

Staffcentrix Year End Report – 2003

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The Military Spouse Virtual Assistant Training Program™

Highlights of Results

- 69% of spouses trained are “more likely to support spouse’s re-enlistment” as a result of the Program.
- 79% of spouses who have launched their Virtual Assistant business find improved Quality of Life for their family.
- 89% of spouses report being “very satisfied” with their business.
- 91% of spouses who have launched are billing at least \$19/hour for their services.
- 87% indicate the service member is “very supportive” of their Virtual Assistant business.

Staffcentrix Year End Report – 2003

We take great pleasure in providing you with this informal, end-of-year report on Staffcentrix' military spouse training-related activities for 2003.

Despite an economy that seems to be characterized by a “jobless recovery,” the overall success of the spouses who have participated in the Staffcentrix Portable Career & Virtual Assistant Training Program™ has been extraordinary by any measure.

This report will highlight some of the key accomplishments of our own corporate efforts and of the Military Spouse Virtual Assistants (MSVAs) who have attended our trainings to date. As you read on, please keep in mind that these successes reflect not only our own enduring commitment to military spouses as they pursue meaningful, portable careers, but also the support of the many family center professionals who have stepped forward to bring the MSVA opportunity to their clients and, inseparably, to their clients' families as well.

We would be particularly remiss if we did not include a heartfelt thank-you to The Air Force Aid Society, which, in its foresight and its concern for the quality of life of Air Force families everywhere, sponsored the first MSVA Pilot Program at Cannon AFB in March 2002.

The Cannon Pilot set off a remarkable and groundbreaking chain of events that has already resulted in the ongoing availability of the MSVA Training Program at thirty (30) bases around the world, with trainings now being given to active-duty spouses from the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

Our many thanks to all, and best wishes to everyone for a successful New Year!

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ACTIVITIES REPORT

The RFP Service

Most business people will agree that marketing is the toughest part of owning a small business, and this can be especially true for MSVAs, some of whom struggle with the self-esteem and morale issues that come from tough job markets, spotty resumes, and long deployments. So we are constantly working to make sure that spouses who have completed training find great clients to partner with. In 2003, the Staffcentrix Request for Proposal (RFP) Service dispatched 104 RFPs from business people seeking to hire an MSVA. We're pleased to report that many matches were made, and by all accounts the relationships are prospering and working well.

Media Coverage

We feel that one of the most important services we provide for MSVAs is *letting the world know they are out there*—ready, willing and able to provide the types of services businesses need. In 2003, thanks in large part to Staffcentrix' past and ongoing media initiatives, the Virtual Assistance industry and in many cases MSVAs in particular got some great press in *Business Week*, *Time*, *Inc. Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN Asia, CNN Europe, *Morningstar Advisor*, many regional newspapers, and several industry-specific publications as well. Staffcentrix was also featured in a segment on MSVAs with ABC affiliate WTNH-TV in New Haven, CT.

Staffcentrix CEO, Christine Durst, was also featured in a full-color, 2-page Microsoft advertisement that included detailed text specifically addressing MSVAs. The ad was published in *Inc. Magazine's* (circulation 665,000; 1.5 million readers) May and June issues.

The Staffcentrix T3 Program™

The Staffcentrix T3 (Train-the-Trainer) Program™—which was designed to train spouse employment professionals who, in turn, deliver the MSVA Training Program™ to spouses back on their individual bases—was first announced at the 2003 DoD Spouse Employment Conference. The T3 Program™ has been delivered three times now: at St. Louis in July 2003, San Diego in October 2003, and Atlanta, GA in January 2004.

“T3” has been a great success, with 36 military spouse employment professionals attending from Shaw AFB, Offutt AFB, Whiteman AFB, NAS Patuxent, McGuire AFB, Peterson AFB, Schriever AFB, Fort Carson, ISC Alameda (USCG), SOCOM, Patrick AFB, Great Lakes Naval Base, Altus AFB, Barksdale AFB, Yokota AFB, Yokosuka Naval Base, Minot AFB, Vance AFB, Camp Pendleton, Spangdahlem AFB, Los Angeles AFB, Wright-Patterson AFB, Charleston AFB, ISC Cleveland (USCG), Moody AFB, Fort Gordon, Fort Polk, and Fort Sam Houston.

Work Practices & Fee Survey

We have just concluded a "Work Practices & Fee Survey" of our 1,600-member MSVA community at www.msvas.com. Results of the survey give a "snapshot" of who MSVAs

are and how they work—how many hours per week, how long they have been in business, whether they are also working outside the home, types of services offered and fees charged. Portions of the information gathered in this survey are included in the final pages of this report.

Our Plans for 2004

- In Q1 we plan to unveil the MSVP (Military Spouse Virtual Professional) Training Program™. As we complete its development, we're taking great pains to assure that it will fit the needs of the many spouses holding advanced degrees or certifications—lawyers, architects, medical personnel, accountants, etc.—who would like to work virtually but would be better served by a training program tailored to the professional level.
- As always, we will continue our many efforts to promote MSVAs in the hiring marketplace through ongoing media coverage of the Virtual Assistance industry.
- We will continue to provide comprehensive online support—including in particular the RFP Service—to spouses who complete the MSVA Training Program™. In doing so, we continue to assure that spouses have the tools and information needed to launch and grow an MSVA business without additional burdens being placed on family center personnel.
- On a larger, industry-level scale, Staffcentrix' many media and outreach efforts have persuaded the real estate industry to look to Virtual Assistants as a primary choice for administrative support, and the trend is firmly anchored there. Now we are working toward cultivating other industries to the same end. At present, these include independent financial consultants, professional speakers, freelance writers, and smaller law firms and solo practitioners.
- We are currently developing a new training program—based on our successful MSVA Training Program™—geared toward transitioning military personnel, veterans, and other military family members. The Program will offer post-training online support (similar to the support we currently offer to trained MSVAs), which will include a dedicated Internet site (separate from the MSVA, active-duty spouse site), interactive community resources, and a separate RFP Service.

