

Ep #160: Finding the Perfect Executive Assistant with Trivinia Barber



Full Episode Transcript

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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 160.

Welcome to the *Design You* podcast. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy. Here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey friends. It's hard to believe I blew through the end of year three of the *Design You* podcast and forgot to even mention it. Forgot to celebrate it and forgot to mention it. It was four episodes ago. So let's celebrate it now, woo hoo, we're moving into year four of this podcast. And I've loved every episode. And I love today's episode. But if you've been listening for a while I so appreciate you.

And you know what? I haven't asked for this in a while but I'd really love it if you love this podcast. If you've been following for a while or you're new, either one, if you would head over onto either your Apple Podcast app or where you listen to podcasts and leave me a rating and a review. I'd love to hear what you like, what's changed your life, your favorite episodes, any of the things that you love about the Design You podcast, let's hear it. We would absolutely like to know. So it, from my perspective has been a total joy.

I can't believe it's already been three years. It seems like one, if that. But I just love bringing you more and more incredible, amazing guests and episodes, sometimes by myself, for the things that I think really matter in our lives and our business. And today is no different. So today I have my new friend, fairly new, Trivinia Barber. And she is the CEO of a company called Priority VA and they match executive assistants to CEOs, entrepreneurs, business owners like me. And I recently hired them to help me find my new assistant.

And it was such an incredible process that I wanted Trivinia to come on and talk to you about it today. So what we talk about a lot today is how knowing ourselves, the real us and being super aware and unfiltered in our knowing

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and awareness of ourselves really enables us to get the help that we need in life and business. And that was very true with my experience with her company.

And we talk about how because I know so much about myself, because I do a lot of deep personal work and I'm very thoughtful about how I want to lead, and how I want to show up, and the impact I want to make in the world, and my values. It's been really easy for her to help me. But I wanted you all to start to have a little insight about how you might want to do this for your own business. And then also if you're ready to have an incredible experience of someone helping you find the right executive/personal assistant like I have on your team then she's your girl.

So we have a fun conversation but I think this one is almost, I mean it's fun for sure, I loved every minute of it. But I think it's just one of those really good problem-solving episodes of bringing you a resource that you may not have known about that could be a game changer for your life and your business.

So just a tiny bit about Trivinia, she tells you more about herself in the episode. But I love where her bio says she's an unfiltered, take charge entrepreneur who isn't afraid to tell it like it is in life and business. Her passion for honesty is fueled by a deep desire to impact the lives of clients she serves as CEO of Priority VA. And one of the reasons she and I connected so strongly is we have the same Enneagram which I kind of geek out on. We're both Enneagram 8s, so I feel like in a lot of ways that we're the same person.

She and I are always saying, "We're the same person." Not totally. She has four kids, I have one, so clearly she's better at managing more things in her life than me. But we definitely have a lot in common and it was a joy to work with her. But if you're not an Enneagram 8 don't worry because she surrounds herself with incredible women on her team that are supportive. And honestly, it's an amazing experience.

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So here we go, get out your pencil and your paper. I say that every week, I know. I hope you just have made a Design You notebook that you're like, "I'm just going to open this up every week for Tobi's podcast and keep all my notes in one place." But I think there's some good stuff in here. And I hope that it leads you to supporting yourself in a way that maybe you haven't.

And if you've been feeling overworked, and overwhelmed, and out of sorts, and like your to do list is running your life, like maybe it's the bus and it's dragging you behind it then finding the right support team can make a big difference for me. So here we go my interview with Trivinia.

Tobi: Hey Trivinia, welcome to the *Design You* podcast. This is going to be so much fun.

Trivinia: I've been looking forward to this for a long time. Thanks for having me.

Tobi: You're so welcome. So I first learned about you years ago when I heard one of the – I mean years. I don't know. When Amy Porterfield had one of her first, first, first courses and you were – at the time I think you were her actual just her personal assistant or VA or something, her VA. So I knew your name and she talked – and it's a very unusual name. So it's not one that you forget. And so I've from a distance watched your evolution.

And then there have been moments where I actually enquired with your different various forms of your business about potentially working with you and didn't. And now we're working together which is so fun. But it's kind of creepy because I feel like I know probably a lot more about you than you know about me because I've been hanging in the background witnessing your business for probably five years at least now.

But for the people who didn't do that, why don't you tell people a little bit about you, maybe a little bit about that story if you want. And then kind of

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set the scene, because we're going to get into some cool stuff and I want them to know why you're the expert to talk about this stuff today.

