



# PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COACHING TODAY

Chris McCluskey & Kim Avery

*The podcast dedicated to Raising the Standard of Coaching...  
and Changing the World*

## Episode 034

### Is It Time To Hire a Virtual Assistant?

**KIM:** Welcome. Our theme for today is how to multiply yourself specifically through contracting with a virtual assistant. Here are some questions. Have you ever had trouble getting everything done? Are you like me? Do you sometimes find technology just a little bit overwhelming? Would you like to work more in your areas of strength and less in your areas of weakness? It may be time for you to contract with a virtual assistant. Today, we're going to interview Susan Fleming, a long time friend of mine and my virtual assistant as well as Chris' virtual assistant. We are going to get an insider's point of view on what a VA is, the types of things they can help coaches do, how do you know when it's time to hire one, what to look for, where you can find them, and so much more. I know you're going to enjoy our topic for today.

**CHRIS:** And isn't this a kick because not only has Susan been Kim's longtime VA as well as a close and dear friend, but she became my VA not even a year and a half ago as we got to an explosive period of growth in the institute. I remember very well that conversation, Kim, when I said, "You know, are you familiar with Susan Fleming? I've seen her name in some other Christian coach's material. I've looked at what she's producing and it sure seems professional." I think you busted up laughing and said, "Well yeah, I kind of know her a little bit." So here we are and I'm

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getting to introduce to the world our virtual assistant, mine in my practice and school, yours and your practice and in all the work that you do.

Let me tell our listeners a little bit about who you're going to be hearing from. Susan Fleming has a background actually professionally in education. She was a teacher for many years. She is therefore very, very good, by the way, at editing, writing, and proofreading, and also at accounting and mathematical kinds of things - lots of weak areas of mine - but background in education, corporate training as well and curriculum development. So you can hear again where there's just great fit for so much of what we're doing here at the institute. Susan went into business for herself as a virtual assistant in 2009 and so this has been what she has been doing now fulltime from home for seven years now. Kim was her very first client. The two of them lived near each other in Winter Haven, Florida and in addition to her doing VA work now, she has begun a very, very part time, she tells me, coaching practice on the side, but perk your ears up coaches here, she's a coach to coaches who are wanting to do what our topic is today, to multiply themselves around more efficient use of your time and your energies, and better use of technology and such, so a lot of skill sets that Susan brings to the show. Susan, welcome.

SUSAN: Thank you. I'm glad to be here. It's exciting.

CHRIS: Well, it probably is best to begin at the beginning. For some of our listeners, the name "virtual assistant" is a new name, might not even be familiar with it ever so tell us what is a virtual assistant, a VA and a little bit of what they do.

SUSAN: Well, a virtual assistant is somebody who comes alongside of a client and in this case, a coach, and helps them with all sorts of different things. It could be administrative things like scheduling clients or making appointments, some even do things like airline reservations and that sort of thing. They do accounting things like I do for you. I do some of your accounts and keep track of that and billing and that sort of thing, and then there are the technical aspects. That's really what I do most of, anything that has to do with what a client is going to do on the internet

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whether it's their website or their electronic newsletter, sometimes we edit audios, sometimes we edit videos, sometimes we help them set up teleseminars. Some clients have trouble with the transitions in their PowerPoint presentation and so they send me their PowerPoint and I fix the transitions for them and make it work right. So there's just any number of things that a coach would encounter in business and just help them get those things done.

KIM: Susan, you've probably done almost every single one of those things for me and you have no idea, maybe you do, how much I appreciate it and that's the logistics of what you do but I do want to speak to the heart of what a virtual assistant does and the heart that you bring to this because you have said to me many times before, "Oh, I'm sorry to make you edit this before I put it out but I just know I've overlooked something." and you said, "My job is to make you look good."

SUSAN: Exactly.

KIM: And that is the heart that you bring to that and hopefully every good virtual assistant. It's not just about checking things off on a list. You are serving not just the coach but their clientele, their platform, the message they are bringing to the world. You help me do it and you amplify it and make it professional so it goes where it really needs to go, so just kudos to all virtual assistants out there.

SUSAN: I like to think of myself as a business partner. So your business, Kim, is my business because if I can make you look good and be successful, then I'm successful.