MEASURABLE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

It is an unfortunate fact of the training and development industry that many programs purchased by organizations fail to produce the desired result. Too often, organizations have simply had to hope that those who were trained would learn something useful in the programs provided.

Staffcentrix developed the Portable Career & Virtual Assistant Training Program™ with the needs of DoD, the services, and the spouses themselves—many of whom already belonged to our online community—in mind. In a series of dialogues with individuals tasked with spouse employment issues, two key concerns were made clear:

1. As “trailing spouses,” military spouses of all ranks face unique career challenges, compounded by frequent relocations to areas that are often remote, economically disadvantaged, or characterized by a high cost of living and low employment prospects.
2. The lack of career opportunities for the spouse often leads to diminished self-esteem; irreparable career gaps or detours; dramatically lower household income; increased tension in the family unit; and lower retention rates among service member-spouses.

Therefore, the Program was designed with the following primary objectives:

- To train military spouses to launch and build businesses that are financially viable, portable, and personally gratifying;
- To improve the Quality of Life for military families as a direct result of these businesses; and
- To increase the probability of retention among service members, both officer and enlisted.

A Sampling of Key Statistics

Statistics gathered through Monthly Progress Reports submitted by spouses who have been trained in the Portable Career & Virtual Assistant Training Program™ are quite positive. Spouses indicate that:

- 22% were working with their first client within six weeks of training.
- 67% were working with at least one client within six months of training.
- 18% are waiting to launch their business until an event or process has been completed (a degree; newborns or young children getting a little older; a coming relocation to be completed; etc.).

- 10% have either elected not to pursue self-employment or have found a job outside the home.

Of spouses who have launched their VA businesses:

- 89% report being “very satisfied” with their VA business.
- 87% indicate their spouses are “very supportive” of the business.
- 79% feel the business has “improved their family's Quality of Life.”
- 69% indicate they are “more likely to support their spouse’s re-enlistment” due to their satisfaction with and the portability of their VA practice.
- 91% are billing at least \$19/hour for their services.

SUCCESS & SATISFACTION SURVEY

In a separate survey, participants were asked twelve (12) specific questions designed to help us determine their levels of success and satisfaction both in their new careers as Virtual Assistants and personally. The questions were as follows:

1. Have you launched your business?
2. We have dispatched over 100 RFPs this year. Have you responded to any and, if so, have they resulted in clients for you? How many?
3. Are you satisfied with the quality of the resources Staffcentrix is providing for you? If not, what would you like to have that we are not providing?
4. Has your business improved your family's quality of life?
5. Is your spouse involved in your business?
6. Is your spouse supportive of your business?
7. Do you feel like a success in your business?
8. Has your self-esteem been bolstered by your business?
9. What has been your "killer" marketing approach?
10. What have you discovered about yourself on this business journey?
11. Are you satisfied with your business in its current state, and do you still feel you "have the right stuff" to make your business succeed?
12. Given your current level of satisfaction with your Virtual Assistant business and taking into consideration any changes the business has brought about in your life (good or bad), how do you feel your business would impact your decision about supporting your spouse's re-enlistment now as opposed to previously?

Please select the statement that best represents your answer:

- I would be more likely to support my spouse's re-enlistment.
- The business would not be a major factor in my decision.
- I would be less likely to support my spouse's re-enlistment.
- Not sure.

Respondents were also encouraged to share comments and anecdotes if they wished.

Eighty-one (81) spouses responded to this survey. A cross-section of their responses is included here:

Q1. Have you launched your VA business?

Responses:

- In the process, and thanks to your recommendation I will soon be working with REVA [Real Estate Virtual Assistant] Teams. Thanks for that lead.
- I launched my business about one week after I completed training and landed my first client about two weeks after that. I have now been self-employed for 3 months and I have 3 regular clients. I'd like to have more, but I am already making an average of \$200/week more than I have made in any job since becoming a military spouse, so I am not complaining -- just ambitious and excited!!!!
- Still in the works of a launch, although I have done a couple of jobs already. I will be partnering up with another VA in January and we plan to launch by Feb.
- I completed the Staffcentrix training in October here at Offutt AFB. I am intentionally progressing very slowly and am working on my website at this time. I am very dedicated to seeing this through and *eventually* making it work.
- I will be launching this spring, as I am in the throes of travel and relocation of family members from Japan to Florida. Don't want to go into this until the dust settles down and I can commit seriously every day for a couple of months. I believe I can do it...and please keep me on the RFP mailings as I will jump at the opportunity to respond to anyone needing experience in the government or travel sector. Will wait to explore other sectors in the spring.
- Yes, but very part-time at present and just within the last month.... (Still working on my .biz website.) I had been a mortgage broker working for someone else in another state, but recently applied for my own brokerage license. I am also a full-time Ph.D. student.
- I officially launched my business as of March 2003 and have had one steady client the whole year and several others off and on.
- I am working on my Strategic Marketing Plan for 2004 (thanks for the template on diskette) and deciding which marketing vehicles to use to reach my niche market—small legal firms. I'm also using the tools I received in training to develop my website content. I plan to launch in April!

