



*Best Practices*

for Working with &  
**Managing**

*Virtual Employees/Remote Staff*



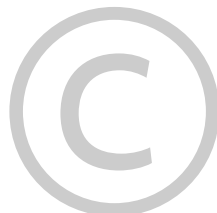
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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

**ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS  
OF VIRTUALEMPLOYEE.COM**

My name is Shaunvir Mahil. I was born in the UK and raised in both, the UK and USA. In 2007, I graduated in Law, and only a few months after co-founded VirtualEmployee.com with my Dad. (who himself worked as a senior software developer in London and Chicago).

Our business, VirtualEmployee.com, is the world's first and only online employee supermarket, where you can hire full-time, dedicated employees in any profession. Since that time to date, we have helped well in excess of **1500 companies from 27 countries** to offshore in more than **50 different professional domains** – from literally everything and anything you can think of, be it software development and copywriting, to investment banking and law.

Once we even placed a medical doctor for a German pharmaceutical company!

So, naturally, over the years, we have accumulated a lot of valuable experience and expertise in remote staffing for Small to Medium Enterprises and also have an advanced understanding of the outsourcing landscape as a whole.

And, so, out of all that experience was born this book.

“When working with them, you collaborate with them. You don’t send some things over there and say “I don’t want to talk to you until I get my results.” If a company thinks that they are going to get a good result by just offshoring things to solve their problem by sending a package of specs somewhere, and they think that the software developers are just machines, their project is going to fail.”



Larry Spencer  
Vice President of Sceris



# INTRODUCTION

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*Hiring a Virtual Employee (from a management perspective) is no different than hiring a local employee. The founding principle of the 'Virtual Employee' concept was that it would mirror and replicate the experience an employer would have when hiring locally. The only difference would be that this management would now be executed online rather than face to face (although nowadays we are increasingly working remotely with locally based employees too). By mirroring the local employment model, Virtual Employees would enable clients to offshore without outsourcing. Reduce cost, but without losing control.*

*And so, hiring a Virtual Employee overseas is the most seamless and easiest way to offshore. Why? Because you are already very familiar with the methodology of this working model. The only way Virtual Employees are one step removed from what you have already been doing is that you will now speak over Skype rather than face to face. And if you are working with remote based staff already (for instance, perhaps you have colleagues based in a different office to yours) then hiring a Virtual Employee overseas really is not going to be new territory for you.*

*Nevertheless, even though hiring and working with a Virtual Employee really is not rocket science, there are still some key tips and pitfalls to avoid to ensure you get the most from your remote hiring endeavors.*

*Although I am a co-founder of [VirtualEmployee.com](http://VirtualEmployee.com), I actually live and work from the UK and so, I myself have been working now for many years with Virtual Employees! And so this eBook not only shares with you best practices/pitfalls that I have picked up from clients who avail our services, but I have also included some tips and best practices that I myself have picked up and learned over the years of working with many VEs. As such, I hope these tips and remote management hacks really enable you to maximize your offshoring productivity!*



# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE

LEVERAGE TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES FOR GREATER FLOW 7

## CHAPTER TWO

YOUR OFFSHORE TEAM NEEDS ‘CONTEXT’ IN ORDER  
TO INNOVATE 11

## CHAPTER THREE

ENSURE REGULAR PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITH YOUR  
VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES 14