CHRIS: Well and you know my little metaphor that Rachel and I have for you here. We call you our fairy god mother and that's because fairy god mothers make wonderful things happen for persons like a Cinderella. They make them look really good and that's what fulfills a fairy god mother. I'll tell you what, listeners, there are so many times where as Kim is just saying there, it's the work that we're doing through Susan, in contract with Susan, like she says, like a business partner here. That is what makes so much of what we do shine so well, land so

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powerfully, work so smoothly. We have concepts, ideas and you surely do too, and that again is what our focus is for today is how can you take the ideas, the opportunities that you see in your practice, the different things. You say, “Boy, I wish there was a way to... but...” and whatever comes after that but is some kind of a weakness that you know you have – maybe it’s technology, maybe it’s time, maybe it’s a specific skill – that’s where an assistant and in this case specifically a virtual assistant, someone who lives somewhere else away from you but today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century via internet, telephones, and video conferencing and such, they can join you in what you are doing and make it look so much better. That’s just the best of all worlds in my opinion. That’s a fairy god mother.

SUSAN: And I forgot my wand today.

KIM: But you’ve brought it many times and so it’s a good thing and we need it. Looking back, Susan, I remember one of the bigger decisions I made for my business was hiring you for the first time. Well, actually twisting your arm into becoming a VA so I could hire you for the first time. I remember the time wresting because I looked at my business accounts and I thought, “I can’t afford a VA but if I had someone doing these things I’m really weak at or are repetitive tasks that I don’t really need to be spending my time on so I could spend more time getting more clients, I know then I could afford her, so which one comes first, the chicken or the egg?” It seemed like a really big decision at that time and very risky. How do our coaches know when it’s time to hire a virtual assistant?

SUSAN: Well, it’s different for every coach obviously but when you get to the point where you need to have things done and either you don’t know how to do it or you don’t want to learn how to do it or your time could be better spent doing something else, that’s when you need to consider bringing on a virtual assistant.

KIM: It’s just a good point because I think there are certain tasks that really lend themselves to virtual assistants. One of those repetitive technology tasks that we’re not good at but there’s also what I consider “one and done” tasks like putting up a website for the first time. I need to have it done but I’m never going to have

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to do it again and I see so many newer coaches agonizing trying to master the skill of becoming a web designer and a graphic designer and learning how to run the technology that goes with the webinar and all of those things that they are never going to use those skills again. It's those one and done activities and when you measure their time, okay let's say you charge as a coach just for a round number, \$100/hour and you could pay a VA half that or less, how much money are you losing by not hiring someone to do some of this work for you? I like that you said things that you can't do yourself and you don't want to learn to do yourself are ideal tasks to turn over to a virtual assistant.

SUSAN: Another time that a coach might consider hiring a virtual assistant is when she feels like she just needs to be part of a team. Being a coach is such a solitary and isolated endeavor. Sometimes it's just nice to have somebody on your team that can come alongside and can be a sounding board for you and help you develop ideas and get them done.

CHRIS: I'm going to piggyback on that and go right back to what Kim was saying there about the financial considerations because I do think that for an awful lot of our listeners, I know it was for me and my private practice long before I began hiring in persons to assist here in the school, just in my private practice, that decision of can I really afford this? What am I "paying" if I don't afford this? That point, let's use just again random numbers here but let's say that as a coach, you're charging something that equates out to about \$100 or so an hour. If you have a client and you're serving that client, you would be making \$100/hour but you're also then doing lots of various tasks in your business that need to be done. Somebody has got to do them. Chief, cook, and bottle washer when you're a solopreneur. You do everything and so you're doinking around with little electronic projects that you don't really know how to do or that are tedious and repetitive and you don't really need to be doing. The question that is posed sometimes is well, would you pay somebody \$100/hour to do that? You choke and you say, "No." The response is, "You already are." You're paying yourself but

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it's coming out in negative incompetential earnings. You're already "paying" that money.

How much less could you literally pay in order to free up your time? Maybe you pick up one more client. Well, how many hours worth of virtual assistant time might that cover? Maybe two hours, maybe three, it depends on what you're paying your virtual assistant but it's a more efficient use of even the money that you make from another client. Play to your strengths, which for most of our coaches is coaching, and delegate out these other tasks. Figure out how to monetize it so that you realize, "I may not have that money right up front today but if I can float myself for even a month or two with some virtual assistant time so that they are doing what I'm doing now, might I have that money from a new client or two or three, or a group or a mastermind or some other thing. You bet. Okay, then I do it now. I pull the trigger now so that I stop literally paying ridiculous amounts of money from my own income earning time for these other tasks that somebody else could do not only just as well, they could do them better. They could do it faster. How sweet a deal is that for everybody?

KIM: It's interesting that you said that, Chris, because that's exactly what I did. I don't know if you remember, Susan, but I said, "Okay, we're friends so this is an experiment. This is a three-month experiment. I'm going to hire you and if I'm earning back at least what I'm paying you at the end of the three months," I don't know if you could do this with the VAs who aren't your close friends but anyway, "if I'm not at least earning this back at the end of three months, then I've made a poor decision" and I have never looked back.