Q2. We have dispatched over 100 RFPs this year. Have you responded to any and, if so, have they resulted in clients for you? How many?

Responses:

- Yes, two that I was fully qualified for in December. One has not answered and the one who did is to call me in the next day or so to discuss personalities and such.
- I have responded to 24 of the RFPs that have been provided and of those that I have responded to 6 became clients. Of the 6 that became clients I now have 2 who are on a continuous basis.
- I have not responded to any yet. Not sure if I should since I am not officially up and running.
- Yes, I have responded to one, but it didn't result in a client. It was my fault though because I answered a couple of days late to the RFP. I have not been a trained MSVA for that long though, so I'm looking forward to the New Year.
- I've responded to around six since my recent move. I am only responding to those for which I am highly qualified. One response. One client! I'll keep trying.
- I'd say about four responses. No clients yet. I am working now on creating a better response template since I think (and so does my husband who I finally asked to review it) that my approach needs some tuning.
- Responded to one and got him as a client! Yippee!
- Just started so I haven't brought in any money yet, but thanks to you I have signed a contract with REVA teams and a couple of local Realtors so it should start soon. I will start responding to the RFPs from now on so I will have more info on that. I am so excited!
- I don't recall how many I have replied to, but I have 3 clients as a result!
- I don't know how many I have responded to exactly, but I have 2 clients as a result and I couldn't be happier with them (or they with me). Thank you.
- I have responded to many of the RFPs, but I just had a friend review my replies and she said she wouldn't hire me either based on what I was sending! LOL! What are friends for? I am re-writing my template and I think it will help considerably.

Q3. Are you satisfied with the quality of the resources Staffcentrix is providing for you? If not, what would you like to have that we are not providing?

Responses:

- I am satisfied with the quality of the resources Staffcentrix is providing. I really appreciate the hard work that has gone into providing these resources.
- I am very satisfied with the resources provided by Staffcentrix. Think of it this way, what's it costing me? ZIPPO! That's a good thing!
- I think you have great resources. But so far I have noticed that many of the people using the RFP service are in real estate, and they usually want you to have experience in real estate, which I do not have. I wish there was a little more variety. I have seen more non-real estate coming through though so I guess you're working on that already!
- Oh yes, I have not even gotten all the way through the information. Although, I would like to see a place that has links to MSVA websites (or showcase a top one?) and more info on tax time.
- I love what you all provide! Your RFPs are much better than the other services I've tried.
- The website is very helpful and informative. I would like to see more help with information on marketing or obtaining clients.
- Absolutely, and I love the way you keep adding on to them too.
- I think Staffcentrix is doing a great job. I'm kind of a lurker right now, but hope to be more involved in the near future.
- Yes. The support and resources have been excellent.
- Love the resources. Love the people. Love the networking. Love the price! LOL!
- Overall I am satisfied with the resources provided by Staffcentrix. I think the only suggestion I would have is to discuss specific computer programs and skills needed to pursue the variety of work that VAs are willing to provide, e.g., to provide assistance as an office manager or a personal assistant there are contact and email management programs that would be beneficial.
- I really like Staffcentrix. I am making a lot of new friends/mentors in the community. I would like to see a new fee survey so I can update my fees accordingly.

Q4. Has your business improved your family's quality of life?

Responses:

- Surprisingly, since I am just getting off the ground, it has already made our home a happier place. I guess the old saying about “if mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy” really is true. Now, “mama” is happy!
- It is improving our quality of life a little at a time. We are patiently easing into the business and getting our bearings, but there is a true sense of a common vision now that was not there before. Our business will be successful in time as a result of the training; our family is more successful already as a result of the training.
- I can’t believe how much less stress there is in our home since I started my business. I don’t think either my husband or I realized just how far we had wandered from where we truly wanted to be. The evening we attended your “Spouse With A Mouse” workshop was a major turning point for us.
- Well, let’s just say that after 17 years of marriage, we feel like we are newlyweds. With the money coming in, the stresses of having to find a job with each move removed, and a solid knowledge of our “Family Vision,” we truly are starting fresh and loving it!
- I can honestly say that even with my one client, being a VA has improved my family life. Maybe not financially speaking, but giving me an "adult" outlet/responsibility helps me feel better. And I still love the idea of working at home with my children. I plan to expand somewhat more this year once things settle down for me. Ideally, I would like to work about 10-15 hours a week, right now, I'm working just under 20 hours a month.
- It’s too soon to say since I am in the very early stages of launching, but I feel a lot better for certain.
- My children, who are 11 and 14, keep telling me that they can’t believe I am the same mother. “Mommy, I didn’t know you could be a boss”, “Mommy, I like that you are so happy now.” I wish I had discovered this years ago, because in it, I have discovered myself.
- I am home more often, making more money, less stressed out, held in high regard by my clients, calling my own shots, more available to my family... yeah, I’d say our QOL has improved. <grin>
- Well, my kids think I am really cool now! And I am feeling a whole lot cooler too. As a matter of fact, even my hubby seems to find me cooler! LOL! I believe it has improved our quality of life.