Trivinia: Yeah, I love it. Well, thanks for having me and thanks for sort of cyber stalking me for five years before we bumped in together. I appreciate it. Here's the thing about me. I started as an executive assistant when I was 18 years old. And I continued in the cool, cushy corporate life for a long time. And then I decided to start a family. And I tried to talk my employers into letting me work from home because it didn't make any sense.

Everything that I was doing I could literally do from a laptop and they were completely against that idea until I got pregnant and I was going to take five months of maternity leave. And then they said, "Do you remember that work from home thing Trivinia? Do you want to try it?" And I was like, "Yes, actually I do." And so that started my work from home journey. My daughter is about to be 18 years old. So 18 years I've been doing this work from home game and that worked really well. It worked as we grew and extended our family, even adopted a couple of kids.

And then they got bought out by a national corporation and they said, "Hey, do you want to come back into the office?" And at that point after 10 years of working in my pajamas I was like, "No, I actually don't." And so I started freelancing, through that I got connected with a couple of high profile entrepreneurs. And through their talk about me on their podcasts or in their courses, the phone started ringing. And people wanted Trivinia.

And what I realized really was when the entrepreneurial light bulb went off for me and I realized people didn't care so much about having Trivinia. They just wanted someone that they could trust. And so one of the things I did when I worked in the corporate world was I onboarded physicians into medical practices. And I'm like this is the exact same thing except it's EAs into entrepreneurial companies. And Priority VA was born about eight years ago.

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And we have been on a mission ever since to create leaders that don't do it alone. And so I'm pleased to be here to talk to you a little bit about how we do that.

Tobi: I love it so much. And the interesting thing too that I watched as is true for so many of our businesses, when I thought about using Priority VA to find just a kind of a general virtual assistant two or three years ago and I wasn't quite ready, maybe, I don't remember, maybe five years ago. Your services were a little more broad as we all are. Because we don't even know yet how narrow we can get and when I came back to you recently because I really was looking for an actual executive/personal kind of assistant which we'll get into.

I was so excited and inspired to see how buttoned up your niche, this is the only thing we do, these are the only people we place. We're not your general VA source. We pair these amazing humans with these other amazing executives and create magic. And that's how, it was so clear which was amazing. So what about that journey?

Trivinia: It was an evolution Tobi, because – and I remember very distinctly Todd Herman who was a coach of mine at the time, also a client of ours for a long time. And he told me, “You've got to stop being everything to everyone Trivinia.” And I was like, “But everyone needs help.” And I do have a temperament and a personality that I don't want anyone to suffer. One of the reasons that I started this company was that I was really pissed off thinking that I was a really good mom but I also wanted to be a really good employee.

And so one of my daughters would always have these weird fevers of unknown origin and so they couldn't go to daycare for 24 hours, fever free. So I would have to call in sick to work. And I just was so frustrated, I'm like, “Why can't I do both, be a good mom and to be a good worker.” And Priority VA allows me to do that. It allows a lot of other women and men to be able to do that as well. But it also solves this different problem, 87% of

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businesses fail in the first two years, 87, that's huge and so most of them fail because they don't have appropriate support that they need.

And I had an idea that the problem I could solve kills two birds with one stone. We're helping these businesses but we're also helping these parents stay at home and take care of their kids, but go on the kindergarten field trip and use their skills. And so we decided to create a company that would really marry the two of those things. And the beautiful thing about that is that I was really, really broad and I'll serve anybody. You needed a graphic designer I would find you one. You need a copywriter I'd find you one.

And what we realized was that the clients that stayed the longest, that were the happiest, they had EAs that were working with them for years, were all across the board executive assistants. It wasn't this hodgepodge of create my funnels and manage my social media stuff. It was take care of the business owner so the business owner could take care of business.

Tobi: So good, so, so good. And what we're going to really talk about, the juicy part of what we're going to talk about is how knowing ourselves at a deep authentic level is what really allows us as CEOs, executives, entrepreneurs, creatives, whatever we want to call ourselves, get the help we need in our businesses. And so it's so interesting. And we're going to get to that in a minute because I always talk about how personal development is way more important even in business development when it comes to running a business.

But before we go there just for a second can we talk about deciding when to hire the EA or deciding to hire the EA? Because I think for years hence the fact that I'm just really getting a really good one at year 21. I tried a couple of kind of pseudo assistants over the years. But I think for a long time I believed that was a position you hired later when you'd arrived and become this person, this busy validated, super important big shot CEO.

