

# Help Want 10 Types of Pe (You've got options!)

Just aren't enough hours in the day to get your work done? Try these tested strategies for hiring help.

Elaine Wren was at the end of her rope. In real estate for eight years, she'd been handling her entire workload on her own. She was ready to hire someone who could help her manage the day-to-day business activities while also upping her sales volume. After talking to her business coach about the issue, this broker-associate with Century 21 Dynasty Ocean in Hallandale decided to hire a full-time assistant to handle specific projects.

Wren immediately realized that she should have made the move eight years earlier. "If I knew then what I know now, I never would have started in this business without an assistant," says Wren, who sold \$10 million in properties last year. She's gone through four assistants since 1998, and is happy with the licensed buyer's agent who's working for her now on a salary-plus-honus basis.

The first three didn't work out as well. "My first assistant was so taken with my business and lifestyle that she tried to be me," says Wren. "She wanted to do everything that I did, but nothing that I asked her to do." When hiring and training that assistant's successors, Wren ran into a few more challenges. For example, she says "letting go" was one of the tougher obstacles to overcome.

"When you're used to doing everything yourself, you always think you can do it a little better than anyone else," Wren explains. "It was a little rough for some of my assistants, until I learned to just turn it over." These days, Wren "turns over" a number of important tasks to her assistant, including telemarketing, computer work (such as searching the MLS for new listings), appointment setting, e-mail monitoring and responses, and showing properties.



# ed: Personal Assistants



# 10 Types of Personal Assistants

Having worked with four different assistants, Wren says she's learned to conduct in-depth interviews when recruiting. During those interviews, she looks for those who are already licensed or willing to become licensed quickly.

"If I want to take a day off, I need to know that someone can legally show properties for me," says Wren, who also seeks out people who seem willing to work hard in the real estate business, which she knows isn't for everyone. "Being a real estate assistant isn't a job that you're going to get rich from right away, but if they apply themselves, they'll make good money at it."

## Type 1: The Team Concept

Across the real estate industry, sales associates are finding creative ways to maximize the limited number of hours in a day that they have to run their businesses. Some, like Wren, have found success by working with one or more licensed or unlicensed assistants who work part time or full time, handling the day-to-day tasks that tend to weigh down a busy professional. Others find relief in virtual assistants, or independent contractors who work off site, handling tasks like transaction management and marketing coordination, while some prefer to join forces with other sales associates to create both formal and informal teams and partnerships.

George Philbeck and Jenny Wemert chose the latter and haven't looked back since. Already working with a (Type 2) transaction coordinator who is employed by Orlando-based Keller Williams Advantage Realty, Philbeck and Wemert paired up in August 2005 after realizing just how synergistic their two businesses were.

1. Team up with another sales associate. Use each other for support.
2. Transaction/closing coordinators can help you manage the safe paperwork.
3. A virtual assistant can be indispensable for marketing campaigns and other duties.
4. A buyer's agent can show properties while you focus on getting listings.
5. On the flip side, a listing specialist can generate listings while you focus on buyers.
6. The unlicensed administrative assistant can be useful for placing your ads, stuffing envelopes and handling phone calls.
7. Call coordinators follow up with past clients and customers as well as returning phone calls.
8. Online/database manager: This person inputs your listings into the MLS and online sites as well as following up with any online leads.
9. Marketing assistant/director: From building your campaign to coming up with innovative promotions, this person serves as your creative mastermind.
10. A licensed personal assistant can serve as a jack-of-all-trades.



Jenny Wemert (in black, center left) and George Philbeck (in black, center right) and their team of real estate assistants.

“Sales associates with good communication skills and the ability to delegate tasks in a clear, succinct manner tend to be the best match for a virtual assistant, says Omni Support Services president Michele Sharrieff.

“Our businesses were identical, so we got together and built our practices on identical business plans, marketing plans and systems,” says Wemert. “Yet, we’ve maintained our individual brands (The Wemert Team and Philbeck & Associates), and we don’t share sales.”

From the outside looking in, Philbeck says, he and Wemert function just like any other real estate team. Marketing materials feature both Realtors® photos and contact information. And when important business decisions need to be made, the Realtors turn to each other for support and advice. “We consider ourselves business partners,” says

Philbeck, who sold \$10 million in properties last year.

Both Philbeck and Wemert, who sold \$12 million in properties last year, have their own (Type 3) full-time licensed assistants, and continue to use the services of the office transaction coordinator. Their licensed assistants

have been trained as experts in the transaction itself, taking care of the basic steps that need to be taken prior to closing, such as client and customer support, documentation, obtaining signatures, working with third-party service providers and other key tasks. They also handle phone calls, messages, showing coordination and other day-to-day tasks that free up Philbeck and Wemert to sell properties. The transaction coordinator takes over once a purchase agreement has been accepted. She handles everything from scheduling home inspections and appraisals to ensuring that all documents are signed in an orderly, timely fashion for closing day.

Just a few months into their alliance, the pair expects higher sales volume for both practices this year, despite the cooling market. “Our listings have quadrupled since pairing up,” says Wemert. “Whereas in the past we had individually reached our limits at 40 transactions a year, now there is no longer a ceiling in terms of listing management.”