## CHAPTER FOUR

MAINTAIN PROFESSIONALISM 17

## CHAPTER FIVE

DON’T OVER THINK OR ASSUME IF THERE ARE ANY  
HICCUPS; FOCUS ON THE FACTS 21

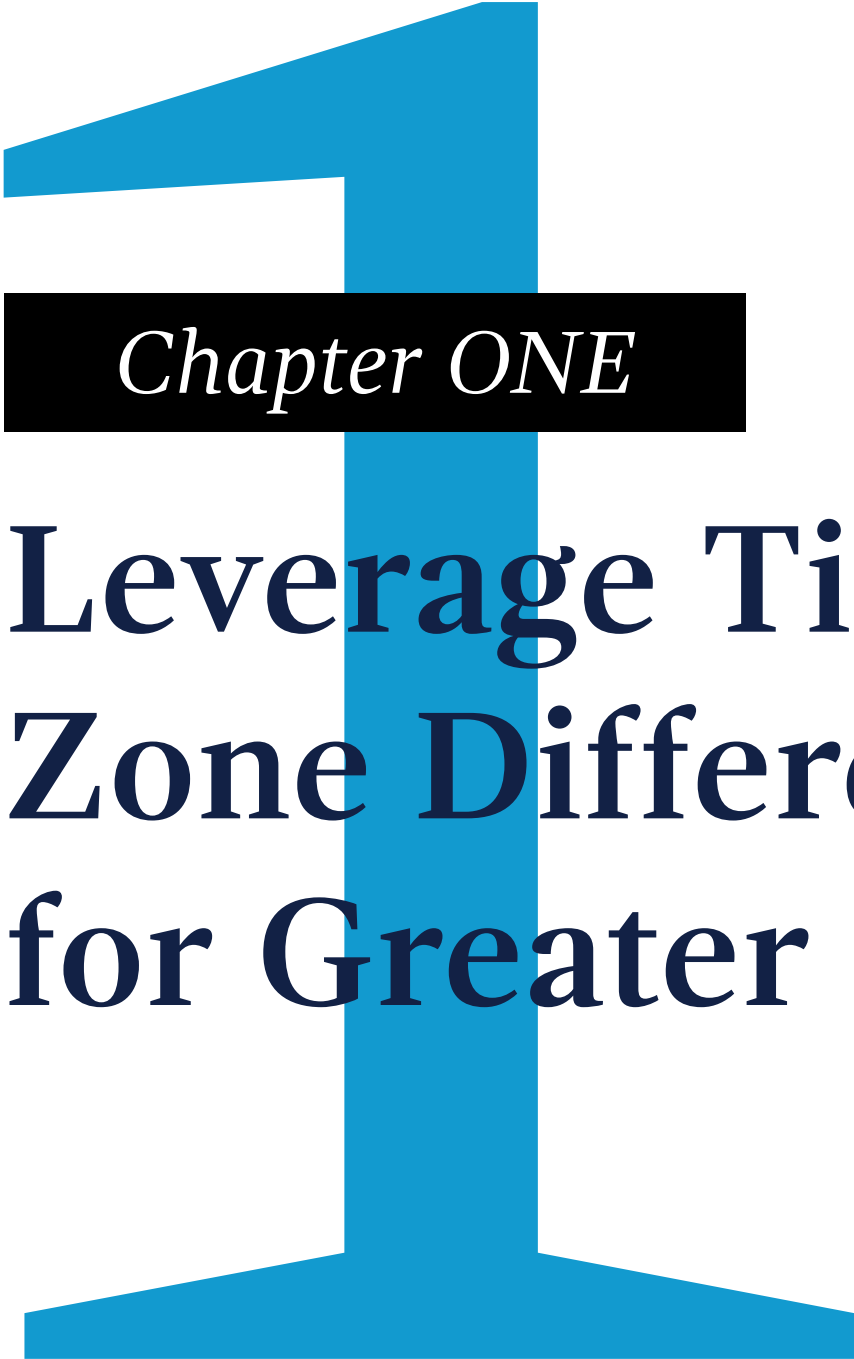
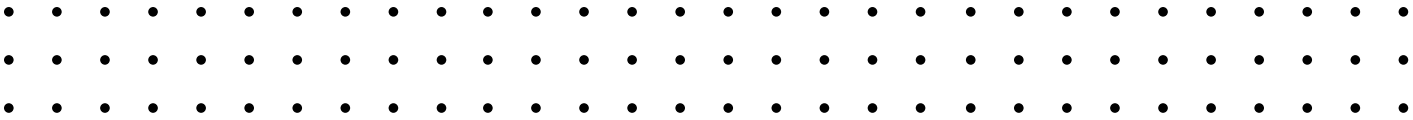
## CHAPTER SIX

