

# Executive Stress<sup>®</sup>

## OFFICE SUPPORT

*"Professional Virtual Assistance for the 21st Century Professional!"*

December 2007

# Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 4

## Welcome!

WHAT A HUGE QUARTER for Executive Stress Office Support ... and me personally! Here's a recap:

**Award Win:** Winner in the Professional Services category of the 2007 Quest Business Achievers Awards.

**Australian Women Online:** I was featured on this site in their Profiles of Success series.

**Australian Virtual Business Network:** I finally launched this network - something I've been wanting to do for a few years now! More details later in the newsletter.

**Australian Expo:** The AVBN has a virtual booth at the Australian Expo which you can see here.

I was asked to write an [article](#) for an e-Book on "What I wish I Knew Before I Started My Business" - which should be coming out soon and more details will become available on that shortly.

So it's been a busy quarter!

With the Festive Season looming it's time to arrange your cards and gifts to clients. If you need some help in this regard, drop as an email.

I've included an article this newsletter from Linda Anderson from a2a Coaching on how to create a successful relationship with your VA.

Please stay safe over the holidays. Blessed Yule/Litha, Merry Christmas, Nollaig Shona, Happy Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Posadas Navidenas and Eid

al-Fitr. Enjoy time with loved ones no matter which holiday celebration you observe!

Till next quarter!

Virtually yours

*Lyn P.B*

"There is nothing sadder in this world than to awake Christmas morning and not be a child."

- Erma Bombeck

## AVBN Launched

AUSTRALIA'S ONLY SOURCE of pre-qualified, skills tested and reference-checked virtual business operators is now available to clients looking to partner with the best virtual operators Australia has to offer.

The **Australian Virtual Business Network** is now online at <http://www.avbn.com.au>.

This network is something I've been working on for a couple of years - nutting out exactly how I wanted it to run, what sorts of things I wanted it to offer not only to clients but also to the member businesses, and how it would be different from networks that currently exist.

The goal of the network is to provide clients with access to the highest quality virtual assistant and other virtual support services Australia has to offer. We all know that you can Google search for Virtual Assistant and get thousands of hits, but how do you

know the link you click on is going to be all they say on their site? The truth is, we can never be sure just what we're getting when we make buying decisions on the internet. AVBN members are the best-in-class, undergoing a rigorous pre-screening process to ensure they possess the fundamentals of experience, skill and professionalism. When a client comes to the AVBN site looking for a particular service, they can either search the directory or (for a small fee) we will match them to the service provider best suited to them. Think of it as a kind of executive recruitment service but without the requirement to pay a percentage of first year's salary!

The network also provides seasoned, new and aspiring virtual assistants and virtual business operators a place to

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learn, network and grow, providing access to online training, business development and support. New VAs are not listed on the site but have access to the forum and online training, enabling them to learn and grow their business by connecting with financial members who are some of the best in the business. There is a listserv for members and non-members alike to network and share information. Membership of the listserv is free and can be joined by sending an email to the moderator at:

[avbn\\_list-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:avbn_list-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

The network is also participating in the Australian Expo 2007. You can see our virtual booth at:

<http://www.australianexpo.com.au>



## Musing ... Manners

Recently I've been wondering what's going on with people. Perhaps I'm just getting older because I sound like all those 'old folks' I remember when I was kid: "I remember when I was young...."

Has anyone else noticed how rude we are becoming? You let someone in in traffic but don't get an acknowledging wave. Or you're trying to merge into traffic and no-one will let you in ... or worse - they speed up to cut you off! Hardly anyone says please and thank you anymore, or 'bless you' when someone sneezes. And if they DO, how many say thank you in response or just give a weak smile?



Last November we had car trouble 45 minutes out of Warwick (a country town 2 hours west of Brisbane). OK - more than trouble. Our engine seized. We had no mobile signal. I stood by the

car, hood up, with my daughter for nearly 2 hours - we were on a relatively busy highway. Not one car stopped - until eventually after that length of time, a young man stopped to loan us his CDMA phone so we could make a call to roadside assistance. Now I appreciate that people have become concerned for their own safety - but has the media made us so terrified by stories of rampaging psychos that we believe these people are the rule and not the exception?

Then there are pedestrian crossings. Only a couple of months ago an elderly lady was killed on a zebra crossing near our home. There are pedestrian lights at my daughter's school but drivers regularly either race to beat them or go straight through the red light - even with pedestrians already on the road. When I learned to drive we were taught not only to stop for a red light but to slow down when approaching a zebra crossing.

It saddens me to think that we are so consumed by our own importance that we begin to believe that we ARE the centre of the universe. "Why should I thank

someone for letting me in when I'm the centre of the universe? They are only doing what I would expect them to do anyway." Do we REALLY think like that??

