

- AGENCY GROWTH · YOUR FIRST REAL HIRE

## The First Hire **Playbook**

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Make your first agency hire **pay for itself in 30 days**, and cut the 46% odds it blows up in your face. The decision tree that picks the right role, the real pay ranges, the copy-paste job post, the paid test task that screens out the people who interview great and deliver garbage, the 8-question interview, and a day-by-day first-2-weeks plan.

[VA vs specialist vs ops decision tree](#)[Real pay \(US + offshore\)](#)[The copy-paste job post](#)[Where to find them, ranked](#)[The paid test task + rubric](#)[The 8-question interview](#)[The 2-week onboarding plan](#)

## THE DECISION TREE

# You know you need to hire. You have no idea who.

VA, media buyer, or someone to run ops? Pick wrong and you burn \$4,000 a month and three weeks of training on a person who quietly checks out. Start with one question, not a job title.

ASK YOURSELF THIS, NOT "WHAT ROLE DO I NEED"

**What is the work only I can do, and what is eating the other 16 hours of my week?**

START HERE FOR MOST OWNERS

## Generalist VA

The cheapest reversible bet

Hire first if you are **drowning in inbox, scheduling, reporting, invoicing, and CRM cleanup**. This frees the founder fastest and is the easiest hire to undo if it does not work.

Default pick

IF DELIVERY IS THE WALL

## Delivery specialist

Media buyer · copywriter · SEO

Hire if **delivery is the bottleneck and you can already sell**. Only works when you have enough recurring work to keep them busy. Do not hire a specialist to fix a sales problem.

NOT YET, FOR MOST

## Ops / account mgr

The integrator

Hire **only once you are past roughly \$30K to \$40K a month** and managing more than 2 contractors. Before that, there is not enough to manage. You would be paying a manager to manage nobody.



### THE RULE OF THUMB TO PRINT AND TAPE TO YOUR MONITOR

When in doubt, hire the **generalist VA first**. It costs the least, it frees you the fastest, and it is the easiest bet to reverse. You do not need to predict the perfect org chart. You need to get \$10-an-hour work off your plate so you can do the \$1,000-an-hour work that actually grows the agency.

**46%**

of new hires fail inside 18 months

**89%**

of those failures are attitude, not skill

**~30%**

of first-year pay is the cost of a bad hire

**68%**

of an owner's time is stuck working "in" the business

Sources: Leadership IQ, "Why New Hires Fail" study (5,247 hiring managers, new hires tracked 18 months). U.S. Department of Labor bad-hire cost estimate. The Alternative Board (TAB) Time Management survey.

THE PAY TABLE

You see VAs for \$5 an hour and US people for \$60, and you have no clue what is real.

Both are real. They buy different things. Here are the live ranges, plus a full-time monthly estimate so you can see the reversible-bet math before you commit a dollar.

| ROLE                                                 | OFFSHORE (PH / LATAM) | US-BASED           | FULL-TIME / MONTH                               |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| General VA / admin<br>inbox, scheduling, reporting   | \$3 to \$7 / hr       | \$25 to \$45 / hr  | \$600 to \$1,200 offshore<br>US ~\$4 to \$7K    |
| Specialist VA<br>light media buying, editing         | \$10 to \$17 / hr     | \$50 to \$100 / hr | \$1,600 to \$2,700 offshore<br>US ~\$8 to \$14K |
| Marketing specialist<br>media buyer, copywriter, SEO | \$11 to \$17 / hr     | \$50 to \$100 / hr | \$1,900 to \$2,900 offshore<br>US ~\$4 to \$7K  |

Source: 2025–2026 platform rate data (OnlineJobs.ph, Upwork, PayScale benchmarks). Philippines VAs typically run 60% to 80% less than US-based VAs, who average around \$35/hr.

A general VA at \$600 to \$1,200 a month is the cheapest reversible bet you can make. If it works, you bought back 15 hours a week. If it does not, you are out one month, not one quarter.

Here is the math that makes the first VA the safest hire, not the scariest one. Most stuck owners are doing \$10-an-hour work at the expense of the \$1,000-an-hour work. Put a number on it.

| THE REVERSIBLE-BET MATH, WORKED                                          |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Offshore general VA, full-time, all-in                                   | \$900 / mo     |
| Admin work you hand off (15 hrs/week)                                    | ~65 hrs / mo   |
| Those 65 hours, reinvested into sales & offer at a \$200/hr founder rate | \$13,000 value |
| Downside if the hire flops (you stop after month 1)                      | -\$900         |
| Reclaimed founder capacity, month one                                    | ~65 hrs        |

You are not betting \$7,000. You are betting one month at \$900 to find out if you can buy back 65 hours. That is a bet you can afford to lose, and the upside is the time to finally work on the agency instead of inside it.