DON’T TREAT REMOTE STAFF LIKE ‘INTERCHANGEABLE  
PARTS’ 25

## CHAPTER SEVEN

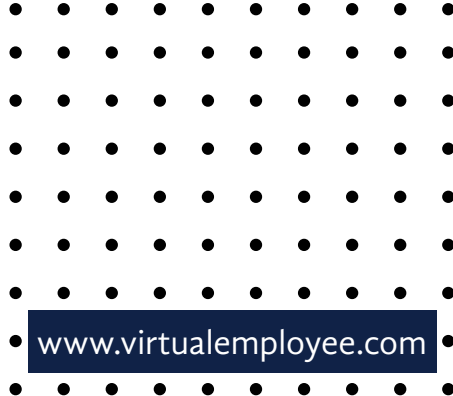
BE REALISTIC ON WHAT MOTIVATES VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES 26

Conclusion 28



*Chapter ONE*

# Leverage Time Zone Differences for Greater Flow





# LEVERAGE TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES FOR GREATER FLOW



In some cases, you need your employees, whether local or overseas, to work the same business hours as you. Sometimes this is unavoidable, perhaps due to the way your business operates or the nature of your project.



However, sometimes, you might only need a few hours of interaction with your Virtual Employees. In such a scenario, the time zone difference provides a great opportunity for you to work more efficiently.

As a business owner or director, one of the greatest challenges you might encounter is the number of responsibilities, projects, departments, staff and decisions you have to take and manage. What this results in is a lot of continuous distraction, interruptions, quick questions from staff and meetings! And all of this is absolutely terrible for your 'flow'.

'Flow' is a term in psychology that describes a state when 'a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement and enjoyment in the process of the activity.' In short, 'flow' is when you are at your efficient best. The ability to get into a state of flow for prolonged periods is also a characteristic attributed to super achievers, i.e. top athletes, musicians and CEOs. It's when you come up with your greatest ideas, but then also manage to get them completed. But getting into a state of flow is not easy. And, more importantly, every time you are interrupted, you fall out of that state and it then takes time to get back into that state of laser focus.

So, if you hire Virtual Employees and have, say, 3 hours of overlapping shifts, I would say, go ahead and try it. Don't worry about not having your VEs working exactly the same business hours as you. You might just find that once your Virtual Employees leave for the day, your interruptions reduce and you are able to focus more intensely on your own projects. I appreciate that you may also still have a local team, but if you have a hybrid team, with some staff based locally and some based overseas, you are still reducing some level of your interruptions and "noise". If now you have 50% fewer requests, messages or questions to deal with, it's still a significant benefit. Particularly, for more senior staff, such as project managers, even a 10-20% increase in productivity would be most welcome!

## Putting it into context:

As mentioned in the introduction, although I am the co-founder of VirtualEmployee.com, I actually am based in, and work from, the UK (not India) and, as such, I myself also work remotely with Virtual Employees too! And here is how I do it.

I usually split my day into two halves. The first half is typically more focused towards meetings, Skype chats, reviewing work, etc with my team. The second half of my day is typically more focused on my own projects. As 80-90% of my core team leaves for the day, I am able to get laser focused on my own projects (like writing this eBook). With no incessant Skype pings and emails, I find it to be the most enjoyable and productive part of the day. I personally love it! So much so that when I am now actually in India, I find it less productive! I often find the days exhausting, with meeting after meeting, someone or another constantly knocking on my door and, in short, less progress made on my projects since I get less time to devote to them.

Admittedly, there are the odd occasions where having a short time zone overlap with your remote colleagues can cause difficulty. Sometimes you need to discuss something or have a file sent to you later in the day. In the scenario that I cannot get a hold of them at all, I have just come to accept that overall, I still feel I am gaining more productivity with this setup. On some occasions, yes, there will be a little frustration, but overall I am getting many more hours of 'peaceful time' by having my colleagues at 'arm's length'. Give it a try, you just might find this counter-intuitive working method to be more productive than the traditional office setup!