Australians would have to be the worst when it comes to email etiquette. I have dealings with people all over the world and yet those in my home country have real difficulty with the concept of hitting Reply when an email comes in. I was beginning to think it must just be me until I recently did a transcription job where someone in the UK made the same point - that Australians don't answer email in a timely manner. It doesn't have to be a lengthy diatribe. If you need to check on something before sending a more considered response, it is courteous to send a simple acknowledgement of receipt so the person who sent the email doesn't think they're talking to a brick wall.

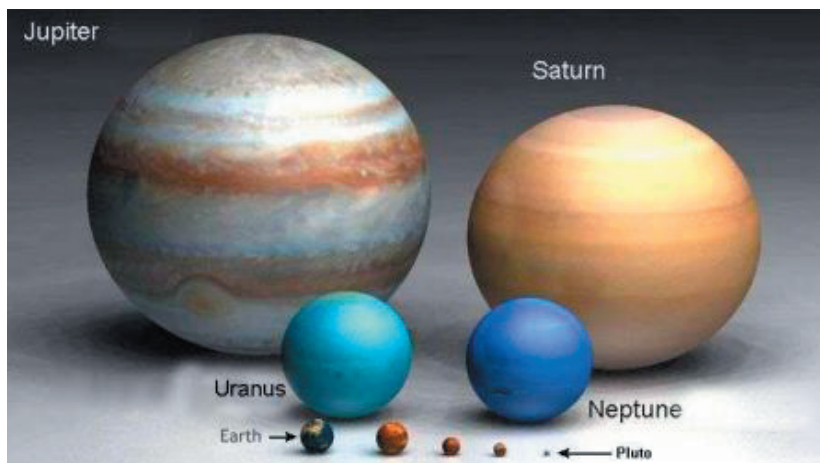
Even our charity organisations seem to be losing sight of why they exist. I had a dreadful time this year trying to find a charity willing to take all three of us (my husband and I, and our 8yo daughter) for volunteer work prior to Christmas. One never returned my email, one started out hopefully but then someone else got on the email and told me my daughter was too young to do anything they had (that includes packing hampers for the needy apparently) but "we'd be happy to accept you and your husband". I understand there are probably WH&S issues involved but it's not like we intended to drop her off and go for a coffee. She would be under our constant supervision. These agencies constantly say they are crying out for help but when it's offered (and I said we'd be willing to do anything) there is no proactive response. These were some of the better known charities too!

One ray of hope was when I met a couple of lovely elderly ladies running a project that provides care packs for children going into foster care. Often these children are taken from their homes with just the clothes they stand up in. The care packs include fresh underwear, toiletries, a cuddly toy, pencils and a notepad which has been handmade. They delivered over 3,000 of these packs in 2007. "Project Love & Care" is run out of the home of one of these ladies and they were happy to take me and my daughter for a packing day in December. We're also arranging



a workshop for my daughter's Guide unit where the girls can make beaded bracelets to go into the care packs for the girls. It's not hard to give a little back really.

As we continue what seems to be the relentless trudge towards a more self-centred society where the rights of the individual outweigh what's best for the community, where you can have 300 "friends" on MySpace without ever really knowing any of them, perhaps it's time to take a moment to reflect on your own actions in 2007 and perhaps make a concerted effort in 2008 to remember that we're just one small part of something WAY bigger than us (as this pic shows!) and it doesn't hurt to show kindness to each other every once in a while.



## How to Create a Successful Relationship with a VA

By Linda Anderson - a2a Coaching

**ABOUT SIX MONTHS AGO** I reached a significant milestone as a soloist. It was the realisation that my business could not keep growing if I was the only person working on the business ... I was running out of time and energy. It was at this moment I began to explore the idea of engaging a Virtual Assistant (VA).

I engaged my VA 4 months ago and in that time she has become an invaluable resource and contribution to my business - she even 'babysat' my business for 4.5 weeks when I went overseas on holidays. Many people I have spoken to have shared stories about their difficulties making their VA relationship work well and have asked me how I got so "lucky".

I can tell you "luck" has had nothing to do with this! Here are 5 tips for creating a successful and productive relationship with a VA.

### Be clear about what you want your VA to do

The first thing I did was a brainstorm of all the activities I currently did that I would like someone else to do. I then added a list of all the things I wasn't getting done which fell into 2 categories:

- (a) things I would like my VA to do for me;
- (b) things that I wanted to do when I had more time (thanks to my VA taking on existing work)

This allowed me to find VAs that had skills and experience that matched my requirements.

### Articulate your personal 'quirks'

As a soloist so much about the way I worked was inside my head - such as how do I like my day structured, what are my response times to

enquiries, how do I word my email correspondence. Having someone else work with me meant I needed to articulate all of these things - easier said than done!