SUSAN: That's great. Yeah, well actually, you can do that with a virtual assistant because when you go to hire a virtual assistant, you're not marrying them. It's not an eternal covenant before God. It's a business relationship and a lot of times, people will hire a virtual assistant just for one specific task. "I need to get my newsletter out twice a month. Can you help me do that?" So you contract with them to do that and then as you work with them, you find out, "Wow, they can do this and

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they can do that. They can edit audio and they can do all these other things,” then it just starts to build, but starting with just one simple project is often a really good way to start.

CHRIS: Susan, we’ve been tossing around some numbers just for analogy’s sake here but really, what does it cost for a person to hire a VA? I would imagine there’s a range.

SUSAN: There is a range. You can get somebody for \$15-\$25 an hour at the low end. The high end is \$75-\$85 an hour and as you would imagine, just like with a car, the more you pay, the more benefits you get and the more comfort you get. So on the low end, you’re going to get a technician who may or may not have great skills in a particular area but is passable and that may work for you. It may be fine to start out on the low end and try to grow together in the business and in the functionality. When you hire somebody in the upper range, you’re usually getting someone who has a lot of skills in the particular area that you want. They have the tools that they need. They may have Camtasia so that they can do screen recordings. They may have different programs that would be very helpful to you that they have purchased and they have spent time training and getting a lot of technical knowledge also.

CHRIS: Wow, that’s a really good point that you’re contracting not only for their time and their expertise, you’re getting the benefit of all the training and skills that they have developed through the years and you’re gaining access to the software that they not only have purchased and have uploaded. They know how to use it. We know software is expensive. It’s always changing and there’s always a huge learning curve. You’re gaining a lot through whatever that amount is that you’re paying. Can you talk about some of the other key considerations when a person is looking at hiring a VA? What else do they need to think through in terms of a like decision matrix?

SUSAN: Well, I think skills probably come first. You need to know or find out what the prospective virtual assistant can actually do. For example, “I have a website. Can you help me with my website?” Well, maybe. Is it a WordPress website and do

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they work with WordPress? Is it a Wix website? Do they even know what Wix is? Maybe they have shopping cart experience in one area but you want to use a different kind of shopping cart and they don't know anything about it. Who is going to foot the bill for the training or the exploring on that? What programs do they own? I can remember a time that another client and I were working with a different virtual assistant and my client and myself both had Microsoft Office and we were sending something to this other person and she had Open Office, which is a free suite similar to Microsoft Office. She would send things back and the formatting would just be so wonky that we couldn't even use it. So you need to find out what programs they are using and if it's compatible with what you have. You need to find out what industry their clients had been in. There's a difference in working with a coach and working with a public speaker or something like that. There's different mindset. You need to have somebody that's going to understand what you're talking about and what your needs are.

CHRIS: So ideally, a virtual assistant who has worked with other coaches?

SUSAN: Right, yeah.

CHRIS: Okay. They get coaching. They get coaching lingo and what some of the needs might be that you don't have to explain everything to them. They are already on page. Okay.

SUSAN: Another thing is what's their work style? Are they independent of supervision or do they need a lot of handholding? Can you call them as you need to? Can they call you as they need to or do you need to schedule a weekly meeting? Do they want to run everything through a project management program like Basecamp or is email okay back and forth with that, and then what do they bill for? This is really important to find out upfront. With a lawyer, if they think about you, they bill for it.

CHRIS: I dreamt about you last night for half an hour.

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SUSAN: Exactly. So I've discovered that there are some virtual assistants who operate in a similar way. If they shoot you an email to ask you a question, they are going to charge you for a quarter of an hour because they had to stop whatever they were doing and do that. There are other virtual assistants who just, it just all lumps in with whatever the project is that they are working on.

KIM: I think that is so important to know upfront because Susan, I have a client or maybe more than one client who hired a virtual assistant, thought they understood, okay, she's charging me \$30/hour and then got the first month's bill back and it was bigger than their mortgage because in their mind, "Well, I just asked her to do this. Oh you mean that whole conversation where I explained every part of it she was billing for? You mean that clarification email she was billing for?" On and on it went and it just, it took their breath away. I don't think we like to seem picky and it's not like you're haggling with someone, but I just want to highlight what an important point that is because as coaches, it's our money. We're on a limited budget. We want to be careful with it and so please, please know upfront, maybe even have it in writing exactly what you're being billed for and maybe even check in the first few weeks how much time have you've used, how is it going instead of waiting for that first month's bill.