And over the years what I've learned, I've completely done a 180 degree shift on that. And I think it's probably the first person you should hire even

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as an interior designer, even before you hire a design assistant. And I would love for you to speak to that because I think people – I mean you were just describing it. If you're not free to even do your creative work, you don't just need a design assistant because you can't even get your laundry taken to the cleaners or people call back to confirm appointments at work. You're doing that instead of making money.

So can you tell me what your philosophy is? I'm sure it probably aligns pretty closely.

Trivinia: It absolutely aligns closely. Cameron Herold is coined with saying he helps companies with COOs, that he's a coach for COOs. But he says often, "If you do not have an executive assistant you are one." And that is a really good lens to look at things through because if you don't have an EA you're doing all the things that an EA should be doing. So I often like to have people think about this. When were you ready to have a child? Was there a moment that you woke-up and you're like, "I'm ready?"

No, you may have had a feeling of I think this is time. You were still terrified. You still had to leap, or when were you ready to start your business? Or when were you ready to ask your partner to finally marry you? Whatever. We're never ready. And we're always going to be learning and growing.

But here are a few indicators for you. If you are spending the majority of your time on minutiae, if you're calling appointments, you're figuring out where to put your pixel on your website. You're trying to figure out how do I set up Calendly so that my scheduling works? If those are the types of things that you're doing and you're not face-to-face with your clients and you're not engaging with them, and you're not having quiet time to just be a visionary, it's time. It is time for you.

I would recommend that everyone read a book called Profit First, it's by Mike Michalowicz. That will help you get your mindset straight about the money piece of it, because that's what we always hear, "I can't afford it. I'm

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not ready. I'm not ready." I would venture to say you can't afford not to. People will often say, "I don't have enough for someone to do." And I like to joke, but I'm actually very serious, I just kind of try to make it funny that if – because our minimum is 10 hours a week.

And I like to say, "If you don't have 10 hours of things that you can have someone else do for you you're not working hard enough. So don't tell me there's not enough for you to do. We just have to take time to do an audit on how you're spending your time so we know what should get off of your plate." So always hire before you're ready. I don't recommend going into debt. So don't put it on a credit card. Don't do that. We want to make sure you're at least revenue neutral before you make this investment.

But any EA in the first 100 days should in a sense be paying for themselves. So don't let money be the factor for you.

Tobi: Yeah. And one more thing before we get into this authenticity piece, which is so exciting is can you describe a little bit about when you help – so this is what my situation was. I said, "I know I have what I would consider more executive assistant stuff but I also have a ton of stuff that feels real personal, like personal assistant stuff." And I was like, "Is that going to be unprofessional? Is an executive assistant going to think that's not worthy of their time?"

Because I'm like, "My dogs need a vet appointment and a groomer appointment. And I need to confirm my kid's stuff with her school and the dentist appointments." And my assistant that you helped me find, which we can talk about is not based in my state but she's still coordinating. She'll coordinate my groceries to show up at my house. All of that stuff is just as important as also confirming my podcast guest or other business related stuff so can you speak to that just a bit?

Trivinia: Yeah, it's a little bit situational. So there are EAs that they have zero desire to ever buy a gift for your partner. They do not care. They don't want to worry about anything personal. I typically don't work with those

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types of EAs because I personally have a view that our job as an executive assistant is to take care of the whole of our CEO. And that is, that is personal, it is business.

I used to have business cards that would say 'also a therapist' on them because an EA is kind of sometimes a hostage negotiator when they're trying to get deals on hotels, or flights, or something. They're a therapist when they're handling your stress, when you're in the middle of a launch. They do all the things for you. And so I typically don't work with any EAs that have a hard boundary about that.

So yeah, so I think that an EA should be looking out for the whole of their executive and take care of you mentally, emotionally, logistically, operationally and administratively. It's the whole package.

Tobi: Yes, it's so good. And what I love about that is it's really a philosophy we've brought to my entire company is that whole 360 degree approach to everyone that works in our firm, family first, people need health. I've gotten to the point where I hire life coaches for my own team. The health and wellbeing of the whole person allows them to have the bandwidth to show up and do a great job at work.

And if that doesn't start at the top with the CEO, if you don't set that tone with how you're caring for yourself and getting people to support you in that way, I don't think that it's very easy to create that culture. And the reason I want to do it is because I want everybody of course to be healthy that works in our team and to be happy. But I want them to stay a long time and feel like they're supported and cared for. And if we don't do that for ourselves then we can't really do that for other people, right?

