Timo: Hello, this is Timo from ProductiveSuperdad.com. Today, I'm very excited to be talking with Mr. Chris Ducker of ChrisDucker.com.

Now, I've got to tell you that Chris has done a pretty good branding of himself, because every time someone starts to talk about outsourcing, he's the person that comes into mind right away. Anyway, outsourcing has been a very hot topic for the last couple of years. We are going to be focusing on one part particular area of that thing, virtual assistants. Now that you know the theme for this interview, it's time to get started.

Chris, how are you, man?

Chris: I'm good. I'm feel like I'm looking in the mirror.

Timo: Yeah, pretty much.

Chris: Only I'm missing the headset, but I'm good. There you go. Thanks for having me on. It's a pleasure to be here. I'm looking forward to the chat.

Timo: Yeah, of course, of course. Now, why don't you tell us a little about yourself.

Chris: Okay, all right. I was born at a very young age, but we can fast forward a little bit. I've been based here in the Philippines, I'm fundamentally from the sales and marketing backgrounds, from all the way back in London, in the U.K. I came out here to the Philippines 12 years ago. I've been involved in the outsourcing industry for 10 of those 12 years. I've had my own company for the last six years. I have almost 300 employees working for me now, both from a call center and a VA standpoint. Really, the last three, four years, or so online, I've been blogging, and podcasting, and doing online video, and stuff. It just came about, all of a sudden, that Chris is the VA guy. So, that's, I guess, why I'm on the show.

Timo: Yeah, exactly, exactly. I know you have lots of great experiences to share, and lots of great stuff to tell us, so that's why I wanted to have you on this interview.

Anyway, let's dive in. The first question that I wanted to ask you is, when is the right time for a person to hire a virtual assistant? Is there right timing? Or, if you are just starting your business, do you think it's the proper time to hire a virtual assistant right away? What's your take on this?

Chris: It's a great question and I don't think there's any right or wrong
answer to it. In fact, I just replied to an e-mail, yesterday, from a subscriber on my blog who asked the exact same question. In fact, his set up was, I've just left my full time job, I've been working my ass off and saving money for the last two years, so I can go off and do my own thing. He's actually involved in Facebook marketing, and managing Facebook ad campaigns for companies, and things like that.

Basically, he said, I'm just about to start out. I have a handful of clients already. I've got savings. I'm not going to be stressed for cash or anything like that. I know I can do it. I've quit. I'm out on my own. This is it, the big time. I want to know, do I need to hire a virtual assistant now, or should I do it further down the line when I've got a few more clients, because I don't want to just, sort of, be spending the money and then not have anything for them to do. It's a very, very, that's a very true issue with a lot of first time entrepreneurs when it comes to hiring VAs and stuff.

Like I said, there's no right or wrong answer here. I always say that you're going to end up hiring somebody when you start feeling overwhelmed. I think that's the big thing there, and as someone who focuses on productivity, obviously, you know what being overwhelmed feels like. You can feel it, you're working too long of hours, you're trying to multi-task. I don't believe in multi-tasking, I think it's a complete and utter myth that was created by some idiot that just wanted to look busy all day long.

There's a different thing called switch tasking, you can go from one task to another, but physically juggling all those balls, I just don't think it works. So, really, it comes down to when you're feeling that overwhelm that you just know you can't continue to do it all on your own, that's when you hire.

The flip side of that coin is that you want to get to the point of outsourcing the right things. It comes into a couple [inaudible 00:04:55], stuff that you just hate doing. You know they need to be done, these tasks, but you just despise doing those kind of tasks. Outsource those tasks, because if you have a VA do those things, you're going to be a happier person, which means you're going to be more productive, right?

That's the first thing. The second thing is the type of task that you know you need to do, and you probably struggle with, because you can't do them yourself. Like, I know I need web pages built. I know I need logos created. I know I need opt-in forms designed to be able to convert people from visitors to subscriber. I know I need all those things. I could try to do them all myself, and I have done before in the past, but I failed miserably, because I'm not a web designer, I'm not a graphic designer, and
I'm not a conversion specialist. I hire the people to do those things for me, so that I can focus on what I am good at, and that's putting together solid content, and marketing my businesses.

Really, that's the two main aspects right there, the things you hate doing and things you can't do. They are the things that you should be outsourcing. Once you feel like you're at that point of overwhelm, that's when you press that button, and you start looking at the VAs, I feel.

**Timo:** Yeah. Yeah, that's really great advice. What I have realized also, is that I'm building my online business on the side, I have a day job, and I also want to spend time with my family, so having someone to take care of, at least, some of the tasks I'm doing right now is a great help. I can focus on totally different things, and much more valuable things, when it comes to online business.