SUSAN: Absolutely. Another thing that you need to just be aware of is what is their turnaround time. If you send your virtual assistant a request for editing on something, is that going to go at the bottom of their week's worth of work stack and you're not going to get it back until next week. What about if you have a crisis? What about if your website goes down on the weekend? Can you get a hold of your virtual assistant? Do they have that entrepreneurial mindset that we know is so important or they are more like an employee and "Well, it's after 5 PM, I'm off the clock."

CHRIS: Yeah. Right, right.

KIM: All right, some important considerations. So Susan, so far you have helped us understand what a virtual assistant is, some of the things that virtual assistants can

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do, what to think about when we're contracting with someone. Suppose our listeners are at the point where they are like, "Yes, yes, yes. I need a good VA." Can you tell us where can they find one? Are you available to work with? Do you have associates? Do you have recommendations?

SUSAN: I do have a couple of associates that I work with and sometimes I refer clients to them. As far as my schedule goes, you and Chris keep me busier than I need to be. At this point, I'm not taking on any new virtual assistant clients. Another great way to find a good virtual assistant is to ask another coach. If you're a member of a Facebook group, you can ask in there. If you know other coaches and just check with them and see who their VA is. That's probably your best way to get a virtual assistant that you know is going to work well for you.

KIM: Any other thoughts?

SUSAN: Yes, there are some other organizations. There's the International Virtual Assistants Association, [IVAA.org](http://IVAA.org) and also [VANetworking.com](http://VANetworking.com). Both of those have websites and they have member lists. Their membership is virtual assistants and you can search for a virtual assistant much like you can search for a coach on [ChristianLifeCoaching.com](http://ChristianLifeCoaching.com).

KIM: How beautiful. For those who are listening, jogging, or driving in your car, we will be sure to link to all of those places that Susan just mentioned in our show notes.

CHRIS: Very definitely. Well Susan, if everybody is listening and getting a little bit more excited about the possibilities of this, not just the need for it but the hmm, okay, maybe I could make this make rational, financial sense and I have an idea of where to go, there comes that point then where you decide to pull the trigger on a contract. This is not a hiring in the sense of W2 employee kind of a thing typically, right? This is much more of a 1099 contracted for a few hours, a set number of hours, specific project, that kind of a thing. Is that typical?

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SUSAN: That's correct, yeah. Most virtual assistants will either contract on a project basis or they will contract for a certain number of hours for a month, some of them ask for a retainer upfront so you purchase like five hours for the month and then the virtual assistant marks time against that and at the end of the month, they settle up. If you have gone over then you pay the extra or if you still have hours left over, then they rollover into the next month.

CHRIS: Got it. Okay. So it varies. There's not really a one-size-fits-all. There are various ways that they may bill but typically, it is just a contract. The VA has their own business, you have your own business. These business to business kinds of services are contracted hourly or on a project basis or whatever. What else should coaches consider when looking at contracting with a VA in terms of kind of getting things started?

SUSAN: Well actually before you hire a VA, it's really a good idea to ask them if they can give you some examples of their work. Either ask for some of their other clients as a reference so that you can find out what kind of work they do for them. For example if you're hiring this virtual assistant to do a newsletter, then ask them if they can send you some examples of some of the other newsletters that they have created for another client.

CHRIS: Quite honestly, that was one of the first things that really struck me was the visual layout, the emotional appeal of the materials that I saw you producing. I kept looking at them at other coaches and then I would ask the coach "Who does your stuff?" After the name "Susan Fleming" had come up a couple of times, I realize, "Okay, there's a common denominator here. That's the thing to look for. We already told our listeners, "You can't have Susan. She's our fairy god mother," but we're picking your brain to say, "Well, what should they look for" and that's one of the thing to look for. When you see somebody else's project, it's just like gals with their hairstyle. "Oh, who cuts your hair?" You will look at something, you like it, and you find out from somebody who is already gaining the benefits of it. Who do they use and that's who you go check out. So then do you typically, like

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are VAs contracted on a month to month basis, quarter, or year? How do most VAs initiate then an actual contract with a coach?

SUSAN: You know it varies from virtual assistant to virtual assistant. What I always do is say, “Let’s try this for a couple of months” and we don’t really know when we’re starting out with a client really how much work that client is going to have. The client thinks they know but the client really doesn’t know, the coach really doesn’t know because they don’t know what they don’t know, and they don’t know yet what they really need that would be helpful to them. It’s in that first couple of months that you kind of start to feel your way with the virtual assistant and figure out exactly what they can do, what you want them to do. Some coaches want a virtual assistant to write a blog post for them, others just want them to post it. So you have to work that sort of thing out.