Advice from the Legal Eagle...

## What Brokers Need to Know



As a broker, the fact that sales associates with your brokerage hire assistants affects you too. FAR attorneys advise you to be aware of the following:

**1** If a licensed assistant is going to perform licensed real estate activities, then the assistant’s real estate license must be placed with the broker/brokerage firm for whom they are performing these activities.

**2** If a licensed assistant is performing real estate work that requires a license, then the compensation paid to the assistant in connection with the licensed activity must come from the broker/brokerage and not the sales associate or broker associate for whom they are acting as an assistant.

Concerns or questions? Call FAR’s Legal Hotline at (407) 438-1409. Calls are answered Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please have your real estate license number available when you call.

# Sizing ‘em Up

Looking for help figuring out whether or not you’re hiring the right person for the job? While gut instincts can be accurate, you may consider a more scientific method.

Rebekah Rivers, as broker-co-owner of Keller Williams Town and Country Realty in Tallahassee and Jacksonville uses the principles laid out by the DISC Profile (an assessment tool that helps you explore a recruit’s personal styles, including his or her approach to home and work life, communication style and motivation, and particular strengths) to size up potential recruits and decide quickly which positions would suit them best. The approximately 40-page test is telling, says Rivers, who when hiring buyer’s agents looks for high I’s and high D’s—scores that tell her they are influencers and dominant personality types. Office staff and tech types should score high S’s and C’s, she says, who are steady, conscientious team players

Rivers



who tend to be compliant and mindful about details.

Listing specialists should be high I’s, she says, who tend to be likable, yet firm and able to get their points across to sellers. “They need to be very forceful at listing appointments,” says Rivers, who considers the DISC to be an effective tool for sizing up job candidates before hiring them. “It tells me what the person is like, and also the dos and don’ts of dealing with them,” she says. “It’s very insightful.”

*More about DISC Profiles:*

*Used by many recruiters and job placement professionals, DISC provides insight into individual styles that helps employers predict the likely future behaviors of potential employees. Learn more online at [www.discprofile.com](http://www.discprofile.com).*

# Is It Time?

If you're curious about whether a virtual assistant is right for you, check out these clues, which might help you make the final decision:

## Type 4: Going Virtual

A growing number of sales associates are finding virtual assistants to be a good middle ground between working solo and hiring full-time assistants who need desks, benefits and steady paychecks. Working virtually with the assistance of technology, these independent contractors handle myriad tasks for busy professionals, including comparative market analysis development, virtual tour assembly and posting, drip e-mail campaign creation, e-mail inquiry filtering and Web site maintenance.

"Literally anything can be done from a distance," says Michael Russer, CEO of REVA Teams, a Pleasanton, Calif.-based virtual assistant organization for the real estate industry, and president of Russer Communications in Santa Barbara, Calif. He says sales

- You need help on a per-project basis that doesn't warrant a full- or part-time staff member.
- You need more time to sell property.
- You aren't focusing on your core competencies (sales, consultations, investments, etc.).
- You have limited space available in your office for additional staff members.
- You're totally overwhelmed in your business and aren't able to keep up with the details.
- You're willing to delegate and give up some control over noncore tasks to an off-site assistant.
- You're a people person who doesn't like hanging around the office doing paperwork.
- You're a brand-new sales associate who has experienced early success and needs assistance, but is not ready to hire full-time help.
- You don't have the time to handle all the necessary marketing tasks that need to be done.
- You're not technology oriented, and would rather have someone else handle responsibilities like updating accounting software and creating virtual tours.
- You know what needs to be done, but you just don't have time to do it all.
- After months of training your last on-site assistant, he or she became your competitor.

Virtual assistants can handle myriad tasks for busy professionals, including virtual tour assembly and posting, drip e-mail campaign creation, e-mail inquiry filtering and Web site maintenance.

associates generally pay either \$250 to \$350 per transaction or \$25 to \$45 per hour, depending on the scope of the project.

In Central Florida, Michele Sharrieff has been providing virtual transaction coordination services to real estate professionals since 2003. As president of Orlando-based Omni Support Services, Sharrieff says her firm manages all contract details—from purchase contract signing to closing day. Fees are paid on a per-transaction basis, and the coordinators themselves generally do not hold real estate licenses.

Sharrieff says virtual assistants can be invaluable for the sales associate who doesn't want to hire and manage on-site employees, but who needs help managing his or her workload. Because most documents can be faxed or

e-mailed, handling transaction management from afar is fairly seamless, she says, and can be orchestrated by a virtual assistant who is well versed in the basics of transaction management.

And while Sharrieff's firm specializes in that aspect of the business, some virtual assistants offer basic support services (phone answering, e-mail monitoring, etc.) and others provide marketing coordination (preparing fliers and postcards, creating and e-mailing online newsletters, etc.).