Trivinia: Yeah. And if we want a high performing team, and that's what we all want, we have to create an environment in where everyone can do high performing thinking. But if we are running our team into the ground, if we're paying them crappy wages, we're treating them like trash, we're not taking care of them then they can't continue to be high performing. And so I love

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that, and this is why you make a perfect ideal client for us is because you do have that big 360 degree view. You do understand that family comes first.

Now, there are other clients that we have served that they're like, "I want my assistant available 24/7. I'm sorry, if I text at 3:00am I want a response." That typically doesn't end well. And so we've got to have, and this is why I think what we'll get into later about really being honest about who you are and how you show up allows us to get the right fit for you. Because if that's how you show up and you really need somebody 24/7 that's going to take a special type of EA. I can't just throw any EA into that type of a position.

But conversely if you have a family centered approach and you want to have potential coaching for your team members. That also takes a special type of person that's going to be transparent and vulnerable and let you into their world as well. And so that's why just throwing out résumés and putting an ad on LinkedIn and hoping for the best doesn't work a lot of times because we don't drill down deep enough. We hire based on affordability. How cheap is somebody?

Their interest, yeah, I'm kind of interested in interior design. I like to decorate my room. And availability, I can start tomorrow. Instead I am deeply passionate about believing that we need to hire based on passion. What passion do they have for the job that they're doing? What purpose, are they fulfilled by the work that they do? And then of course proficiency, can they actually do the job that is required of them? And I just think that that's a paradigm shift we haven't made culturally yet.

Tobi: That is such a great point because I think you're absolutely right. When I watch people hiring in their business it is first and foremost, it seems like always about the money and especially if they're afraid that they can't afford someone. What's the cheapest person I can get? And to your point I think that is the exact opposite of the way that we should be looking at. I'm more interested in what result am I trying to achieve with this hire?

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And do I really think a college age intern or someone with no experience that I'm going to somehow magically train to be an EA, which I've not been. I mean how is that really going to work? So I love that. So let's talk a little bit about the process because I just went through this with you and we found my person and I'm so excited. And we're just getting started with her but it wasn't fast. It wasn't the first person we found.

You're like, "We're going to take 60 days. We're going to interview potentially hundreds of people for you. And we're going to bring you our cherry picked best matches for you. And then you're going to interview those three or four people. And then we're going to go from there." But there's a lot more to it than that. Starting with what we've been promising to talk about which was you really getting to know me and what my needs are, what my preferences are, what my opinions are, what my personality. All of that stuff, that's where we started.

So can you start to talk about that? Because you have mentioned a couple of times that I was a good case study and you said that before we started. Let's use me as an example and talk about that process. And might I add and compliment you, I was so impressed when I hopped on some of those calls that you, actually you were the person there asking me these questions. Not just like an intake person that was going to take some notes. You were in there with me invested in the process.

Trivinia: I am and I don't know if I'm always going to be able to do that. As we grow and scale and our business gets high, and I have eight of those calls a day. I don't know if capacity issues will allow me to continue to do that. But it is deeply important to me that I'm highly involved right now because my name's on this.

Tobi: Well, and I'm sure if you replaced yourself it would be with someone equally qualified as you. So to that point I'm not saying I necessarily have to have the person with their name on the door. But I was so impressed

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that it was such a high quality, high level, high touch relationship through that process.

Trivinia: Well, thank you, I appreciate that. But here is why we do it that way and why I'm deeply involved. I'm not afraid to ask hard questions. This is why I think I get along so well with you is that you also have a similar temperament that I do, because I want to get to not really the tasks you need somebody to do because I can teach somebody how to order groceries for you if I have to. What I need to know is who you need. And I can't figure that out by having you fill out a form. I need to ask. I need to see your eyebrows raise when I ask certain questions.

I need to see you smile when I target something about your personality that hits home because those are the nuanced things that putting up an application on Indeed isn't going to give you. So I ask difficult questions about who you are, about how you show up as a leader, about what success looks like in the role for you. I like to figure out what pisses you off. What are the things that an executive assistant is going to do that is going to just be nails on a chalkboard for you? Because I need to know that so then I can vet it out in the interview process.

And we will create custom questions specifically to hit on those areas. Tobi's not going to like this person, they laugh way too much. Or we'll be able to sort of figure it out. And then we can come to you when we make a presentation of the EAs to you, we can say, "Here are some things that you need to take into consideration. You want someone whose super fast paced but this person is going to need a little bit more details when you get started. Then they'll be able to hit the ground running and be at your same pace."