## BEFORE YOU WRITE A JOB POST

# Owners delegate the wrong thing first, then wonder why **nothing freed up.**

Do not hire to a vague vibe of "I'm busy." Sort your week by the value of the hour. Everything in the first two columns that is not the thing only you can do leaves your plate on day one.

| <b>\$10/hr</b><br>HAND OFF FIRST                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>\$100/hr</b><br>HAND OFF AS THEY RAMP                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>\$1,000/hr</b><br>YOU KEEP THESE                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Inbox triage</b> &amp; calendar</li><li>• Scheduling &amp; reminders</li><li>• Formatting client reports</li><li>• Invoicing &amp; chasing AR</li><li>• Data entry &amp; CRM cleanup</li><li>• Posting &amp; scheduling content</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First-draft proposals</li><li>• QA on deliverables</li><li>• Routine client check-ins</li><li>• Hiring screens &amp; sourcing</li><li>• Building SOPs &amp; templates</li><li>• Ad reporting &amp; pulls</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positioning &amp; the offer</li><li>• Closing high-ticket deals</li><li>• Key partnerships</li><li>• Long-term strategy</li><li>• The few client calls that decide renewals</li></ul> |

**THE RULE THAT PICKS THE WORK TO DELEGATE**

If a task is **\$10 or \$100 work** and it is not the thing only you can do, it leaves your plate. Your first hire's whole job description is the left two columns. The right column is why you are hiring in the first place: to get the time back to do it.

**Now turn the sort into a written list before you post.** Open a doc and write the five tasks you most dread, the five that eat the most clock, and the five only you can do. The first ten become the job post. The last five are the lines you protect. A hire with a clear "you own this so I stop doing it" mandate ramps in days. A hire you throw in with no plan is the one who fails inside 18 months.

**PRINT THIS BEFORE YOU SPEND A CENT ON A JOB BOARD**

Owners spend **68% of their time working "in" the business** on day-to-day tasks, when most would rather flip that ratio (The Alternative Board). The job of your first hire is to flip it. If your job post does not name the exact \$10-an-hour tasks they will own, you are about to hire a person to be busy near you, not to free you.

## THE JOB POST TEMPLATE · SWAP THE BLANKS, POST IT TODAY

**Title:** [Role, e.g. Agency Virtual Assistant] for a growing [your niche] agency

**1. THE ONE-LINE OUTCOME**

You will own [inbox, scheduling, reporting, CRM] so the founder stops doing it and gets back to selling and serving clients.

**2. WHAT YOU WILL OWN (5 RESPONSIBILITIES)**

- ✓ Run the inbox and calendar: triage, reply to routine email, book calls
- ✓ Build and send weekly client reports from [Looker Studio / your template]
- ✓ Keep the CRM clean: log calls, update stages, flag stale deals
- ✓ Handle invoicing and chase overdue payments
- ✓ Schedule and post content across [channels]

**3. THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES**

- ✓ Fluent written English and a same-day reply habit
- ✓ Overlaps [4 hours] with US [Eastern] time
- ✓ Comfortable with [ClickUp, Slack, your CRM] or learns fast

**4. THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENT + THE READER FILTER**

Record a **60-second Loom** telling me about a time you cleaned up a mess for a past boss. To prove you read this, **start your application with the word PINEAPPLE**. Applications without it are deleted.

The **PINEAPPLE filter** kills every applicant who blasts the same copy-paste reply to 50 jobs. The **Loom requirement** shows you communication, energy, and follow-through before you spend a single minute on a call. Two lines, and your inbox shrinks to people who can actually read and do.

## SOURCING, RANKED

# You hired a cheap offshore VA once, redid all their work, and **gave up.**

The platform was not the problem. No filter and no paid test was. Here is where to post, in order, and the one note that makes each one worth your time.

1

**OnlineJobs.ph** **CHEAPEST**

The deepest pool of full-time offshore VAs at **\$3 to \$7/hr** for general work, \$10 to \$17 for specialists. Filipino VAs are used to long-term, Western, English-first roles. This is where most of your applicants should come from.

**Filter for:** ID-verified profiles, a worker who lists **agency or admin support** history, and a recent login. Post your PINEAPPLE filter and require the Loom.

2

**Upwork** **TEST FAST**

Post a job and you get proposals inside **24 hours**. Best for speed and for running a paid test before any monthly commitment. Look at LatAm candidates if you want full US-timezone overlap.

**Filter for:** 90%+ job success score, hours logged on at least one **admin or VA contract**, and a profile video. Skip anyone whose only proof is a five-star review on a \$20 gig.