***Would you like to learn more about how working remotely can help increase your productivity?***



Click Here, to download my **FREE** eBook '5 Outsourcing Myths Busted'. In this eBook I look at how working remotely decreases your decision fatigue which, in turn, will help to increase your work output



*Chapter TWO*

**Your offshore team  
needs ‘context’ in  
order to innovate**



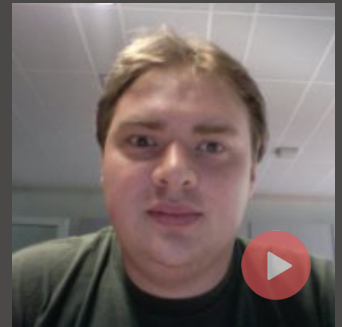
# YOUR OFFSHORE TEAM NEEDS 'CONTEXT' IN ORDER TO INNOVATE



To have your offshore team functioning at its optimum best, you need to ensure that you don't communicate with them in abstract terms. Giving your offshore team context and sharing with them the bigger picture, not only about your project but also about your company, will enable them to truly innovate. Don't avoid sharing your larger visions and plans just because your employees are now at 'arm's length'; include them just as you would your local team.

## Putting it into context:

The above point was very well articulated by Olivier Cant, the CEO of Exxoss (a Belgium-based Infrastructure as a Service provider) when he filmed a case study with our VP in India. Click here to watch it.



*“Have all your communication tools ready so that the remote team is part of your local team ....because what we witnessed in the first month is that the guys didn’t show much initiative. They looked like they lacked empowerment, but after coming over here we realized that actually they don’t have enough context on the project, they don’t know what the project’s purpose is. So we started explaining who we are, what is the company, who are our customers, what are our products, what are our services, where are we located, where do we run infrastructure, and the people who use the projects and the tools, what do they do with it.*

*So they started to get a glimpse on - a global understanding of the project, context, and then you see that people will start taking initiatives and have new ideas. They will start thinking out of the box, they will start suggesting new features, suggesting new ways of representing the data, new ways of adapting the project. But I think an important prerequisite for that is communication and specifically the context, the project context, that’s something very important.”*

***Can offshore staff be innovative like Olivier has said above? That they can’t is an accusation that is sometimes made, but is it fact or fiction?***



*Click Here, to download my **FREE** eBook ‘5 Outsourcing Myths Busted’. In this eBook I bust the myth that offshore employees aren’t innovative.*



*Chapter THREE*

**Ensure regular  
project management  
with your Virtual  
Employees**

# ENSURE REGULAR PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITH YOUR VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES



You must project manage your Virtual Employees! By this I mean that you must assign tasks, review their work, decide the direction of your project, set the deadlines and supervise your employees. I recommend daily project management, but if you can't do this then ensure you are project managing your employees, at the very least, on a weekly basis.

The word 'outsourcing' is often used interchangeably with terms such as 'offshoring' and 'virtual employees' / 'remote staff'. In reality, however, there is a big difference between outsourcing and hiring a VE. Sometimes, clients blur the lines. However, let this be said in no uncertain terms that there is a very big difference between outsourcing and hiring a VE; both are as different as chalk and cheese! You must work with a Virtual Employee just as you do with a local employee; the only one difference being that your project management is now done remotely, as opposed to physically from the same office. This might seem obvious, but over the years, I have seen many clients who, for some reason, think that VEs should be able to work completely independently.

## Putting it into context

We once had a client who hired a Virtual Employee PHP developer. The client had been working with this developer for a few months and everything was going fine. The client then went on a long vacation for 3 months and instructed his virtual employee to study a programming manual. Throughout the duration of these 3 months the client maintained no communication or interaction with his virtual employee. The client had also not informed us that he was going away and so would not be in regular touch with his VE. Upon returning from his vacation, the client was then shocked to find that his VE had not completed the manual he had been assigned and was very unhappy.

In this situation, admittedly, some fault can be attributed to the Virtual Employee. However, in truth:

- A. a programmer wants to code; very few programmers will sit there for 3 months just studying a manual, and
- B. add on to that zero supervision or feedback for an entire 3 months and I think you would be hard pressed to find any local employee either that would be on top of such an assignment. Just because your employee is based overseas it does not make them a robot.



It is also worth keeping in mind that, for technical fields, project management is not just about assigning tasks either. Some clients will assign tasks and just leave the employee to work away independently and only 'check in' when the deadline approaches. Project management is a lot more than just assigning tasks; project management is about working with your employee regularly. Don't get me wrong; I am not saying that you hand-hold your Virtual Employees (I have come across many of our clients who only touch base with their VEs on a weekly basis; although this is not something I would advise, I have seen it be implemented successfully). The collaboration you need might only have to be 20 minutes-a-day, but that 20 minutes-a-day makes a world of difference and ensures your project stays on the right track.

