

CREATING A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT BOUTIQUE WITH TRIVINIA BARBER

Welcome back to another episode of She Means Business! I am so excited to have you here because we are joined by the lovely Trivinia Barber. She's the founder of the virtual assistant firm PriorityVA.com. She shares so much goodness in this episode. She talks about how her kids were her inspiration to start her business. She talks about how face-planting in business is OK and how every single one of us as entrepreneurs experience it. Seriously, we all do. I have face-planted many times this year. I love it. It's so honest, it's so raw, and it's so inspiring. Also, make sure you listen right to the end because you will find out how you could be in with a chance of winning a 60-minute consultation with Trivinia and her leadership team, which is amazing! Definitely stick around to hear that. I hope you enjoy this interview. I absolutely loved doing it.

Trivinia, thank you so much for being here. I'm so excited to hear behind the scenes of your story and how you have built a successful boutique virtual assistant firm. Thank you for being here!

Carrie, it's my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

I am so excited to talk to you about this. I'm really intrigued how you've managed to actually not only build a really successful virtual assistance firm because a part of me thinks how on earth have you found people? How have you done it all — it seemed like a big thing to do. Also, you work with such incredible people. The clients you work with are amazing. So, I'm excited to dive into it and find out more about how you got to where you are. First off, I thought it would be interesting to give everyone more

of an overview what your business looks like right now, where you're at with it all.

I am the founder and owner of Priority VA. We are a boutique virtual assistant staffing company where we place entrepreneurs with virtual assistants all around the world. Actually, we work with only US-based VAs and have clients in 6 countries right now. It's been such a blessing to see how we can match virtual assistants with entrepreneurs and see them really accomplishing great things at a faster rate than they would be able to on their own. It's been really fun to watch this business grow from me and my husband and one little assistant to 54 virtual assistants and 70 clients all around the globe. It's been fun.

That's amazing. The thing is it's so needed. I know myself, I would not survive without the support of the people I have working with me. Trying to find the right people can be so challenging which is why I think what you've created is just so perfect for entrepreneurs. Let's go right back to the beginning. Let me ask you what inspired you to start this business?

I've always had this leadership streak in me, whether it was when I was in grade school on the school yard running things there, or in my corporate job. I just always rose to these leadership positions rather quickly. But my kids were really the real inspiration for why I started this business. I needed to be home for them, especially after we had brought home our third daughter from foster care. That was a real catalyst to build something that could allow me to be home with her when she needed me. That's really what the main inspiration was. Now, it's really turned into helping other men and women create these businesses and lives where they can still support their families, but use the skills they've been given as well.

I love that. That is definitely a big why for doing something. When you decided you were going to go down this route and embark on the

entrepreneurial journey, what were the initial steps you took to actually turn your idea into reality?

For me, I gave and I gave and I gave. Anywhere I was —whether I was at a networking event or a Facebook group or even on potential calls with clients— I just gave freely of my knowledge without any expectation. What that allowed me to do was build this reputation for service. It's really the basis of our entire business. It's about serving our clients really well. When I decided to start building my business, going from being a solo virtual assistant to having a team of people, people already respected me. I didn't have to create this platform. I already had one that had been built on giving away what I knew to help people.

With the kind of business that you're building, having to recruit assistants and they have to be good enough for you to pair them with entrepreneurs, it seems like a daunting task. Maybe it does from my perspective. When so many entrepreneurs get started, they get so overwhelmed by what they actually have to do. How did you get around that in the beginning? How did you manage to put all the pieces in place and turn it into a success?