So, in that sense, it's very, very difficult and very important, of course. I think that when I'm looking at myself, I have been reading and learning about virtual assistants for quite a while. But for me it took me, it was quite a long process, after I realized that I truly needed some external help, because I just can't do it all. Even if I knew how to do something, but still it is not reasonable for me to something, so I'm more than happy to hand over those tasks for someone else.

**Chris:** It's just smart. It just shows that you're a smart guy, because it's silly for you to try and do everything on your own.

**Timo:** Yeah. It seems that we are so emotionally tied to certain types of tasks that we are unwilling to let go of those things. But, the feeling is just completely opposite. Once you let go of that stuff, you feel relieved, and much more energized, and all that. It's a really positive feeling in general.

**Chris:** Absolutely.

**Timo:** Yeah. Now let's say that if there's a person, and he or she decided that it's time to get started with outsourcing. What are the first steps that kind of person should take, first thing?

**Chris:** I think, actually going back a little bit to my first reply to your first question was, a great way to be able to do it... actually this is a really cool exercise that your listeners, viewers, subscribers, whatever can put themselves through as well. This is something that I've done with groups of business owners and entrepreneurs where I've spoken live at events, or webinars, and things like that. I'm going to give everybody, if
it's okay, a little exercise here, a little bit of homework, because I think it will help.

What you need to do is, this is what I call creating my three lists to freedom, okay? Basically, what it is, you get a piece of paper and you draw two line down it, so you create three columns. In the first column there, you write down all the things, like I was talking about, all those things you do everyday, like, you just hate, you really hate doing them.

The second column is, exactly what I was talking about a minute ago, the things that you can't do, that you might be struggling to be able to do them, and you might be able to get them done, but it just doesn't make any sense for you to be do them yourself, because you can't do them properly, or at the level you really need them to be done at.

Then, the last column, and this is the big one, this is by far the most important of all three, you make a list of all the things that you feel, as a business owner, you shouldn't be doing on a day to day basis. So, simple things like accounting, or bookkeeping, or writing copy for your website, or whatever the case may be, if you feel you shouldn't be doing those things, as a business owner that your time is better leveraged doing other things, to help market and grow your business, then that's what you should be doing.

So, those three things right there almost act like a bit of a road map or blueprint of sorts, for you to then go ahead and take those three lists and physically start outsourcing work.

There's two ways to really get going. The first one is to work on a project basis with virtual staff. You can go to some of those job sites that are out there and get a logo designed, or get a landing page developed, or maybe have some of your podcasts transcribed, or something like that. So, this is stuff that you can utilize to be able to help market your business online. Just as an example, that's kind of project-based outsourcing.

Then there's the more permanent-based outsourcing where you're looking to grow your team, and find full-time members, or maybe part-time members of staff to begin with, but ultimately full-time members of staff to [be able to] grow your team. That's when you can maybe look at a company like Virtual Staff Finder, for example, which allows you to have all that leg work done for you in a nutshell, in a nice, easy, professional manner, so that you get the jump start on the entire process.

Really, I mean, those are things that you need to do to try and figure out, is this the right time for me to get going now? Nine times out of ten,
you'll find that the large majority of your competitors will go [inaudible 00:11:22] after what niche you're in now, and probably already started outsourcing in some way, shape, or form.

So, with that in mind, if you haven't already done it, you better get your ass into gear, because otherwise they're going to be well ahead of you, and you're going to be eating the rubber off the back of their tires, so to speak. That's really one of the easiest ways to get going, is to create those three lists of freedom.

**Timo:** Awesome, this is really great, and I really love that exercise. Although, I know at least some sort of tasks that I want to get rid of, but I definitely want to put all of those tasks into a document. What I have realized is, doing any of these kinds of exercises actually makes you see the bigger picture, in a way. You realize that, hey, I have been doing this and that, and I really shouldn't be focusing on this stuff. I really should get rid of it as soon as possible. That's really great, very great.

**Chris:** You mentioned it yourself when you said there are a number of tasks that I want to get rid of.

**Timo:** Yeah.

**Chris:** That terminology, in your head, subconsciously, you want to get rid of that task. Why? Probably, because you don't like doing it.

**Timo:** Yeah, yeah.

Chris. It's your first column, you've got two more columns to fill up now, Timo.

**Timo:** Yeah. Yeah, I have some exercises to do after this.

**Chris:** A lot of homework.

**Timo:** Yeah. Yeah, sure. Now, we talked about outsourcing and the first steps that a person should take when outsourcing, or get started with outsourcing. But, do you think that there is an opposite situation, a situation where you would say to a person that you shouldn't be outsourcing, at all? Or, you shouldn't be hiring a virtual assistant?