***Is project management something you don't want to do when you outsource?***



*Click Here to download my **FREE** Cheat Sheet "Choosing The Right Outsourcing Business Model" and discover with which outsourcing models you don't have to project manage*





*Chapter FOUR*

**Maintain  
Professionalism**



# MAINTAIN PROFESSIONALISM



We have found that once clients and their Virtual Employees have worked with each other for some time and developed a good rapport and relationship, some clients start to become lenient in maintaining professional standards. This is a big mistake. Never veer from the standards and policies that you and your vendor had implemented right at the beginning of your hiring.

## *Putting it into context:*

For example, we have noticed that, although few, some clients do become ultra lenient with their VEs taking leaves. To put this into perspective, let's look at freelancers in India and Virtual Employees in India. There is a significant difference in the experience a client will have with hiring a freelancer and hiring a virtual employee. Freelancing is notoriously a hit and miss affair, whereas our VEs have a phenomenal success rate (I know what you're thinking; of course, I'm going to say that! It's hard for me to prove this to you, but our 100+ case studies and testimonials might go half way in convincing you on this <http://www.virtualemployee.com/testimonials>). The reason for the stark difference in success rates between these two models is partially due to the fact that freelancing has little to zero levels of supervision, management, professionalism or accountability. By contrast, one of the key pillars of the virtual employee's success is the high levels of professionalism, supervision, management and accountability that are implemented by us. In short, the point that I am trying to make is that the reason clients develop a strong rapport and level of trust with their Virtual Employees in the first place can be attributed to the professionalism that is instilled and expected from day one. The Virtual Employee knows that there is zero tolerance for unprofessionalism, and so, psychologically, they become conditioned to uphold and maintain a certain level of conduct. It is only due to the high level of professionalism being demanded (from the outsourcing vendor) that, in turn, enables the client to trust and form a strong rapport with their VE. If the VE was unprofessional from day one (as often is the case with freelancers), you, the client, would never get into a position of developing a strong bond with your employee (just as is the case, more often than not, with a freelancer) and, in turn, be okay with becoming more lenient when it came to HR policies.

I have to stress that it is not by accident or chance that you and your VE develop a strong relationship. It is heavily down to the professional Virtual Employee environment that the client and their VE form a high level of trust between one another. And so, if you now start removing that pillar and undoing the foundations that fostered the relationship you have developed, your VE may start becoming more complacent with the standards and conduct that they and you have become accustomed to. This, in turn, can very quickly lead to a slippery slope situation which will inevitably begin to strain the trust the two of you have developed. By becoming lenient with HR policies, you may just be opening a can of worms; don't take the risk and have faith that there is a reason why your vendor is implementing and advising you not to deviate from certain policies.



## THE COMMON PITFALL

Want to learn what other pitfalls to watch out for and avoid when outsourcing?