That's just one example of many of the types of things that we're doing. But the point of it is, is that if I can get leaders to be really transparent, first with themselves. I happen to be writing a book about this right now, so it's good practice to kind of get this out. But what often leaders will do is instead of

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looking in the mirror to sort of see who am I as a leader, instead we sort of walk around with a magnifying glass and we're looking for problems. We're blaming everyone else for the things that didn't go right, for this person was flaky, or that one didn't know Google Drive or whatever it is.

Instead of saying, "How did I show up as a leader that made this not work or could have made this work better?" And so that's what I like to do first is let's figure out who you are as a human first, as a leader second. And if I can figure out that then I am way more successful at making a match that can handle you and that can complement you.

Tobi: That is so good. So I love what you're saying. And of course again, it did seem easy for us to work together and likely because I was already doing a lot of this personal development work. But that's not required, you can guide people through this process. But I do think that if people are starting to think about whether it's an executive assistant or anybody, if they're starting to go, "Okay, this is piquing my interest." What should I be doing? How do I start to get into that awareness, that more awareness, that more deep personal work?

I want to talk about that a little bit. My word of the year happened to be lead and my whole approach to this year is how do I show up as a leader? And it was almost again the opposite of what people think when they think leader because we think it's like be in charge and know all the answers. It's not that at all. It's how do I support my team? How do I get out of the way so they can do an amazing job? It's a whole lot of things.

I mean yes, big ideas and yes, I'm working on million dollar ideas because that's fun for me and I'm creative. But it's a lot different than what people think. And I think so often people are intimidated because they're like, "Well, if I'm going to be a good leader I need to know all the answers." And I think it's kind of the opposite. That's kind of like you need to find the right people. If you're going to be a really good leader, if you can put the right

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team of people together that match with you in certain ways then you can create a ton of magic.

So I was in that head space already but let's talk about what you started to find out about me and from me, and how you use that, so we can give them some real true examples of what this looked like.

Trivinia: Great. I'm going to do something quickly, and so sorry if this – you can hear this on the recording. So let me pull this up. And I'm actually going to pull up all of the notes that I took about you.

Tobi: Okay, good, this is...

Trivinia: From our call, so we can dive in. Okay, so things that I realized about you that you were honest enough to do. And this is the key is that you've got to be honest if we're going to go through this process. And thank God you were just so, you were like, "I'm an open book. Let's just go here." You said that you were typically the bottleneck in things. That in and of itself is a huge admission for a lot of entrepreneurs, they refuse to admit that they are the problem in their business, that things aren't happening as fast because they get stuck in your lap. And so you were really honest about that.

You talked a lot about how you were organized and that you knew that there was a lot of stuff that an assistant could help you do. But you also needed the minutiae done and you worried about that. Are they going to feel like that's beneath them to do that? And so to me I wrote down, she is deeply passionate about what her team thinks, because you are. And you happen to have note that you did a lot of personal work over the past couple of years that you have definitely been growing in that area personally.

And then when I asked you what success looked like you said, "Feeling like I have freedom in my day." That word 'freedom' can mean so many things to so many people. For some of them it is just time freedom, where they

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don't feel like they have to get on a meeting at 8 o'clock every single morning so that they can go on the field trip for their kid, or they can have a spa day, or just have a day without meetings. For others freedom is emotional and mental capacity. They just want the freedom to think and not be hammered with questions 24/7 from their team.

So I drilled down into what that means for you so that we can assess that and look at it different. I talk a lot about how we show up as a leader. And one of the things that you mentioned is that sometimes when you're in a meeting you will in essence make a promise. "I'll go look at that. I'll review that course later and I'll get back to you." And then 87 other things pop up in your brain and that doesn't actually get done. Again, that's an admission of your limitations. And sometimes we don't want to admit that we're not good at something.

And so we've got to get really clear on the things that you're not good at, where you absolutely can kill it and help a new person on your team. And you were again just really transparent about that. We talked about what I call your ideal teammate avatar. And we get a little bit politically incorrect about that because again, as long as we're not breaking any federal discrimination laws I want to know who you want on your team. I want to know is this person going to be super tech savvy?

Are they going to come from a city or is it okay if they're from a small town and they have an accent? Is it important that diversity is massively important to you? Or is it okay if I give you the plain Jane white girl from Missouri, are you okay with that? So I want to talk about those types of things so that we can determine who I'm looking for.

What you said is that was most important to you is that someone who was emotionally mature, that that was going to be really important to you. And again, that can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people. But in your case it was like, "I want to be able to have intelligent conversations with people. I want to know that if I give you something I can trust that you're

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going to handle it and I don't have to then micromanage and follow up." Knowing who you are and how you lead helps.

