, building and maintaining a team. Done right the Assistant makes you much more than they earn each year, raise production, income, your quality of service and your quality of life.