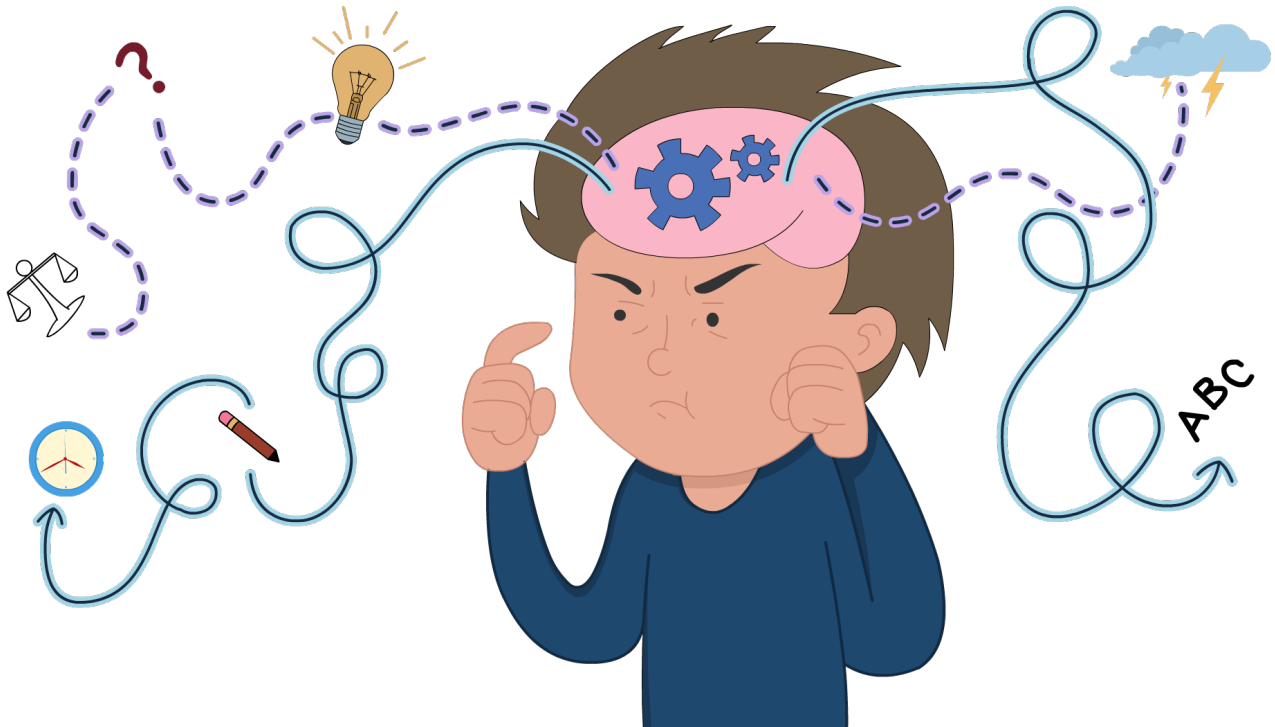
*Click here to download my **FREE** eBook '5 Pitfalls To Avoid When Working With Your Outsourcing Vendor.'*



*Chapter FIVE*

**Don't over think or  
assume if there are  
any hiccups; focus  
on the facts**

• • • DON'T OVER THINK OR ASSUME  
• • • IF THERE ARE ANY HICCUPS;  
• • • FOCUS ON THE FACTS



If, at any point, you do have an issue with your Virtual Employee, remember that, because you are working remotely, it is very easy to:

- a) jump to false conclusions and this, in turn, can easily lead you to
- b) overreact to a situation

It is just human nature that, when we get only a snippet of information, our brains go into overdrive to fill in the gaps. Say you are in a meeting at work, and upon returning to your desk you find a voicemail from your child's teacher at school requesting you to call the school back. Your brain immediately goes into overdrive, "Oh my God, is Jimmy ok? Has he been hurt? Or, maybe he's gotten into trouble!"

It's the same when working with a VE. As soon as you have a hiccup or an issue, your brain immediately goes into an overdrive and starts jumping to conclusions (especially if your VE has already left for the day). Because your employee is based remotely (and may not even be at work at the time an incident comes to your attention) it is very easy for the surface facts to start 'growing and morphing' and, in turn, quickly start to appear more sinister (when they are actually not). But this is just a cognitive bias (a bias of assuming the worst) that your brain tricks you into when you are working remotely. What might be a small issue can easily get amplified because your mind starts to unnecessarily escalate the concern and fill in the missing blanks as a result of you not being then and there in the moment and not having all the facts at hand. And so, you can easily start to imagine a scenario much worse than it actually is. In turn, you might overreact to what actually might just be a small problem and this can hurt the long-term relationships you have formed with your VE.

Any time you find yourself...

1. Racing to conclusions;
2. Thinking the worst or thinking, "I bet he/she did this," or "How on earth could they have forgotten to do..."
3. Speculating as to the full facts

...you must try to stop your brain from going into overdrive and remind yourself to first establish all the facts before reacting. This might sound like common sense and just good business management, but because of the distances involved in offshoring, it is easy to become more suspicious than you normally would. In turn, even those with the most cordial temperaments can overreact. I myself, too, have regrettably succumbed to this pitfall.