It was hard. What I really started doing was map out the problems that I saw. I think that's what any successful business does — it solves problems. People are not buying things — they're buying solutions to whatever problem they have. So, I really tried to be cognizant and be aware of the problems I was seeing. That allowed to then start sourcing the right type of talent that could solve the problems I was seeing clients have. We actually run what we call lovingly the gauntlet. It's a 7-stage process that anyone who wants to join our team has to go through to be able to, in a sense, qualify to be one of our Priority VAs. That allows us to weed out the people that aren't taking this seriously and really don't have the heart to serve. It's definitely been hard to get to this stage. When we created the gauntlet, it was really an answer to our problem that we were having. Maybe some unscrupulous people start to fall through the ranks into our

business and we just needed a way to stop that. That's how we created the crazy gauntlet process that we have now.

How did you do that? Literally just by sitting down and thinking through the process? So often, I find people get tripped up when it comes to figuring out the process, the details of things, even the contracts you need to have in place for the people you're working with and all of that kind of stuff. How did you get all those pieces? How did you figure it all out?

Some of it was for sure trial and error. When we came up with our gauntlet, we actually worked with a company called Hire to Fit. Most of the problems that we see in business aren't necessarily the fact that someone's not a good person; it's just that they're not a good fit for what you're looking for. When we created our process, working with a gentleman named David Bonney, I went to Phoenix and spent two days with him and just really map out anything from my core values to the vision I had for my business to who I needed to fill the seats in my business and to serve the types of clients we want to attract. It's definitely something I spent a lot of money to be able to sit down and do that with him. It has helped us tremendously because what it does for us is it self-eliminates. People self-eliminate themselves immediately when they even hit our website and they start to read all about me, my values, and what we stand for. If they don't resonate with that, they don't want to work with me. That's perfect because I don't want them to go through the process of becoming a Priority VA if they're not going to align with what we do. It was a lot of meetings, a lot of meetings with attorneys to develop our contracts. Our contracts are ridiculously long and cover everything for not only Priority VA and the virtual assistant, but for the clients, too. That really was a challenge for us because we really serve two people: we serve the clients and we serve the virtual assistant. We had to make sure we were protecting and covering everyone, including ourselves.

Do you do a lot of personal development? How did you keep the right mindset to be able to keep going as you're building that and get through the headaches and the challenges?

I definitely do. I'm always reading whether it's books or listening to podcasts and doing things like that to make sure I'm staying on top of the latest trends and things that are happening. My headspace is in a good space. Right now, I'm working with Dan Martello. One of the things that he says is "I protect entrepreneurs' confidence." That's really important because as we're building these businesses, it's really hard. We have to make sure that our confidence is guarded so that so we're not taken aback when the crazy stuff happens because it does.

What have you found to be the most effective way of having the confidence in yourself to do things?

It's actually something that I learned from Todd Herman. He's the creator of a program called the 90-Day Year. He does these reflections of how far you've come in your business. We do them in these 90-day year sprints. That's really helped me a lot. I actually just wrote an email to my list last week. I talked about 2016 was the year of face-plant after face-plant for me. I literally felt like everything I did was just a mess. I was scraping my knees a lot and just getting road rash as far as every time I tried to do something for the business. I felt like it just wasn't working. In the email, I said, "But why am I smiling at the end of this email?" And then I listed out every single accomplishment that we had in the year. When I looked at that list, it blew my mind. Holy cow! Yeah, I had a lot of failures but look at what we were able to create and do. That's really a process that I learned only from working with Todd. He forces us to look back. Most people just want to keep going forward and they never look back and assess the good and the bad that happened in their business.

Yeah, it's so important. I always find it so eye-opening. Oh my goodness, I never even acknowledged that this massive thing happened. I just completely brushed it under the carpet.

Because we don't celebrate our wins.

No, we don't.

I always say that the bar or the finish line just keeps moving for us as entrepreneurs. We never get to the finish line. For a lot of us, it means we never celebrate our wins. That has been a real good eye-opener for me. I do have a lot to be thankful for and to celebrate with me and my team and our clients. Man, we keep moving that finish line and just keep hustling harder — most of us do.