I throw pens, Tobi, I do, if you could see my office, actually there's none on the floor right now but I throw pens. If I can't figure out something, if a link breaks, if I don't know what to do I'm like, "Damn it", and I throw a pen. It's so good I don't have anybody in my office. I also curse like a sailor. That can be really challenging.

I had a girl on my team once who was profoundly Christian. It didn't matter, I don't care about that. But the fact that I cursed a lot really bothered her. So she couldn't handle it on our team, if we're in a meeting and we hear that some link broke or something and I use a curse word. That was deeply bothering to her. So I learned, I have to be really upfront with people and say, "No, I curse." And I never curse at someone but I will say, "Shit", or whatever when something's happening.

Tobi: Yeah, the eff bomb flies out most – I mean and since the pandemic I think I use it more than I ever did before. I feel like it's just the staple of my vocabulary some days.

Trivinia: It's the best word ever, it really is. So we have to be really clear about that because – and it is, in fairness it is to help the candidate or any potential employees that come in. But it is also to help you because it frees you to continue to be yourself because what happens is, if you feel like you have to show up as someone different to appease your team, it can happen for a while but it's not sustainable. And then likewise for the employees, they can grin and bear it for a little while. But they're like, "I can't work in this environment."

And so our goal is to get somebody who's going to be a long term collaborative fit for you. We can't do that unless we're honest.

Tobi: So good. And I also remember being very transparent with you about how much work we're doing on diversity, and equity, and inclusion in our

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business. And I said, “It’s got to be somebody who is on the same page with us about that. That is so important.” We talked about my Enneagram. I remember describing myself and what I loved about it is you’re like, “Oh my God, I’m also an 8”, which again we immediately connected because the 8s are challengers and sometimes we can be misunderstood. And so that was so interesting.

But if you hadn’t been the same there were three other people on your team, there’s somebody on your team was going to connect and resonate with me that I feel like I could trust and be like, “They get me.” So you asked me a lot of things like that about how I describe myself. You said, “What makes me mad? When do I get irritated with people?” And that was so helpful because you didn’t just come and ask me like the rosy happy version.

And that’s I think what we’re doing when we try to hire people ourselves a lot of times. We’re already seeing best case scenario even though in our minds we’re worried about things, will they be a fit? Will they bother me, whatever? We’re not bringing that up in conversation.

Trivinia: I just did a podcast episode on my podcast and it’s all about brutally honest job descriptions. Because if we will even be brutally honest and I think sometimes people can freak out, if they’re honest in a job description and they have 20 applicants as opposed to the 200 they’re used to getting they’re like, “This is a bad job ad.” No, actually it’s pretty good because it’s weeding out. We want to attract or repel people with our job ad.

And again we want to be really real about who we are so that nobody’s feeling like they were hoodwinked. This is not a bait-and-switch that we’re some great amazing company. In my job ads I say, “I have a rainbow flag flying in my yard, you need to be okay with that.” I absolutely believe that Black lives matter. If this does not work for you and you are not okay with the eff bomb this is not the home for you.”

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Tobi: I love it. I was going to ask you for an example but that's perfect. And it doesn't have to be that, we're not saying that you have to – you can have the exact opposite of any of those. You could have all, whatever your values are.

I think we're coming to a point though in, I feel like just kind of in society, at least for me it's going to be true, that kind of since 2020 and forward I feel like it's more important than ever to share our values out publicly for all kinds of reasons, hiring clients, everything, all the people, kind of all the stakeholders that are involved in your day-to-day business. I think it's important that people...

Trivinia: I ask every client that we get on a call with what their values are. And it is still so shocking to me in 2021 how many clients you'll see. You can literally see their eyes shift and they go into their Google document to be like, "Wait, what are my values again? Because I don't remember what my values are." And that's hard. We should always, if you guys take anything from this episode, hire and fire to values.

Your values, honesty and direct, diversity and inclusive, innovation, always making a difference and revealing beauty in the world, with rooms we create we are a shining light on another human doing amazing things. Those are your values. So that when I'm interviewing for you I'm asking questions that are going to point out to someone aligned with those values. So some of the questions that we asked the applicants for you was we talked about, "What does it mean to reveal beauty in the world? What does making a difference look like to you?"

We want to ask them those things so we can understand, is there alignment there?

Tobi: Yeah. And it was so fun because when you sent me over, or actually Sarah who is my kind of account person that works with you, sent over the people for me to consider. And I think you sent over three people. It was so exciting. I was way more excited than I thought I was even going to be. I

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think I was a little nervous before and I expected it to be more drier than it was. And when I got not only the document with the résumés but her video explaining kind of who you all thought was a fit. And she was so excited.