3

**We Work Remotely** **US-BASED**

When you want a **US-based** VA or a marketing specialist and you are paying the higher band, this is a serious-applicant board. Expect fewer, stronger applicants than the offshore platforms, and a faster ramp on US-client nuance.

4

**Your own audience & DMs** **HIGHEST SIGNAL**

Post the role to your email list, LinkedIn, and the people already in your DMs. Someone who follows your work already **gets your niche and your standard**. Add a referral ask: "Who is the best VA you have ever worked with?" A referred hire comes pre-vetted on the one thing that matters.

**THE ONE FILTER THAT SAVES YOU A BAD MONTH**

The offshore people who sound great in chat and terrible in the work are the **#1 trap**. **Never hire off a resume and a nice message.** The next page is the screen that does the real work: a small paid test task. It predicts on-the-job performance better than any interview, and it costs you fifty bucks to find out.

THE PAID TEST TASK

Stop hiring on the interview. Hire on the work.

A work sample predicts job performance at .54 on its own, far above an unstructured interview (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Pay your top 2 or 3 finalists \$50 to \$150 for a real, scoped task. You learn more in one day than in five calls.

For a Virtual Assistant

PAY \$50

**The brief:** Here is a messy CRM export (50 rows, duplicate contacts, blank fields, wrong stages). Clean it into a usable sheet, then draft **3 client status update emails** from the notes I have attached. You have **2 hours**.

**What it reveals:** Do they follow instructions, work fast, write like a human, and ask a smart question instead of guessing? All four show up in one task.

For a Media Buyer / Specialist

PAY \$150

**The brief:** Here is read-only access to a real (or sample) ad account. Send me a **5-bullet teardown**: what is working, what you would kill, the one change you would test first, and why. **Loom optional, plain text fine**.

**What it reveals:** Do they read an account fast, prioritize the one thing that matters, and explain it so a client would understand? That is most of the actual job.

Score every finalist on the same 1-to-5 grid. Do not score from memory. Fill this in the moment the work lands so the best applicant wins, not the one you talked to last.

| SCORE EACH FINALIST 1 TO 5    | A                        | B                        | C                        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Instructions followed exactly | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speed / turnaround            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Communication (clear, human)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality of the actual output  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

A 4 or 5 across the board is your hire. Anyone who ignored an instruction in a **paid test**, when they are trying their hardest to impress you, will ignore ten of them once they are comfortable. The test is the cheapest insurance against the 46% failure rate there is.

## THE 8-QUESTION INTERVIEW

# Skills get them in the door. **Attitude is what blows up.**

89% of hiring failures trace to attitude, not technical skill (Leadership IQ). So lead with coachability and follow-through. Ask all 8 in the same order, every candidate, and score what they say, not how you felt.

**1 Tell me about a time you got hard feedback. What did you do in the next 48 hours?****COACHABILITY**

**LISTEN FOR** a specific change they made fast, not defensiveness or a vague "I took it on board." The best ones name the exact fix.

**2 Walk me through how you cleaned up a mess for a past boss, start to finish.**

**LISTEN FOR** ownership and a real sequence of steps. Vague answers mean they watched it happen. **You want the person who did it.**

**3 When you do not know how to do something, what are your exact first three moves?**

**LISTEN FOR** "I check the SOP, I try to solve it, then I ask with a proposed answer." A red flag is "I ask my manager" as move one.

**4 What does a great workday look like for you?****TEMPERAMENT**

**LISTEN FOR** whether the work you are hiring for energizes them. A VA who hates admin will quietly quit in week three.

**5 Tell me about a deadline you missed. What actually happened?**

**LISTEN FOR** honesty and what they changed. "I have never missed one" is a lie or a sign they have never owned anything hard.

**6 In the test task, why did you make [a specific choice]?**

**LISTEN FOR** reasoning, not luck. This is where the paid test pays off twice. You can tell who understood and who guessed.

**7 How do you keep track of work when you are juggling five things at once?**

**LISTEN FOR** a real system (a list, a board, a daily review). "I just remember it" is how things fall through the cracks.

**8 What questions do you have for me?**

**LISTEN FOR** questions about the work, the standard, and how success is measured. No questions at all is a quiet no.

## ONBOARDING · WEEK 1

# You hire, then throw them in with no plan and act **shocked when it fails.**

Organizations with a **structured onboarding process** see materially higher new-hire retention and faster time-to-productivity (Brandon Hall Group). Most owners run zero structure. Here is the day-by-day that turns a new hire into an owner of work by Day 10.

**Day 1**ACCESS +  
WATCH**Give access, then show them the work once**

Set up logins to **email, CRM, Slack, and your PM tool** before they start. Then record a **10-minute Loom** of you doing the first task they will own, narrating every click. No live training. The Loom is reusable and it removes you as the bottleneck on day one.