I love the fact that you were so honest that you sent out to your email list about how you were having all these face-plant after face-plant. I love the honesty of it because it's so easy to look at someone else's business and what someone else is doing and think that it's perfect and they have it everything figured out and it's just a breeze to them. I just love it when people are honest and open about the fact that there are challenges. There are times when you mess up and things don't go the way you hoped, but you just have to keep going. I love that you were sharing that there have been moments that were probably very trying. Now, looking back in the year, you can really see how they're worthwhile it all was and the wins that were all along the way, too. I find it really liberating when people are honest about their experience.

Absolutely. I think that we live our lives looking at the highlight reel of someone else's life and comparing it to our bloopers. If more of us would share our bloopers, I think that not only does it encourage other entrepreneurs that coming up along, but it helps make us all realise that we're in this together. None of us are really doing any better than the other. We are all having our different levels of failure and success.

So true. I definitely can say that that's very much the case for me. Obviously, you work with some incredible people. Your client list include Amy Porterfield, John Lee Dumas — great people. How have you got your business and your message out there and got it to where it is today? How have you attracted those people to you?

I want to have a disclaimer: results not typical because I have done zero paid advertising for our business. Literally, every single client we have has been a referral from someone else who used our services and really just appreciated how we show up for them. We have continuously done what we said we were going to do, which speaks volumes in this space, when there are a lot of those fly-by-night companies wanting to help. We have just always maintained integrity and have been committed to helping our clients. I just think that's what's gotten our name out there. Again, results not typical. There's a lot of hustle that has to go on and a lot of it is just been me networking and engaging with people and becoming a household name. That's what I wanted for our business. I wanted us to be known as the place that you go, where high-quality, high-growth entrepreneurs go to get the best talent. Thankfully, we've achieved that so far. It blows my mind when I think about it though.

It's really incredible that a lot of it comes from referrals. Obviously, it goes to show what an amazing job that you're doing. You mentioned there as well networking, which is so important. You're really proactive with that. Is this something that you've dedicated a lot of your time over the years to doing?

Not only have I dedicated my time, but I've dedicated my resources to. Going to conferences and being on calls with people, it takes time and money to fly and get where you're needed. I network because it's in my DNA. I would not be a very good person that just works behind the computer looking at data and numbers all day long. It doesn't fit who I am as a person. There are some people where the thought of networking

makes them want to gouge their eyes out. They aren't that person so that could look very different for those people. Networking is massively important if you want to build a reputation. I think it's really important if you want to offer value and service to people, but it doesn't always have to be putting on a fancy outfit and going to a conference. It can be behind your computer screen and engaging in LinkedIn groups and stuff. It can look very different for people but very important.

I couldn't agree me more with that. I have a question which I love asking because it is always insightful to hear what people say. In my experience, the entrepreneurial journey is a crazy one. I've experienced so many highs, so many lows, so many twists and turns. Has there been anything in particular that you didn't expect to deal with?

Yes. For me, I was definitely naive to the hurtful things that can happen when you're building a business. If you imagine a brick-and-mortar store, you can't fathom someone walking in and saying or doing the things that they do behind a keyboard and a monitor nowadays. There are just people that lack integrity. I think I see that more online than anywhere else. I didn't expect to take it so personally at first. I thought I've got thick skin, but I'd be a bucket of tears if a virtual assistant would bail on us in the middle of a project or whatever. I just didn't expect it to hurt. That was the one thing that I think I had to grow up a little bit and realise that a person's issue or snarky comment, that was more about them than it was about me. I'm so glad we had them because it allowed us to build systems and process to avoid devious people coming into our ranks. That was hard for me. In the first year, I cried more than I celebrated anything because I just thought people are so mean.

I love that you persevered and got through it and have created so much success. It's really inspiring, especially for everyone out there who's experiencing the same things. It's funny how much that answer has come up when I've asked this question, which I really wasn't expecting. I suppose

you did see a lot of negative stuff going on online especially when you're building something and it's close to your heart. You put your heart and soul into something, so we wear our hearts on our sleeve more with it.