And it's funny; the person that I ended up hiring was the person she thought was going to be the best fit. And when I first read the résumés I thought she was going to be my third pick, which is interesting, of the three. But what showed up all throughout were things that we're so aligned. The person I hired used to work for a huge construction kind of conglomerate sort of in Chicago. There were also people who had either worked specifically in diversity inclusion or had that as their hobby and side gig.

One of the people that we interviewed, she and her mom had started a social justice. She and her 70 year old mom had started a social justice organization. And she was really into preventing voter suppression. I mean one of the candidates was a person of color or two. It was so important to me to have a diverse group of people. And so it was so fascinating because they were truly aligned with all the stuff we had talked about. And it made it hard to choose from on paper.

When I interviewed them it was instantly clear who was the right fit. But thinking to myself could I ever have gotten that group of people in front of me, and then be able to interview and connect with them at that level. It would have taken me months, if not years to find people that were that aligned with what my needs are.

Trivinia: And there amazing people out there. Sometimes people ask me, "Well, can't I just find somebody on Upwork?" You can, absolutely and people do it all the time. But sometimes it is looking for a needle in a haystack. For your job alone we did something like 87 interviews. And 87 interviews of seven stages with clients, so it's challenging and difficult to do that. And so that's what people are paying for when they come to us.

They're paying for us to do that legwork for them so then they sort of get on a platter candidates that are aligned with who they are and what they need

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so that then they can make that choice. It doesn't make the choice any easier but it makes the legwork portion a lot better.

Tobi: Oh my gosh, so much easier. So let's talk a little bit about what it was like then for you to onboard the person with me, which again not promising that you'll always be this person but you were the person that still came on at that moment. When Haley and I got together and you introduced us and we had a Zoom call all of us, and you took us through the process of onboarding and getting to know each other. And I loved it so much because you have a way and you can tell people some of your, you know, what system you use.

But you have a way of finding out so many things about how we operate. And so I listened to you tell me how she was going to work and what it would be like for her and where she might get tripped up, or stuck, or frustrated. And then you described me. And you're like, "Does that sound alright?" And I remember you saying, "Haley, if you do this, Tobi's going to want to kill you." It was so fascinating. And then you would verify, "Is that right?" And I'm like, "Yeah, pretty much, no one's perfect."

But I thought that was so fascinating because you didn't just leave us with, "There you go," run off into the sunset. You were like, "No, I want to set you up for full transparency of how you'll work perfectly together, where you might conflict, what to look out for." You helped us set, or you required us even to set goals for the first 100 days. There's so much support there and that was remarkable as well.

Trivinia: Thank you. I'm passionate about doing that because I have been that EA before. I was matched with a client and has to sort of figure it out as I go. And then I'm disappointed because I'm like, "Oh man, this is not what I signed up for." Because I think that if we opt in to something, even to a relationship, we opt in and we sort of know what we're getting into because there's going to be spilled milk. I promise you, whether it's day two

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or day 32, something's going to happen. And if we can anticipate where those speed bumps are going to be, we can navigate them more easily.

But if it feels like a gut punch, because nobody told you that your assistant's going to need some details before they start a project and feel confident about it. Or if nobody tells the EA that you are a visionary and have a million ideas a day and that you might quickly pivot on something after they just spent three hours of work on something then they're going to be like, I just wasted three hours of my life. But if I set the stage for that and they know what they're getting into at the beginning, nobody can ever come to me and say, "You never told me."

Everyone knows exactly what they're getting into and that's how we can make a relationship work.

Tobi: And you also said there is going to be a point, you're like, "The honeymoon's going to be over about day whatever. There's going to be some point where you're like this was the worst idea ever." You described all these obstacles. And I could see it like a movie in my mind. And I can already say it's been so helpful because there have been moments already and I wasn't very self-aware before going into this.

And knew that one of my kind of my obstacles personally was that it's sometimes hard for people to help me because I am really good at helping myself even though I don't really have the bandwidth or the time a lot of times to be doing it. But I will get really busy say Monday, if we don't meet first thing by noon on Monday sometimes I don't kind of raise my head again until Thursday at four. And so we've been learning through this process.

And so about three days in I was like, "You know what? I kind of forgot. I need a lot more time held in my schedule for these first couple of months just to learn how to work with her just to give her feedback." Because if I'm packed all week long and I don't talk to her again after Monday, how can she even move things forward? So it's such a good reminder to me. And I

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went back and was like, “Okay, let’s clear a lot more time in my schedule for at the very least me to read responses from you, me to get your feedback, me to send you a video.