- Our QOL on the relationship front has always been solid, but when it came to career and finances I was on a downhill slide while he was working his way up through the ranks. Now I am the “general” of my own business and the self-confidence I have gained through this experience has only helped me feel more supportive of his career. (Yes, I was a wee bit envious of him before.)
- The sense of cohesiveness that the family feels in launching this business has made it so worthwhile.
- My son gets off the bus and asks me, “What work do you have for me today, Mom?” and my husband comes home at the end of the day ready to hear about my day instead of griping about his. The money is starting to come in slowly now – I only launched about 8 weeks ago – and I can’t believe how supportive my family has been. While it’s still too early to say the money part has improved our quality of life, I would surely say that our quality of life as a family has improved greatly.

Q5. Is your spouse involved in your business?

Responses:

- No, but he plans to be once he retires--whenever that is. <g> For now he retains a figurehead position of Vice President.
- Yes, my spouse is involved in the business.
- Only to the point of being very supportive and that is very important!
- No.
- Aggravatingly, yes. Kidding. He's great.
- Not at this time, but he is looking forward to my business being established so that he can help out.
- My spouse is very involved and supportive of my business endeavors.
- Yes. He is a lot more technical than I am, so he is handling database management work for one of "our" clients. So far, we're having a blast working together.
- He is helping me write a strategic marketing plan using the template I received in training. Together, we have been able to come up with some really exciting ideas.
- My husband and children are all involved in the business to whatever extent their expertise will allow. My husband is wonderful and marketing, my son (17) is my computer support person, and my daughter (13) has been helping with filing and organizing. It is a real family effort and it has brought us closer together in so many ways. Thank you!
- No. But he would like to be when he retires.
- Only through his support.
- He is helping me in every spare moment he has. My business is our new hobby!
- Yes. He is deployed right now, but when we do get to speak he asks about the kids first, me second, and the business third. He is my "tech support" guy and in a matter of minutes he talks me through any glitches I may have run into.

Q6. Is your spouse supportive of your business?

Responses:

- YES!
- Spouse is still being supportive and wanting to help and recommending various ideas to help along.
- You bet!
- Yes. Very!
- He sure is.
- Extremely.
- He is still very supportive and encourages me to get it off the ground.
- Not at the current time. My spouse is deploying soon so we decided it would be better for me not to count on him until he gets back.
- Tremendously! I am in awe!
- All these years as a military spouse I really felt I was being as supportive as a spouse could be expected to be. My husband has taught me what real support is all about. What a wonderful lesson. What a wonderful man.
- We have our family “Values and Visions” pyramid [from the training] on the refrigerator door and my spouse is always sticking little notes of encouragement on it to keep me going.
- Oh my goodness! More than I ever, ever, ever thought possible.
- Absolutely.
- Now when he comes home at the end of the day he asks me how MY day was instead of telling me about his right away. He has been wonderful.
- All he needs now is a set of pom poms! He is my biggest cheerleader.
- He and our kids continue to be very supportive.

Q7. Do you feel like a success in your business?

Responses:

- YES
- Not yet, since I am still trying to get it up and officially running, but I am determined to be!
- To a point, yes! I know it could be better but that's just a thing of finding the right clients. I'll never give up, so with that in mind, I'd have to say it's successful.
- Not quite yet, but I am brand new!
- I do! I do! And I really like the way success feels!
- Yes.
- I can't say I feel successful as yet. I'm thrilled with my one client, but I look forward to concentrating more on my business in this next year.
- Even better! I feel like a success as a person! THANK YOU!
- I do.
- Well, let's just say that it's early still, but I can smell success around the corner and I am determined to catch it!
- In so many ways.
- Not yet, but I have set some pretty high goals for myself. I do have two clients, but I've set a goal of 5 by June 1. I am confident I'll get there.
- Over the past two years I have applied for so many jobs that I was qualified (or over qualified) for only to be turned away. That takes a toll on even the most confident person after a while and you start to wonder what success is after being met with failure all of the time. Since launching my business I am reminded every day of what success is. It is something you feel more than something you are, and I am feeling it in a really big way!!!!
- So far, I am succeeding in getting my business off the ground. So I am "Phase One" satisfied and ready to move into "Phase Two" satisfaction!

Q8. Has your self-esteem been bolstered by your business?

Responses:

- Not really, I had high self-esteem before. But, I did receive the confidence to go out on my own.
- Although I am frustrated with some difficulties publishing my web site, creating it and building the concept of the business has helped to build my self-esteem. I am sure to see more improvement as the business develops!
- Yes, but then again I had very good self-esteem all along
- A little more with each passing day.
- I had no idea how far my self-esteem had slid. I guess I was keeping a smile on for the family and denying my own pain. Now that I have something that is mine – my business – and I am making it grow and being recognized for my contributions, I realize what I have been missing. It's all coming back to me and I am loving it.
- I sure do, but now instead of feeling like nobody wants me, I worry that I may not be good enough. Newbie jitters. I believe in myself.
- N/A in regard to an actual business since I have not yet launched, but I've appreciated the support displayed by the Army in providing resources such as these workshops.
- Remember in training when we talked about answering the typical, "What do you do?" question that you're always asked in social gatherings? This was a question I used to dread and answer in embarrassment. Now, I can't wait for people to ask me what I do because I feel so confident and "important" when I reply. It is almost unreal.
- Only about 1000%! :-)
- I have sent all of my shirts out to have a big "S" embroidered on the chest. Does that answer your question? LOL!
- I do indeed. Indeed I do.
- I am a new and improved person!
- I have actually had two friends ask me what I was doing differently now because I am so much more confident. "Lost weight?" ... No, I FOUND ME!

Q9. What has been your “killer” marketing approach?