Yeah, I think that and I am in the people business. I'm not selling a digital product that someone can buy, like or dislike, and maybe say a rude comment and carry on. I'm literally dealing with people every single day. It depends on what they're dealing with in their own life, too. They might have had a flat tire or their kid is sick or whatever. We have to take those things into consideration. It's definitely been a growing up process for me to not retort and come back with an attack. Instead, just be like "OK, that's done, Trivia. Don't worry about it, girl." It helped me grow up for sure.

I love that mindset. It's a good one to have. The last question I want to ask before we go to the lightning round is what's helped you to be unstoppable in your pursuit of your entrepreneurial dreams?

This is easy in a sense for me because it's the vision that I see for my business. I very clearly can see where it can go. I just believe 100% in my purpose for starting this company. It helps that I'm competitive because I race against myself to create something bigger than I thought I could. In my heart, I 100% know that what we're doing matters. I've said on other interviews that we're not curing cancer, but what we do allows an entrepreneur to grow and scale their business and reach their dreams. They are able to go to their kid's soccer game that they've previously said, "No, honey, I can't go" because they're busy working on something. We bring back date night for a family that's trying to grow their business because we offer virtual support. What we're doing matters. That keeps me going every single day because I know how important it is in the lives of the people we serve.

Yeah, I love that. It's such a good answer. OK, now we have the lightning round. I'm going to start off a few sentences for you to finish. Are you ready for this?

Yes.

The first one is when I face a big challenge, I...

I get out my Post-It notes. I'm a visual thinker so I have to map out every possibility. Typically when there's a challenge and I have things laid out, I can see the whole or often the solution right in front of me. I just can't see it until I have Post-Its all over.

I am very similar to you in that respect. The next one is if I could go back in time to when I started my business, I would tell myself...

Expect it to be hard and stop trying to do it all alone. I think as entrepreneurs, we try to be martyrs in our business and do everything ourselves, even me. I outsource for a living and I was having a hard time finding help.

It's funny how we do that to ourselves. My favourite business tool, resource, book or podcast is...

It's a book called *Who* by Jeff Smart. Most people are trying to solve the "what" problem in their business when what they really have is a "who" problem.

I like that. Finally, what is your favourite quote?

Easy. David Allen says "You can do anything, but not everything."

That's a good one and very true as well. Trivinia, thank you so much for coming and taking the time to share your amazing story with us. It's so inspiring. It's just really refreshing to hear such honesty around the entrepreneurial journey and the fact that we all face-plant and it happens a lot. I know for me this year, there has been so many times where I just felt so frustrated. Things haven't gone the way I thought they would, but it's part of the process. I always say you have to honour the process: the ups and the downs and just keep on going. It's really inspiring to hear your

story. Also, what an amazing job you have done creating your virtual assistant boutique. I think the level of service you provide clearly shows in the fact that you've had so many referrals.

Thank you. I appreciate you having this show. I think it's a great opportunity for other business owners who are starting or ramping up their businesses to see we all didn't start out with a silver spoon and everything goes swimmingly. We've all had to crawl and fight for the success that we've had. Sharing that and just being real is such a blessing for us. So thank you for having this show.

Thank you so much. I hope you have all enjoyed this, too. On a very exciting note, if you would like to be in with a chance of winning a 60-minute consultation with Trivinia and her team which is so exciting, all you need to do is leave a comment over on the blog and let us know what your key take-away from this session is. What an amazing giveaway that is. Thank you so much, Trivinia.

Absolutely. I can't wait. I love spending time with entrepreneurs. My whole leadership team and I will dissect whatever your biggest challenge is and hopefully solve it.

Amazing. Thank you so much. Also, make sure you go and check out Trivinia's website. All the links are in this blog post. Go over to PriorityVA.com. It has so much goodness going on, especially if you need more help in your business. Go and check it out. I hope you enjoyed this and I will see you next week for another episode of She Means Business.