**Chris:** Right, great question. There are some things that you should not consider outsourcing, but there are a lot of things, in fact, most things can be done by someone. Number one, don't outsource your parenting.
Timo: Yeah, I agree.

Chris: You want to keep that one a little closer, but on a more serious note, if only we could, could you imagine if we could outsource parenting? That would solve so many problems, but never mind, that’s another interview, a conversation completely.

Timo: Yeah.

Chris: On a more serious tip, content, that’s it. Do not think about outsourcing your content, ever. When I say content, I mean that is your IP, okay? It's your intellectual property. It's what you are all about. For me, for example, if I'm going to be known as the virtual assistant guy, there's no need, it's madness for me to outsource content creation covering that topic. I mean, it's stupid, it's insane. It's like Michael Jordan starting a blog and having someone else write about how to shoot a jump shot. You're Michael Jordan, you can shoot a jump shot, tell everybody how to do it, you know what I mean?

Timo: Yeah.

Chris: That's just an analogy to use, but ultimately, your content should come from here. It should come from here, and your viewers, your readers, your listeners, regardless of what kind of media you're producing, they should be able to feel that that's from you. That's your direct involvement with them and the way that you communicate.

The only kind of content that you should consider outsourcing is the type of content that you find in, say, on a niche site, or something along those lines, where it's not something that you want to be known for, for example, right? So, you can write a niche site about how to walk a dog properly, or how to keep your teeth clean, or whatever, like that. That sort of stuff is not what you want to be known for, but you maybe want to make money in that niche, that's fine. Outsource that stuff, that's brain-dead work, outsource that.

In your case, when you're talking about productivity tips and tactics, particularly for busy parents, and things like that, that has to come from you. If I'm going to talk about utilizing VAs, or online video, or anything like that, that needs to come from me. So, you can literally outsource anything, but don't outsource your content. That has to come from you.

Timo: Yeah. Yeah, that's really great advice. I agree that it's ridiculous to outsource your content, because you want to become an authority in whatever you're doing, especially if it's [inaudible 00:16:08] related
stuff. Of course, if you’re building a niche site, it's a little bit different story. But other than that, you want to show your own voice, and build your authority, and only you can do it, not someone else. You just have to do the legwork.

Now, something that I’m very interested in, and I know that there have been these big, big companies who, even big companies have been struggling with this issue, but what do you think about . . . I mean, when I’m hiring a virtual assistant, how much should I learn about his or her cultural background? What's your advice?

**Chris:** I think, depending upon where you're outsourcing to, that topic will be more important than others. Particularly, also, the type of thing [audio cuts out 00:17:07] website to be built, and that's maybe a project-based outsourcing job. That's maybe to somebody in India, for example. I, personally, I wouldn't really be too consumed with learning anything about the Indian culture, or anything like that at all, because that's a one time job. It's a very techy job, I'm not going to claim to be a techy guy, I'm certainly not. I have problems switching my iPhone on most days, so with all that considered, it's not really needed in that regard.

Now, if you’re talking about hiring a full time team member, that person is going to be part of your team, part of your business, part of your life on a day to day basis, you have to learn a little bit more about their culture. And, here in the Philippines, it's like any other country in the world, there are all different cultures, different mind sets, and things like that.

I found that if you can genuinely learn something about the culture here in the Philippines, the Filipinos being as loving, and as caring, and as trustworthy as they are, they love that. They just eat that up for lunch. They love it when their, particularly their foreign boss, shows interest in their culture and things like that.

Here in the Philippines, you have things like family are very important. They have a term here, which is spelled as if it's H-I-Y-A, and it's actually pronounced [fee-ah], and fee-ah is a local term that they use for when they don't want to show any embarrassment to the person that employees them.

So, a lot of the time, it's a little tip if anyone is working with Filipino VAs, if you don't hear back from your VA on a particular task for a certain period of time, maybe they're struggling with that task, and they're too embarrassed, and they don't want to lose face by coming back to you and saying, boss, please help me, I don't understand. They will Google
everything for hours, trying to figure that problem out on their own, first, before coming to you with their hand up saying, I don't understand it, boss.

So, these are the little cultural traits that are very, very important. I've talked about them at live events and things like that on a number of occasions and they don't go away. So, I think with part time, or with project-based outsourcing, not so much required. With full-time team members, absolutely, you should learn a little bit about the culture of the person that you're employing.