Responses:

- Thus far, I am click-through advertising on Google. No real killer yet as I am just starting it.
- Building a great web site!
- I think the best advertising is "word of mouth" basically because it's "free" and it says more than one could ever hope to put into an ad or anything else. I'm sure it has also helped by me putting my website at the bottom of my outgoing e-mails. That alone has generated quite a bit of traffic to my website.
- I'm still looking for the “killer,” but I've developed a great network of MSVA peers and we're working together for our mutual success.
- Well I really have not advertised any of my services except on the web. I am waiting until after the New Year to start advertising in newspapers. I know a lot of people are gone right now due to the holidays.
- Tell anyone and everyone what I do and why they can't live without me.
- Our Family Support Spouse Placement specialist has really been moving and shaking for us in this department.
- Genuine care and responsibility.
- I did follow one of your marketing tips and donated some time at a charity auction, and the person who won the time was thrilled that someone like me was out there, and that could actually turn into some good work. That has been my biggest lead so far.
- I have been using your “weenie on a toothpick” tactic [offering a first hour or two of services for free] and it has resulted in two regular clients and one that I work on projects for periodically.
- Telephone, tele-family member, tele-former employer, tele-friend. Tell anyone who will listen! Word of mouth is working for me.

Q10. What have you discovered about yourself on this business journey?

Responses:

- That I can be the military wife, the mother, and the business woman I always wanted to be without sacrificing any of the above.
- I CAN be my own boss very well.
- Building the business from little steps is going to be better than just jumping into it.
- Like everyone else I know, it has shown me my faults in "time management".
- I am a soldier in my own right. Scrappy and willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the mission. The mission is the success of this business. I can smell it.
- That while I always thought I was a "loner" I have come to depend on the network of colleagues I developed at the training and since then at the web site.
- I'm persistent.
- I would be happier in a job like a VA business than the standard 40 hour a week job! I am so "not" an employee.
- It is a lot harder to get a business going than anticipated. It's not a quick fix but I enjoy being able to work at it at my own pace and love that I am building something meaningful that will last.
- I am learning that starting a business is a huge commitment but one well worth the time and effort when I get it going.
- Self-discovery is a good thing and you can definitely learn a lot about yourself on a business journey. You learn that you can do it! You learn that you are good with people, driven, success-minded and open to learning in order to succeed.
- I have learned that it is OK to reach out for support and that when you do, someone will probably be there to offer it. What a great community of friends and colleagues.

Q11. Are you satisfied with your business in its current state and do you still feel you have the “right stuff” to make your business succeed?

Responses:

- I think as a business owner, one can never be satisfied. You always strive for excellence and to increase sales. If you mean do I like where I am at this point in the process...YES. And this business will succeed.
- Not yet, with my business in its current state. I still need to get it up and going but it's only been a short while since I completed training!
- Without a doubt, I have the right stuff. As far as being successful, well that's still in the works. When the timing is right, it'll happen.
- I feel like I have the right stuff. I just really need a couple of new clients to get the train moving and then there will be no stopping me.
- I am increasingly satisfied with my business and yet I am enjoying it so much I wonder if I'll ever be “satisfied”. So this is what you meant when you said, “You may come to feel like your business is a child and you will find yourself wanting to nurture it all of the time to see what great thing it will be when it grows up.”
- I'm not satisfied at the moment but I feel secure in the idea that I can make my business a success. I had to take the last year extremely easy due to my pregnancy. This put a large stall in my business. But now, I am ready to rock.
- I am satisfied with the direction my business is going. I am taking one step at a time and if I don't land my first client in a reasonable amount of time, I will work another direction. I know I have the right stuff.
- I made the decision to concentrate on family matters (family comes first always) this year, and with a very young family, finding time is more difficult especially when the spouse is deployed. I know which areas I need to improve, and I have made some valuable connections. I plan to improve on these things in 2004.
- I am satisfied with the progress I have made so far to get the business going. I believe I will be able to make this business very successful in 2004.
- Strangely, YES! I had forgotten how wonderful it feels to be so self-confident!
- My plan is to launch my business in the next six months and I am confident I will succeed. Thank you again for the training opportunity and this opportunity to provide feedback.

Q12. Given your current level of satisfaction with your VA business and taking into consideration any changes the business has brought about in your life (good or bad), how do you feel it would impact your decision about supporting your spouse's re-enlistment now as opposed to previously?

Please select the statement that best represents your answer:

- I would be more likely to support my spouse's re-enlistment.
- The business would not be a major factor in my decision.
- I would be less likely to support my spouse's re-enlistment.
- Not sure.

Responses:

- 69% Indicated they would be more likely to support re-enlistment.
- 23% Indicated the business would be a major factor in their decision.
- 0% Indicated the business would deter them from re-enlisting.
- 8% Were not sure if the business would impact their feelings about re-enlistment.

COMMENTS AND ANECDOTES

The following are a cross-section of post-training comments and anecdotes shared by spouses regarding issues relating to family, business and personal growth.

Adding Business Skills to the Home Schooling Curriculum

...I have decided to market a product and service I recently learned and delivered in my PhD program. Through the push I received from MSVAs, I believe I will succeed with this endeavor.

As for working around my children: We are a home schooling family. The kids are 11 and 14 and are my filing system. Not only are they learning necessary office skills for their future, they are keeping my present clear of clutter. Of course they do get paid financially along with credits awarded for business skills. They are also learning the business.