And so, it is important to remember that:

- A. Your brain will naturally try to fill in the blanks, and that this will only unnecessarily cause you to overreact, which can hurt the rapport you have developed with your VE;
- B. You are in possession of only a few of the facts, so don't form an opinion until you have a thorough talk with your VE;
- C. Even with all the facts, things can still be misconstrued without context – so, directly speak with, not only your VE, but also your vendor about the issue you have. Hearing your VE's side of the story and also having your vendor put things into perspective (from an on-the-ground impartial point of view) can radically alter the impression and conclusion you had initially formed. So don't react until you first speak to your VE and/ or the vendor. You may just find that you were facing a storm in a teacup.

## *Putting things into context:*

We once had a non-technical client working with our Mobile App team. The developer had informed the client that all the changes for the app had been made after which he had left for the day. Soon after the VE had finished their shift, however, we got a call from the client, who was very unhappy that none of the changes that had been outlined had been met. In short, he expressed his outrage with his VE's performance. As it turned out, the client had been looking at the previous version of the App built. When their VE came to work the following day and showed the client the latest App built, the client very quickly retracted. But the aggressive reaction of the client certainly did nothing to build a strong relationship.







*Chapter SIX*

**Don't treat  
remote staff like  
'interchangeable  
parts'**

# • • • DON'T TREAT REMOTE STAFF • • • LIKE 'INTERCHANGEABLE • • • PARTS'

In 2013, I met Larry Spencer, the Vice President of Sceris, to film a case study about his experience of working with Virtual Employees (you can watch that case study by going to the following link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvJEHX1jWHY>).

Larry is a seasoned outsourcer; before working with us he had outsourced to both, the Ukraine and India (although both these earlier endeavours hadn't turned out to be so successful).

But you learn from your mistakes, and Larry most certainly has done that, as can be seen in his answer below. When I asked him if he had any advice for future clients, he really hit the nail on the head by giving us this gold nugget of advice.

*"Me: Is there anything you'd like to share with our viewers? Do you have any advice or anything else that you feel is relevant to add?"*

***Larry:** Yes, Shaun. There is one that I feel very passionately about and that is that developers are not interchangeable parts in some kind of software machinery. They are to be treated as individuals, professionals, and accorded all the respect that we can give them whether they are here in the United States or overseas. Be sure that you select them as individuals, and not just assume that they are interchangeable with every other software developer. So, that means that when recruiting them, you just don't treat them as a resume, as a piece of paper; you give them a chance to show what they can do.*

*"When working with them, you collaborate with them. You don't send some things over there and say "I don't want to talk to you until I get my results." If a company thinks that they are going to get a good result by just offshoring things to solve their problem by sending a package of specs somewhere, and they think that the software developers are just machines, their project is going to fail."*

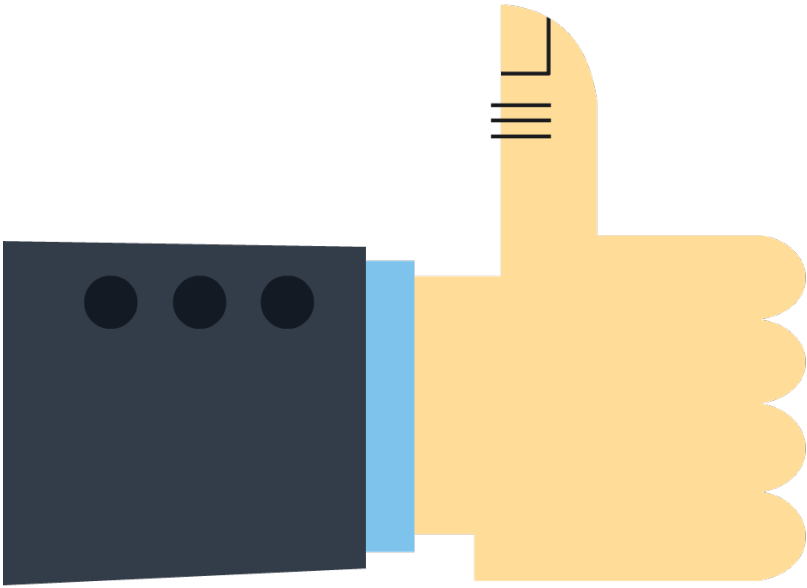
I can't really make the point any more articulately than Larry already has above. Some clients really want very little to do with their offshore team. They literally just want to throw some work at them, have the least amount of interaction possible and then expect to see a result after 'X' period. It is the equivalent of treating offshore resources as robots or, as Larry puts it, "machines". Having a closer relationship and collaborating regularly with your offshore team will go a long way in helping you achieve success; just as it does when you hire locally.