Timo: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Sometimes you hear these stories when even some big corporations and companies are struggling with outsourcing and they have this [coexistent] between the different cultures.

Chris: Yeah.

Timo: Like, the western culture is conflicting with another culture in a remote country. That's why I find this to be a very interesting topic in a way. I think there is great distinction, like you said, that if it's a project-based worker, so it doesn't matter that much. But, if you were hiring a full-time employee for yourself, then it's a little bit different story then, and you should learn more about the background.

Now, let's talk about the types of tasks that virtual assistants are doing. I know there are different types of virtual assistants out there, but do you think that there are any typical tasks for virtual assistants that they are doing? I mean, is it possible even to say that there are typical tasks for a VA?

Chris: Yeah, there are typical tasks, but it obviously depends on what kind of VA they are. One of the big misconceptions, and it's important that we cover this on this topic, one of the big misconceptions is that people believe that they're a super VA that can do everything for $2 an hour. That doesn't happen. It doesn't happen in the real world, so why the hell should it happen in the virtual world? I always say if I have a leaking pipe in my house, I'm going to hire a plumber. I'm not going to get a carpenter that, maybe, possibly knows a little bit about plumbing. I'm going to get a plumber to come fix that.

It's the same with any VAs. There's a handful of major VA groups. There's that general VA, that will handle things like your calendar, your travel itinerary, maybe setting up your WordPress blog for you, posting your blog schedules, doing transcriptions, handling your social media. That's your general VA, and there are the types of tasks that, that kind of VA will do
Then there's the content writer, who is exactly what it says it is. They're creating written content for you, in and out, every single day.

The third type of VA is a web developer, not a web designer. Big misconception here. A web developer is somebody who codes the design. Some of them might know a little bit of graphic design, things like icons, or buttons, and things like that, but that's a graphic designer. That's a whole different kit and kaboodle, that is. A web developer will build the sites, they'll code them, and upload them, and work with servers and FTPs, and all the rest of them. That's their type of task.

Then there's the graphic designer, who can also, sometimes, we've noticed it a lot recently, actually, a graphic designer nowadays can also, nine times out of ten, do a little video editing, as well. A bit of online video, that's a potential, as well.

Then, you've got stuff like mobile app developers, and things like that, as well, who will just work on Android and iPhone apps.

Those are the type of tasks that those different VAs can do for you, but the most important thing is, you realize that one VA can not do all those things. Oh, I missed that one group, and SEO [inaudible 00:23:25], getting all of your sites to the top of Google. An SEO VA is not a web developer, or a graphic designer, they're an SEO person. So, you've got to hire for the role, for the tasks that you want completed. That's the most important thing.

Timo: Yeah. Something that I also recognize is the fact that you should give enough information for your virtual assistant. Meaning, giving him or her proper training, before you ask him or her to do something, because it's quite obvious that, if you're not providing enough documentation, and you're not training him or her related to a process, so it's not possible for that person to do his or her best work. So, that's also very important, but it's really great that you brought out these distinctions between different types of virtual assistants, that there really isn't one super VA that can handle all, just for $2 per hour. I mean, it just doesn't exist.

Also, something related to different virtual assistants. I know that this depends on the type of VA that you are hiring, but what about the salary range for different VAs? Can you give us a very brief run down of the different salary ranges, depending on what type of virtual assistant?

Chris: Just like any other industry in the world, they fluctuate from one
level of experience to another, from one person to another, even from one year to another. This is a question that I get asked all the time when I'm doing these kind of interviews. There is not strict answer. When I first started doing these kind of interviews, I used to say, oh, a general virtual assistant will cost you $400 per month, on average, full time. But then if someone comes across that interview a year later, that's probably out of date. That's probably more like $450 or $500, now.

What we did, actually at Virtual Staff Finder, is we created a VA salary guide, which is a PDF download document. This is not going to turn into a pitch or anything, I promise. It was the only way to make sure that when we'd give out that kind of information, it is always up to date. So, if any of your viewers or listeners are interested, they can go to virtualstafffinder.com, and just download that guide. It's free. It's 100% free. They can download that guide and know that we update that almost every quarter. The one page that we update, above and beyond everything else, is that salary guideline page.

As of right now, which is December 2012, general VA, full time, 40 hours per week, about $500. That will be somebody with a year, plus, experience that's good on the web, and all the rest of it. Depending on the other types of roles that I've just mentioned, obviously the salaries change a little bit, but like I said, the best thing for your viewers is to head over to the site, and get that guide free, because it really does enable them to be 100% up to date with everything.