My business has changed because prior to the course, I was working for someone else as a mortgage broker. Often, I was not in the loop at the office because I worked at home in another state. Paychecks were often 2 weeks late. I have ventured out on my own in this field by pursuing my own brokerage license and creating my own corporation. I already have someone going through training to work for me. On the VA side of the house, I am concentrating on what I do best -- computers. This means I am offering management services for software, along with developmental and programming services. My main focus is Instructional Software Development. This would help businesses with training programs by creating a computerized multimedia environment (tutorials, simulations, and games) for their training purposes. It frees up the trainer to work on their actual job instead of training and some estimates are that training time is cut by 30%. I still respond to those needing office skills such as word processing on RFPs because it's a foot in the door.

BTW: My PhD will be in Computing Technology in Education. I will have my Education Specialist degree this summer and PHD as soon as I can get the dissertation completed.

Great Success Through Networking

My business is doing great. I have 4 clients, 2 of them are Realtors, and I work with REVA Teams. I haven't gotten any of them through the RFPs to date, but I have probably only responded to 5. I only respond when I know I can do everything they need. I just responded to an RFP from Staffcentrix yesterday and he emailed me back requesting more information. I haven't ruled him out yet.

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I love being able to work at home, my children are definitely much happier. I have a 5 year old at home and 2 others in school. I find it helpful to put my 5 year old in preschool a couple of hours per week just so I can have some time by myself and it gives him a break from me. I think it is good for kids to have time with other kids. My husband has been deployed since April, if he were here it might have been a little different....

Although my husband is deployed, he is very supportive of me even from Iraq. He has always been behind me no matter I do. He just wants me to be happy. I am very lucky I have such a wonderful husband. When he gets home, he wants me to teach him my business so he can help me with it, which will be really great. He is the one that got me started with FrontPage so I could do my website. Also, my 20 year old wants me to teach him my business so he can do it while he is in college.

I am so thankful I took the Staffcentrix training. That was certainly the start of some wonderful things. I never realized at the time that it would turn into such a success. I met Elaine Stewart at the training. If it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't be where I am today. Without her supporting me and encouraging me in the beginning I may have given up. She has been a big part of the success of my business. I got my first client from her and that was just what I needed to get me going. It really helps that I can call her when I just need to talk or if I have any questions. She has become a really good friend and with my husband being deployed, I would have had a really hard time without her. We look back at when we first started and laugh because we really thought we knew a lot back then, when in fact, we hardly knew anything compared to what we know today.

I am also very lucky that one of my clients, who just started out with me to catch up his Housevalues account for 5 hours, turned into a 45 hour monthly retainer. Now I maintain his websites, drip marketing, check his email, answer emails, do CMA's, anything he wants done I do. I was very lucky to get him because he got programs like Top Producer, eNeighborhoods, Hot Marketer, and his Advanced Access website on my word that I could learn them, set them up and maintain everything. So a lot of the programs I know today are because of him. He is also a big part of my business being a success.

I have discovered through all this that I may be smart when it comes to business but I am awful at marketing. It is easy to talk to people about things I know but since I was just starting in the Real Estate field, I didn't feel comfortable talking about it. As time goes by and I learn more, it is getting a little bit easier. The only marketing I have done was some business cards and brochures that I took to a Housevalues seminar that I went to with Elaine. The client that I talked about previously is from the seminar. It is only because Elaine is so talkative, that I got him. She started talking about Virtual Assistants to the Housevalues person holding the seminar and the next thing we know he had her get up and talk about Virtual Assistants in front of all the real estate agents there. I couldn't have done that myself. At the time I didn't know that much about real estate online programs like Elaine did. My other clients I got through them searching the Internet for Virtual Assistants. I certainly can't complain because I have plenty of work.

We will probably be moving to a new post next year so I am even more thankful for this business. To know that I can move anywhere and I don't have to try and start over with a new job or career is a great relief to me. I can actually look forward to our move.

It is funny the path that God picks for us and how everything seems to fall into place. I really have him to thank for all of this.

I think you all are doing such a wonderful job! Even though I took awhile to get everything running (due to my pregnancy) you all have stood by me, and given me advice, help, contacts...WOW, I couldn't ask for better people to work with!

Though I've had to halt my business growth, I have had a wonderful time building it to this point and I look forward to really blasting off. I love that I can bring in income while still being an active part of my son's life and with the Officer's Wives Club. I watched my mother work continuously and learned a lot, but always wished she could spend more time just relaxing. I feel this business will allow me to be the mom and wife I want to be while still being a part of the business world.

One thing I have learned is that community is important in this business. You don't have office mates to talk to and share things with, so you need to have a network of friends and online peers to help you feel like a person. Sometimes this is extremely difficult when moving every few years, but the base clubs and people are there if you look for them.

I'm terribly glad to have had the chance to fall into this arena. Thank you so much for the training and active support you have bestowed upon me and other military families.

One of the great MSVAs I met in training (no charge, but will help her back when she needs it) helped me get my site up and running. She also suggested I get another email to go with my business name and showed me how to get it out to the search engines. This has been such a learning curve, but I am enjoying every second of it and once it gets going it's going to be great.

Thanks so much for all your help. You have been so wonderful and patient with this beginner.

Improved Self-Esteem & Quality of Life

Let me begin by saying, "I am doing great." Staffcentrix Portable Career Training has been one of the best things to happen to me...ever. My business, Kinetic Integration,

(launched in May 2003) is doing remarkably well. As yet I haven't responded to any RFPs nor have I needed to market myself. I have been blessed with a strong "word of mouth" network. Also, many of the RFPs are for assistance in the real estate arena and up until now I was lacking that specialty. I have been extremely satisfied with the resources Staffcentrix is providing...the support and networking alone have been priceless.