Sharrieff says Realtors with good communication skills and the ability to delegate tasks in a clear, succinct manner tend to be the best match for a virtual assistant. By the time the third transaction rolls around, she says the relationship begins to "gel" well, with both parties becoming comfortable with the process. "By that third sale,

everyone is on board and comfortable," says Sharrieff. "After that, the virtual assistant pretty much goes on automatic."

## Covering All the Bases

For Gene and Rebekah Rivers, the ability to delegate important tasks to professionals who specialize in certain areas of the transaction has been an extremely effective business strategy. As broker-owners of Keller Williams Town and Country Realty in Tallahassee and Jacksonville, Rebekah Rivers says, after 17 years in the real estate business, they're at the point where they no longer list and sell, but instead direct their team to success.

For Rebekah Rivers, who runs the 209-agent Tallahassee office, that team includes (**Types 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10**) one team leader (who coordinates the entire team and manages the office), five buyer's agents, two listing specialists, one database manager/call coordinator (who coordinates and manages inbound and outbound contacts), a marketing director (who handles the company's marketing efforts), a new-construction listing coordinator (who works solely



### Virtual Assistants

Virtual assistants can help you with a variety of marketing and general tasks. Here are a few to call:

1. **Allie Milicevic**, [www.virtualresources.net](http://www.virtualresources.net), e-mail: [info@virtualresources.net](mailto:info@virtualresources.net), (321) 206-1277
2. **Anna Baron**, [www.TheVirtualLink.com](http://www.TheVirtualLink.com), e-mail: [Anna@thevirtuallink.com](mailto:Anna@thevirtuallink.com), (972) 359-9855
3. **Jeri Winkler**, [www.secretassistant.com](http://www.secretassistant.com), e-mail: [Jeri@secretassistant.com](mailto:Jeri@secretassistant.com), (315) 482-6819
4. **Kim Hughes**, [www.KimHughes.com](http://www.KimHughes.com), e-mail: [Kim@KimHughes.com](mailto:Kim@KimHughes.com), (903) 569-6763
5. **Omni Support Services**, Michele Sharrieff, (407) 656-7519
6. **Pro Step Marketing**, Tricia Fink Andreassen, e-mail: [Tricia@prostep-marketing.com](mailto:Tricia@prostep-marketing.com), (866) 799-9888, ext. 81
7. **REVA Teams**, [www.revateams.com](http://www.revateams.com), e-mail: [info@revateams.com](mailto:info@revateams.com), (888) 842-3232, ext. 8000
8. **The 24 Hour Secretary**, Sharon Williams, e-mail: [info@the24hoursecretary.com](mailto:info@the24hoursecretary.com), (410) 521-7001

Of the assistants, only the buyer's agents, listing coordinators and team leader are licensed, says broker-owner Rebekah Rivers. Compensation structures vary, with administrative personnel working on salaries and buyer's agents operating on 50-50 commission splits.

on new-home listings), a resale listing coordinator (works solely on resale listings), a marketing assistant (who supports and executes marketing activities), two closing coordinators and two runners (who work with all the others, delivering documents and transferring pertinent files among the designated parties). Among them, only the Riverses and the buyer's agents, listing coordinators and team leader are licensed. Compensation structures vary, with administrative personnel working on salaries and buyer's agents operating on 50-50 commission splits.

Rebekah Rivers, whose Tallahassee office posted \$70 million in property sales last year, says she hired her first assistant in 1990. That position slowly split into two jobs, one centered on closing and the other on listing. A buyer's agent soon followed, as did several administrative personnel. "As we got bigger and bigger, we had to separate jobs and hire new employees to fill them," says Rivers. "It's been quite a process."

To sales associates looking to hire their first assistants or add to an existing team, Rivers says simply: Hire slowly, and fire quickly. "Hiring out of need is just not a good thing. Even if you need immediate relief, you should take your time with hiring and find someone who truly fits your business." She points to college students or interns as good choices for those who need help, but who may be apprehensive about the financial commitment and training involved with hiring employees.

"Even if you just hire a college student to handle mundane tasks like putting up signs, making fliers and running around checking lockboxes, you'll be in good shape," says Rivers. "That \$8 an hour that you pay that person will be well worth it. Just look at how much money you'll save if you don't have to do all of those things."

*Bridget McCrea is a Clearwater-based freelance writer.*

## 7 Tips for Hiring a Helper

- Organize your goals and systems first so you can easily decide what type of help you need and can train someone quickly to meet your needs.
- Don't hire someone just like you; hire someone who balances your weaknesses. You need someone who can handle the part of the business you don't want to do.
- Hire someone from inside your brokerage or from another company who already knows about real estate or at least someone who knows real estate terms.
- Consider an administrative assistant who loves real estate but doesn't want to be a full-time Realtor. He or she will be interested in the work, but won't use you to jump start his or her career — however, that's not always a bad thing.
- Once you find the right assistant, it's important to compensate that person well and partner with him or her to create loyalty.
- If you have more than one assistant, cross-train them so you won't be at a loss when someone leaves or goes on vacation.
- If you're not ready to take the step to hire a part-time or full-time assistant, consider delegating some services to a virtual assistant or to a mailing company.