### Be explicit with instructions and deadlines

This may seem to be stating the obvious but it never ceases to amaze me how many people issue a request for work to be done without a deadline attached. Then they get annoyed when work is not complete when they want it! Deadlines can be as specific as 'Wednesday 3pm' or as general as 'by the end of this week' - just ensure you have one.

Ensure you are explicit with instructions as it reduces the chance of miscommunication or error. Remember, much of what you do is habit and you can't assume someone else will think the same way you do.

### Agree on work flow processes

Spend time in the early stages of your working relationship to agree on work flow processes. How will you share information? How will you ensure things don't slip through cracks or get double handled? How will you issue instructions - verbally or in writing? Will you send requests as they happen or save them up in batches?

Discussing these things up front will minimise the chance of things going wrong.

### Be willing to let go

I am a self-confessed control freak. The most challenging thing for me was to let go of tasks and trust my VA to do a great job. I didn't want to drive my VA crazy by always checking on work and timelines. To help me soothe the control freak within we created processes which ensure I am updated regularly on progress of work.

Linda Anderson - <http://www.a2acoaching.com> - is a Certified Professional Coach dedicated to helping people live bold and rewarding lives. Linda has an energetic and direct style of coaching which suits people who like to be challenged. She currently works with clients in Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Japan and the USA.



## Webrings - Top Tip

### WHAT EXACTLY ARE WEBRINGS?

Are they worth joining for the promotion of your website? I recently posed this question to SEO expert and colleague **Tawyna Sutherland** of Mediamage Business Solutions. I thought I'd share her answer with you:

*"I avoid webrings. Webrings are a bunch of similar websites all joined together under the one banner that is put on all of their websites that when clicked on randomly pulls up one of the websites within the group. Reason I avoid these is that most want this banner on the main page of your website which takes away from the professionalism of your website, plus when clicked on takes your visitors directly to a competitor. Is it worth a backlink to lose a sale?"*

Mediamage Business Solutions provides internet marketing plans, search engine optimisation, online branding strategies and more. Visit <http://www.mediamage.com> for more information.



organisations service that market. There is no problem with that and businesses are of course entitled to choose their service provider as they see fit. However, should articles like the above be encouraging businesses to take advantage of highly skilled professionals like the Professor of Linguistics from Serbia who was willing to accept 5 pound an hour for what Sandy Mitchell himself referred to as a "lowly task"?

The upshot of all this is I urge caution to anyone bandying about the title "Virtual Assistant". First coined in the US by Thomas Leonard when referring to his remote secretary it has been latched onto and misrepresented by a number of organisations in cheap labour countries like India, China and the Philippines who pass themselves off as virtual assistants when in fact they are simply cheap transcription companies. It has also been grabbed by Serviced Offices who are NOT virtual assistants at all but are beginning to promote themselves as such as the industry grows. It is important for anyone contemplating partnership with a virtual assistant - or even anyone considering outsourcing a single project to a virtual assistant - to understand just what a VA really is. Here's my definition:

*A Virtual Assistant is an independent business owner who has transitioned years of experience in corporate settings in personal assistant or executive assistant roles, and who brings to the business relationship exceptional skills in software use, technical savvy and business acumen. They contract with clients around the world utilising latest technology to meet client outcomes.*

Add to this definition the one for a Virtual Business Operator - these professionals may not have been PAs or EAs but they possess exceptional skills in their area of expertise - which could be web design, customer relationship management, desktop publishing, graphic design or bookkeeping.

If you're ready to outsource your life - or just some of your overflow work - then you can't go past the multitude of experienced virtual business owners we have right here. AVBN is one place you can look where you can be assured the credentials of the members have already been checked for you. See page 1 for details.



## Recent SMH Articles

Wow, the *Sydney Morning Herald* has surpassed itself in the last couple of months with regards stories about "Virtual Assistants". On 10 November 2007 the *Spectrum* section re-ran the article by UK-based Sandy Mitchell (which also ran in the *London Telegraph*) titled "**With a Virtual Assistant You Can Outsource Your Life**". This misrepresentation of virtual assistants prompted a letter from me to the Editor of the SMH which has not as yet been published - and probably never will be - but I have included a copy of it on my blog - <http://execstress.blogspot.com/>.

This article then prompted Valerie Khoo to write a piece in her SMH Blog ([http://blogs.smh.com.au/enterprise/archives/2007/11/i\\_outsourced\\_to\\_india\\_and\\_got.html](http://blogs.smh.com.au/enterprise/archives/2007/11/i_outsourced_to_india_and_got.html)) indicating she tried to outsource her life to India unsuccessfully ... but this lady - who normally is a proponent of Australian small business - went on to encourage businesses to send their work offshore anyway ... to any one of a number of international virtual assistants. I left a comment for her which you can see here.

There is no doubt that there is a section of the market who are keen to get the cheapest price possible to get their work done - and these

# Executive Stress

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*Seasons Greetings!*