**Days 2-3**SHADOW +  
DOCUMENT**They watch, then they write the SOP**

They shadow you (or re-watch the Loom) and **write the SOP themselves** as a numbered checklist. This does two jobs: it proves they actually understood it, and it builds the documentation you have been meaning to create for a year. You review and fix it once.

**Days 4-5**THEY DO, YOU  
REVIEW**They run the task, you review the output**

They do the real task off their own SOP. You review the output, not the process, and give one round of specific feedback. By Friday of week one they should be able to do **one recurring task without you watching.**

**THE LOOM-TO-SOP METHOD THAT KILLS THE BOTTLENECK**

Open Loom, do the task at normal speed while narrating every click, stop. Paste the transcript into ChatGPT or Claude with: **"Turn this into a numbered SOP with a checklist a new VA can follow."** One ten-minute recording replaces hours of repeating yourself, and now the next hire trains off the same library.

Source: Brandon Hall Group research on the impact of a structured onboarding process on new-hire retention and time-to-productivity. Directional research, not a guarantee of your result.

## ONBOARDING · WEEK 2

# Week 2 is where they go from "new hire" to "owns it."

One SOP written per day, a five-minute async check-in, and a first fully owned task by Day 10. No long meetings. Just a tight loop that builds trust fast and gives you a documented machine on the way out.

**Days 6-9** One recurring task owned, one SOP written per day

OWN +

DOCUMENT

Each day they take over a new recurring task and write its SOP. By the end of week two you should have **4 to 5 fresh SOPs** and a hire who runs the daily admin without you. The library is now the asset that makes hire number two ramp in days.

**Day 10** The first task that fully leaves your plate

FIRST OWNED

TASK

Pick one thing you will **never touch again** (inbox triage, the weekly report, invoicing) and hand it over for good. This is the proof point: a task that used to be yours now happens without you. That is the whole point of the hire.

**Daily**

5-MIN ASYNC

**The daily check-in, written not called**

Replace the status meeting with a **three-line async message** in Slack at end of day. It takes them two minutes and you 30 seconds. It catches problems while they are small and builds the habit of proactive communication, the thing that separates a hire who lasts from one who quietly drifts.

**THE DAILY CHECK-IN TEMPLATE · HAVE THEM SEND THIS EVERY DAY****1****Done**

What I finished today.

**2****Stuck**

Where I am blocked or unsure (with my best guess at the answer).

**3****Next**

What I am doing first tomorrow.

Set the expectation on Day 1 that **"Stuck" always comes with their proposed answer**. That one rule turns a VA who asks you 20 questions a day into one who solves 18 of them and brings you the two that matter.

## THE 30-DAY SCORECARD

# At day 30, you keep them or you cut. Score it, do not guess.

Rate each on a 1 to 5. A bad hire kept too long costs ~30% of their first-year pay. A good hire you doubted and dropped costs you the whole search again. The grid removes the emotion.

| AFTER 30 DAYS, RATE 1 TO 5               | WK 1                     | WK 2                     | WK 3                     | WK 4                     |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Instructions followed without reminders  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Communication: proactive, brings answers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quality of work (needs little rework)    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speed / turnaround on owned tasks        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Took work off your plate (felt it?)      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Keep them if

- ✓ Scores trending up week over week
- ✓ You have stopped doing at least one task for good
- ✓ They bring proposed answers, not just questions
- ✓ You feel lighter, not like a babysitter

### Cut them if

- ✗ Same mistakes after the same feedback twice
- ✗ You are still redoing their work in week four
- ✗ You dread checking their output
- ✗ Attitude dipped the moment they got comfortable

Decide by **Day 30, on the numbers**. Most failed hires were visible by week two and kept for three more months out of guilt. The scorecard gives you permission to act early, which is the single cheapest thing you can do about the 46% failure rate.

• YOUR NEXT MOVE

# You can run this hire yourself. Or we can **build the whole machine with you.**

This playbook is the system on paper. AgencyGod is the system done **with** you: we build your client-acquisition machine, fill the calendar with calls that show and close, and stand up the delivery and SOPs so your first hire walks into a real operation, not chaos. The hire frees your time. **We make sure that time turns into revenue.**

It is backed by the \$10,000 guarantee: you get the result or you get paid. We onboard only a handful of agencies a month so we can actually deliver, and **every spot carries the guarantee.** Read this, make the hire, then come map your machine with us.

**\$10K  
GTD**

You get the result or we pay you \$10,000

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Results mentioned are real client outcomes and are not typical. Individual results vary with effort, market, and execution. The \$10,000 guarantee is real and subject to the program's written enrollment agreement terms.