**Timo:** Yeah. So, what about bonuses? Do you pay bonuses for your virtual assistants?

**Chris:** Yes, absolutely, you should pay bonuses. We also go into that a little bit in the guide, as well. Bonuses are absolutely loved here in the Philippines, but Filipino VAs. They don't always need to be monetary bonuses. You can do simple things.

For example, my VA just had a little baby girl. Had to rethink for a minute, she had a little baby girl, a couple of months ago. So, I got my PA to [inaudible 00:27:35] out here from the office here and put together, whatever it was, $50 worth of clothes, or whatever, and we shipped it over to Manila, where my VA. That's huge, Timo. That kind of stuff is huge.

Yeah, a little cash bonus if they complete a project on time. You want to throw an extra $100 to them in their paycheck, and don't tell them that you're going to do it, just do it. Then when they say, oh, boss, I think you sent me a little more money than [inaudible 00:28:06]. Then you said, no, that was for the job well done on ABC project, keep it up. I was very,
very happy. They love that. They will talk about that bonus for a week. They truly love that, so, yes, absolutely give bonuses and incentives.

Some of the other stuff I've done in the past, chocolates, flowers, mouse mats, iTunes music gift cards, you name it. I actually even bought a cell phone for one of my VAs, about a year or so ago, as well. They love it. They love it. They love it. You should absolutely do it.

Timo: Yeah, that's a great example of something that doesn't normally get mentioned. For example, if you read any of these sales letters, which talk about outsourcing and they are [advertising] outsourcing training, and may times this bonus thing is not mentioned there. It seems that it's just skipped, so all that is being said is, yeah, you can hire a VA for $2 and hour, but at the same time, you just have to remember that there is actually a real human being doing your work, and you want to give him or her recognition and some bonuses, if he or she has done great work. I think that's a really great point, really great point you brought up.

Now, we are actually going to go to the end of this interview, but I still have one question left. This is actually somewhat related to this previous answer that you just gave us, but do you think that there are three different important elements that you should remember when you want to have a successful, long lasting virtual assistant relationship?

Chris: That's a great question. There are a lot of things you can do to be a great virtual boss, and to keep your VAs happy. If I had to pick two or three, to wrap the conversation up on [audio cuts out 00:30:21] without a doubt, pay your VA what you feel they are worth. If somebody says that you can get a VA for $2, they're high, you can't. No one can get a VA for, who works for $2 and hour, for Christ's sake, right? Not even in the Philippines ... So, that's number one. Always pay your VA what you feel they are worth. Just as importantly, make sure you pay them on time, every single time, as well.

So, for example, here in the Philippines, VAs like to get paid on the 15th and the 30th of every month, every two weeks. Now, when you send money to PayPal, it will go in the account straight away, but if they're going to withdraw that money from their PayPal account, into their bank account, it can sometimes take up to two, three days to hit the bank account. So, if you want to be a really cool boss, you can send that salary, not on the 15th and the 30th, but you can send that salary on the 12th and the 27th, because what that will mean is they can withdraw it, and have it in their bank account, so they can withdraw it on their ATM card on those two specific dates. That's huge. They love that stuff.
Ultimately, the biggest tip here, ultimately, is just be a nice guy. I come across so many people that utilize VAs, and for some reason or another, they just turn into a complete a-hole. They micro-manage them all the time. They hang off their shoulder, like a virtual vulture, the whole time. That, for me, completely defeats the entire object of the outsourcing game, because if you’re not leveraging your time properly, and creating more freedom for yourself in working with VAs, instead of hanging off their shoulder all the time, irritating them, micro-managing them, looking at what they’re doing all the time, you’re an idiot. You’re just wasting your money and your time.

Just pay them on time. Be a nice guy to work for. The rest is just, build up the relationship over time, it is what it is. If you do those two things, pay them on time, and be a nice guy, those two things alone, with Filipino VAs, they’re not going anywhere. Trust me, they’re not going anywhere. Do those two things, and they’ll be with you forever.

**Timo:** That’s really amazing. That’s great information. Hey, that was my last question, and I think that you shared your experience with us, and gave us so much great information that it was really an honor to be talking with you and have you on this call. Thank you very much for being here, Chris.

**Chris:** No problem at all. The honor and the pleasure was all mine. It’s been so nice. For all of your listeners and your viewers, Timo has been a big supporter of my work online for the last couple of years, so I’d like to say publicly, thank you, sir, for putting up with all of my crap, over the last couple of years.

**Timo:** Okay. You’re welcome. Thank you.

Okay, well, we are finishing this interview, but anyway, it was really a pleasure talking with you, Chris, and hopefully I will talk to you very soon. Bye-bye.

**Chris:** [inaudible 00:33:51]. Take care.