My family's quality of life has significantly improved since I began my business and my spouse has been extremely involved and supportive. Never have I felt so successful in an endeavor and that fact alone has affected my self-esteem. Also, I've discovered that I am extremely detail-oriented and great at following-thru with situations and projects. These are two of the many qualities clients are showing appreciation for in addition to my services.

In its current state, my business could consume me if I allowed it. However, it is being managed well and I am currently billing for approximately 20-30 hours a week and that is just right for my current situation. I'm certain I have the right stuff to make my business succeed...I simply need to remind myself how much or how little time I'm willing to devote to it.

Recently (December 17th), I delivered my second child and was in the hospital for three days following the c-section. The second day I was in the hospital, I was going stir-crazy. So, my husband brought my laptop to me and I was able to connect to the Internet via a secondary dial-up connection and the phone jack in my room. As a result, I was able to work and my clients didn't know about my new son until several days later when I returned home and sent them pictures. Never have I felt better about my situation or myself and never have I felt so useful in my pajamas!

Thanks for giving me that...

Sharing the Wealth

I always did worry that I might not be a good example to my kids for not going to college! I do feel so worthy now to say, "Look at what I have done!"

I am happy to say that I have also been able to help my Sister and Mom. Mom is divorced. My sister is a military spouse and has some health conditions at the moment. She is learning to be a Real Estate VA from me and she is my subcontract VA. My Mom is learning computers with my sister to do subcontracting for me also!

Thanks Chris for your hard work to help me change my life!

I would like to say Thank You for the opportunity to participate and receive the excellent Virtual Assistance training provided by your company. What a wonderful idea! I attended the training session at the Peterson AFB, Colorado session in October 2003.

Please keep the RFPs coming and I will keep you abreast of my progress. I am very excited to FINALLY be ready to start this venture.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS – WORK PRACTICES & FEE SURVEY

At the time of this survey, Staffcentrix had a membership of 1,567 Military Spouse Virtual Assistants (non-trained and trained combined), hailing from military installations around the world. Twenty-one percent of the membership (329 MSVAs) responded to the survey, which was administered on an anonymous, voluntary basis between December 18, 2003 and January 31, 2004. Following is a summary of the information provided by the respondents.

WORK PRACTICES

How long have you been a practicing VA?

I have not yet launched my practice ("Pre-launch")	52%
Less than 12 months	34%
1-2 years	10%
2-3 years	4%
3-4 years	
4-5 years	

How many hours per week do you work in your VA practice?

Less than 20*	59%
21-30	16%
31-40	14%
41-50	7%
51+	4%

** Informal polls indicate that the majority of MSVAs prefer to work part-time in their businesses, so they can balance business and family obligations while still adding to the household income in a meaningful way.*

Do you also work as an employee in addition to running your VA practice?

No	71%
Yes, part-time	15%
Yes, full-time	14%

Unique Demographics

Military spouses start their VA businesses for diverse reasons in addition to those inherent in the military lifestyle. Many of the 329 respondents also indicated the following reasons for wanting or needing a portable, home-based career.

Work-at-home parent	281
Displaced homemaker	27
Caring for sick/elderly relative	4
Student	39
Person with a disability	12
Rural location	70
Special needs child	6

SERVICES & FEES

While administrative support services still top the list of services offered by MSVAs, the range is broadening to include more specialized and tech-related areas. Following is a recap of the details provided by respondents regarding their services and billing rates.

Note: Fees for administrative support services averaged \$25-\$35 per hour, with a high of \$75 and a low of \$10. Specialized areas, of course, are being billed at higher rates. For example:

Programming: Average Fee, \$69/hour

Interpreting: Average Fee, \$53/hour

Intranet Development: Average Fee, \$55/hour

(All fees are “per hour” unless otherwise noted.)

Service	Average Fee (\$)
Academic Writing	30
Accounting Services	32
AudioVisual Production	32
Business Coaching	50
Business Plan Writing	600/project
Business Writing	35
Collection Services	31
Competitive Research	33
Concierge Services	33
Database Management	39
Desktop Publishing	29
Document OCR/Scanning	3/page
Editing/Proofreading	30

Entertainment Industry	30
Event Planning	35
File Conversion	33
Fundraising	30
General Transcription	30
Government Procurement Expertise	45
Grant Proposals	50
Graphic Design	33
Graphic Scanning	28
HR Expertise	45
Insurance Broker/Agent Support	33
Internet Research	33
Interpreting	42
Import/Export Support	35
Intranet Development/Management	55
Legal "Secretarial"	35
Legal Transcription	35
Litigation Support	35
Live Phone Answering for Clients	28
Mailing Services	25
Marketing/Advertising	35
Market Research	35
Medical Transcription	35 or .05/word
Multimedia Presentation	47
Nonprofit Support Services	28
Office Management	36
Paralegal Services	35
Payroll Services	34
Phone-in Transcription	32
Private Investigation Support	30
Programming	69
Public Relations	48
Realtor Support	33
Resume Writing	38
Spreadsheets	28
Statements/Billing	29
Systems Management	50
Technical Writing/Editing	45
Translating Services	39

Voice Services (Greetings, Events)	50
Website Design	40
Word Processing	28

* * *

The Portable Career & Virtual Assistant Training Program™

Program Objective

To train U.S. Military Spouses to build successful businesses that are financially viable, portable, and personally gratifying, thereby helping them overcome the career obstacles they often face as a result of frequent moves and sometimes-isolated posts. And, in the process of doing this, to assist these women and men in finding improved self-esteem, better quality of life and greater satisfaction with the Military lifestyle.