*Chapter SEVEN*

**Be realistic on  
what motivates  
Virtual Employees**

# BE REALISTIC ON WHAT MOTIVATES VIRTUAL EMPLOYEES



If you are hiring a Virtual Employee in a developing country (and taking it as a given that you are a fair and fun to work for boss!), most VEs will be motivated by, firstly, financial compensation and, secondly, the amount of opportunity the role offers.

This is a plain and simple fact and should not be taken in a negative way. It is a reality that, due to the social-economic conditions in developing countries (and the fact that sometimes employees often live with, and are financially responsible for, extended family members too) salary appraisals play a very significant role in the minds of employees than other employment factors (such as the working environment, as may be the case in the West).

## *Putting it into perspective:*

Although rare, some clients lose sight of this and believe that their Virtual Employees are highly motivated due to the working culture they have, due to the direction their company is headed in, due to their vision, due to them being an incredibly charismatic entrepreneur or due to the friendship the client has fostered with their VE. I hate to burst this bubble, but the reality is that if another company came in and offered your VE a 50% hike on their salary, more times than not, your VE would take up the new position. Don't get me wrong; working environment and culture is very important, and I have found that our staff do truly love working with Western firms. The working environment does matter and motivate and the staff do appreciate it. However, at the same time, it's important to be realistic and the reality is that, whilst the mindset is perhaps changing in the Western world, in developing countries the biggest motivator for employment is still financial remuneration.

## *Conclusion:*

In conclusion, working with a Virtual Employee is just like working with a local employee. And - this is a theme throughout all my eBooks - if you just follow good local business practices when also offshoring / hiring Virtual Employees, you will more or less be fine. Things generally tend to go wrong when clients deviate from what are well-established employee management practices.

However, sometimes, due to the economics involved and social and cultural differences, there can be occasions where it might be difficult for you to make a prudent decision. That's where your outsourcing vendor plays a critical role.

Lean on them and take their advice; don't ignore it. For instance, we (VirtualEmployee.com) have done this (placed VEs) over and over and over again (literally, over a thousand times). And when you have that level of experience, the advice you can offer to clients is invaluable. Unfortunately, sometimes clients use their discretion whether or not to use our advice, but more often than not, it's to the client's detriment if they ignore our advice. So remember, when hiring VEs, don't ignore the vendor's counsel.



***Are you thinking about Outsourcing? Then turn to the next page***



## ***If you are thinking about Outsourcing... Do you know?***

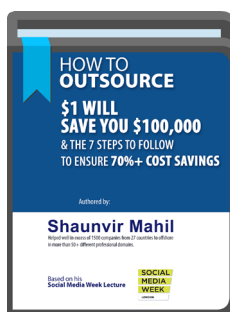
1. The 3 most common Outsourcing Models?
2. How to assess the knowledge transfer complexity of your work?
3. How to check if you are outsourcing correctly, in just 5 minutes?

Outsourcing can transform your business, but only if done correctly...

*In my eBook, 'How to Outsource Work Overseas' (based on my lecture at the Social Media Week), I share with you The 7 Key Steps to Ensure 70%+ Cost Savings, and the 10 Most Common Client Pitfalls to Avoid*

## ***The 7-Step Process for Outsourcing Success:***

- Step 1: Ask Yourself, Are You Outsourcing for the Right Reasons?*
- Step 2: Invest Time to Learn How to Outsource Before You Outsource*
- Step 3: Analyze and Evaluate Your Work Before You Outsource It*
- Step 4: Choosing the Right Outsourcing Business Model for Your Work*
- Step 5: The Outsourcing Heuristic*
- Step 6: Choosing the Right Outsourcing Vendor*
- Step 7: Getting Started with Your Outsourcing Partner*








*By following my 7-step methodology, you will have an effective outsourcing strategy in place that will ensure you get outsourcing right, the first time.*

***Yes, I want to ensure 70%+  
Outsourcing Cost Savings***


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# Virtual Employee

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