KIM: Yeah and I think that brings up an important point and that’s about setting up expectations and communicating clearly with your VA. I know not with you so much, Susan, because we do just read each other’s minds and that’s very convenient, but with other professionals I’ve hired, I thought I explained what I wanted and when they came back, I think, “Okay, I can see how they thought that’s what I said but that is so not what I said.” It just wastes a lot of time and money and there’s needless frustration and all that type of thing. So what are couple of first steps for people to set up that relationship so it will succeed?

SUSAN: Well Kim, one of the things that I found has been really successful when Chris and I started working together, we set up a daily meeting because he had contracted for so many hours with me and every morning, we sat together, we joined our screens with Join.Me and he shared his inbox and we went through all the emails and that gave me an understanding of what his mindset was and how he phrased things and how he responded to people. That also gave him an opportunity to find out some of the things that I could do that he didn’t really know that I could do because I might say, “Well, have you ever thought about this?” He would say, “No, can you do that?” That sort of thing, so that works out really well.

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CHRIS: Yeah, that service that Susan just referenced there, that was a game changer for us. If you're not familiar with it, everybody wants to write this down. I'll get it in the transcript notes after the call today but Join.Me, J-O-I-N-.M-E, just like it sounds. Join.Me is a free service. Now you can pay for upgrades on it but for a long time, I just used the free service and you can go in and easily join your screen to somebody else's, in this case, Susan and I joined our screen. She's in Florida, I'm in Missouri. We had never face to face and we spent, like she says, five times a week. It wouldn't have had to be that frequent but we had our morning time every single day and not only were we joined then aurally but we could pull up my computer screen, go through my inbox, look at my website, look at my newsletter, look at a blog we were messing with, look at a project that I was working, anything at all. We could switch it around and I could look at her screen. She could take me on a tour of something and walk me through, but that virtual connection.

You could certainly do the same thing through another software service that at the basic level is free called [Zoom.US](https://zoom.us). Same kind of a feature where you've got audio and visual connection, easy breezy and it's free, but gosh, Susan, we probably did that for three months or more and like you say, "You got inside my head and the way my business works and the way I like to phrase things," We composed responses while we were there. It wasn't wasting your time. You heard the way I phrase things. You got the nuancing of things or I could clarify when I wanted to be delicate about something and when I wanted to be more direct about something. Boy, did I get inside your head because you just opened a whole world to me of things that could be done that I had no idea. I never would have known they could be done. That connection was huge. It took everything we were doing to a completely different plane than we would have found otherwise. I really couldn't underscore that enough for our listeners. If you're getting frustrated that your efforts at incrementally growing your business are about top out and you're maxed on your time, your skill, and your knowledge, a VA can not only increase that incremental growth further than you can, they can exponentially explode it because they know other services and tools on the web that you just don't know about.

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KIM: And that was our theme for today, wasn't it, how to multiply yourself specifically through contracting with a VA. Susan, it has been great to learn what a VA does, how they work, how to contract with one, and how to get started with one, and people hopefully, their minds are spinning and new worlds are opening for them, and so I'd like to direct them to one of your websites, Susan, which is [VA-box.com](http://VA-box.com). Think VA in a box, right, [VA-box.com](http://VA-box.com) where Susan has a wonderful free download just for you called "70 Things A VA Can Do For You." If you're not sure everything that a VA could help you with and take off your plate to free you up to do what you love doing, this handout is going to be great for you. Susan, thank you, thank you for being with us here today. Any final thoughts for our listeners?

SUSAN: Well thank you, Kim. It's just a joy being able to be on the podcast with you and Chris. I know that the coaches when they go to my website, [VA-box.com](http://VA-box.com), they may have some additional questions that they don't find the answers to there. I'd love to have them email me, [Susan@VA-box.com](mailto:Susan@VA-box.com).

CHRIS: Well, that's a very generous offer. Thank you, Susan, to be such a resource like that for the Christian coaching community. I encourage people, take advantage of it. Go out there and download that free download that she has, 70 Things A Virtual Assistant Can Do For You, and don't hesitate to contact her then. While you're on the web, you'll probably want to pop out to our website because we did cover a lot of material today and on our website for the podcast, [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com), you can click the icon for today's podcast and you'll find that you can download the transcripts. We encourage you actually every podcast we've done has a free downloadable transcript of everything that we've covered, all the sites we've referenced, the key points we've made. You might even pull material from those for talks that you're preparing or something. Feel free to avail yourself of that really valuable resource. Again, just go to the website, [ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com](http://ProfessionalChristianCoachingToday.com), click on the icon of the episode you want and there's free transcripts.

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Until next time, keep raising the standard of coaching and changing th world.

KIM: God's richest blessings to you.