Our Training Methods – On-Site, Online, On Target!

As pioneers of an Internet-based industry we are firm believers in the effectiveness of the Net and other technology in business communications. However, as experienced trainers/educators we also know that when it comes to teaching “soft skills” these tools alone cannot take the place of a traditional, face-to-face learning environment.

For optimum results, the Portable Career & Virtual Assisting Training Program for Military Spouses™ is presented in phases—using a combination of **on-site training** and **online support**. The former draws out knowledge and promotes thinking; the latter puts in knowledge and promotes growth.

Launching a Virtual Assisting practice is a process that requires dynamic thinking and action. Our **on-site workshops** provide a learning environment that encourages the kind of interaction, insight, and free-flowing creativity that inspires participants to make their vision a reality.

Following the on-site workshops, each graduate receives sustained **online support** at the Staffcentrix Portal for MSVAs – an Internet-based community of colleagues and experts – for as long as he or she remains an “active-duty spouse.” The information and continuous communication available to MSVAs at our site promotes awareness and knowledge that helps them further develop the skills that will help them succeed.

This comprehensive program is designed to meet several essential needs:

- Professional training for the spouse on how to launch and grow the MSVA business;
- Sustained post-training support through the Staffcentrix Internet portal for MSVAs—an interactive, “cross-fertilizing” forum for the exchange of growth tips and resources, and the formation of alliances critical to their success;
- Prepare the service member spouse for the types of changes which may occur as a result of the civilian spouse undertaking a home-based career;
- Enable the participating branches and bases to gather detailed data regarding the feasibility and impact of Internet-based portable careers for the military spouse.

Phases of the Training Program

The Application/Screening Process

Our goal is to create “success stories” among Military Spouses—not contribute to what may already be a long list of perceived career “failures”. Therefore, the selection of participants is a critical component in this, or any training program, designed to encourage self-employment.

At the center of the participant selection process is an online application designed to provide an accurate and uniform method of gathering information and scoring candidate responses. This simple, yet thorough tool, allows family center personnel to review the applications quickly and select those exhibiting the strongest evidence of likely success in the training program and in their own virtual businesses thereafter.

Phase I: ‘Realities & Readiness’ Workshop: Exploring Entrepreneurship & Self-Employment

Duration: 6.5 hours

We understand the excitement and importance of transitioning into self-employment but are equally aware that not everyone is cut out to be an entrepreneur. In this workshop, participants are introduced to the challenges and rewards of home-based entrepreneurship and self-employment. A series of discussions, exercises and self-assessments will help participants evaluate their entrepreneurial profile and readiness before moving to launch a MSVA business.

Phase II: Family Workshop: “Spouse with a Mouse” – *Anticipating Changes in the Household*

Attendees: Military Spouses AND Service Members

Duration: 2 hours

Business ownership can sometimes be more demanding than the entrepreneur — or his/her spouse — imagined. New responsibilities, client demands, and the requirements of consistent professionalism all require time, focus, and energy. The family schedule changes, the entrepreneur (who, before, was always “there”) is suddenly unavailable or preoccupied, and the “ups and downs” inherent in every business reverberate through the family unit.

The chances of success in a home-based business are dramatically strengthened when the entrepreneur has the emotional support and understanding of his/her spouse. Time commitments, marketing expenses, and the occasional outlay for new hardware or software will make sense to a spouse who has been briefed on what to expect, and will help the new entrepreneur avoid the criticism and antagonism that may arise during the ramp-up period, before the business can be expected to turn a profit.

This Workshop helps couples develop reasonable expectations and goals for the new environment, so they can sustain a healthy relationship while meeting the challenges of growing a business.

Phase III: ‘Launching & Marketing Your Virtual Service Practice’ Workshop

Duration: 6.5 hours

This Workshop is designed to take participants through the first stages of building a solid client base that will support their practice over the coming years. Topics covered include defining the “ideal” client, how to interview prospective clients, effective communication in “virtual” work relationships, an exploration of various marketing approaches and vehicles, and more. Additionally, participants will begin writing a comprehensive marketing plan that will help them implement a focused, strategic marketing campaign.

Phase IV: Sustained Internet-Based Support

Duration: As long as the participant is an “active-duty spouse”

The Staffcentrix Portal (www.msvas.com) provides a joint-branch community environment designed to foster business development, high professional standards and an entrepreneurial culture. In addition to its comprehensive content and networking tools, the site provides online mentoring and “real-time” Q&A, and includes an RFP (request for proposal) service to generate client leads for the MSVA.

Participants Are Talking...

“...I feel I have learned so much from the two of you as well as meeting other military spouses who

I will be networking with. This is just what I had been looking for.”

“This was a wonderful experience for me. I can’t wait to begin this business. Thank you for these opportunities that will be opening for me.”

“This was wonderful. I have always wanted to do something in this arena and never quite knew how to go about it. I hope to be one of your stars and help rocket this industry into the forefront of military spouses careers.”

“I learned so much from networking with the other spouses and being trained by the gurus of the industry. My husband really enjoyed the ‘spouse with a mouse’ workshop and it was good for him to hear about the realities of a home-based business from a third party.”

“This was a fantastic program for military spouses. It really meets the needs and criteria for people who are not typical job seekers.”