And had you not set the tone for some of that I would have already on day two been going, “This wouldn’t work.”

Trivinia: Never mind. I’ll just do it myself.

Tobi: Why did I try this? What was I thinking? And I think that’s what happens so often with people that they do hire someone or try something and they’re like, “I knew it wouldn’t work.” And from then on they have a belief that this process won’t work. I think that the book, *The E-Myth* which is probably behind me on a shelf talks about that. He’s like, you’re a creator. You’re a – what does he call it, like a service provider. You’re a pie maker. And you do your craft but you don’t really know how to work with other people.

And so you keep thinking that it just doesn’t work to have people help you and that’s just not true.

Trivinia: Yeah. That is probably the biggest area of growth that most leaders have to go through. We have to understand a couple of things that first, we are worthy of support. We will bend over backwards for our clients. You will make sure your people are happy. You will do anything to make sure that anyone who deals with you feels like they have a top notch experience. And yet for whatever reason we feel like we’re not deserving of that same level of service for us.

Conversely there are some people that are super narcissistic and high maintenance and they think they deserve it all. But I don’t typically work with those types of people. So there’s that barrier. Once we can get over the am I worthy and deserving of an assistant barrier, there is this other barrier that comes up that’s like it’s going to take too long to train this person and it’s just faster if I do it myself. And so we have to force ourself

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to slow down so that they can get onboarded and trained so that we can speed up.

But that slowing down process is grueling, it is so grueling and everyone hates it. And I just like to call it out into the universe. I'm like, "Guys, this is going to happen." And if you know it's going to happen again we can just anticipate it. And we build on those calls sort of barriers, "Okay, what are we going to do when you start to skip meetings because you're too busy?"

Tobi: Yes, we talk about that.

Trivinia: Yeah. How are we going to handle that? Because we're making those little micro commitments to each other at that moment so that when it happens I can email you or I can get on a call and say, "Tobi, we talked about this. You've got to keep your meetings with your assistant." Because we get on this cycle, I call it the cycle carousel. It's this carousel of frustration. Maybe they make a mistake and then you get a little bit frustrated. And you're frustrated but you don't really say anything because you're like, "They're learning and it's not a big deal."

And then maybe something else happens and then you're like, "Forget it. I'll just do it myself." Then you start taking work back. And then maybe something happens and then you, if you're me or another 8 that I know, maybe then you would explode and it's like, "Oh my gosh, what is this about? Why is this happening to me?" And then you just say, "Forget it." Throw my hands up. I'm not going to do this anymore. And I just want to call it out into the room so we can say, "Let's take some actionable steps for when that's going to happen."

So we don't fall and lose all the momentum that we had, bringing this person on in the first place.

Tobi: It's so good. And the thing that Haley and I – I mean I've done it and she's onboard with it. I haven't called this period training Haley. I've called this period training me.

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Trivinia: Amen.

Tobi: She's already trained. She knows exactly what to do. The only person in this relationship between she and I that has to be trained is me. And so she'll do something and I'll notice my, you know, a version, she put that vet appointment in the middle of the day. I hate leaving the house in the middle of the day. It's right after I had a four hour strategy day with someone. I'm going to be exhausted. I went through all this in my head.

And then I had the awareness to go, but if you just tell her to cancel it then you're (a) undoing the thing getting done and (b) defeating the whole purpose of her helping you. So how would you like to show up in the moment? What would you like to think differently about it? And I can come back and go, "Okay, don't cancel it." Because my instinct is to say, "Just cancel it." And that is wrong. Let's not cancel it. I'll show up and do it.

But let's decide right here and now when am I typically going to want that? And what we decided was I'm going to want where my husband can drop the dogs off on his way to work and I can pick them up at the end of the day. But I didn't know that until we encountered this thing when I was like, it's at 2:30 and I'm going to be tired. And so it's so interesting how much you learn about yourself. And once you learn that I never have to tell her again. She's like, "Is he in town? Are you in town? Okay, then these are the days that they're going."

And she could text him to remember, drop them off, me to remember to pick them up and life gets so easy. It takes a little commitment to getting that process dialed in and to even knowing how to think about it, right?

Trivinia: Again remember it is you holding up the mirror to say, "What do I want to do in this moment? How am I going to show up? And what do we need to learn moving forward?" Because there's always a solution, we can always get it figured out. But if your natural instinct is to just pull back then we're never going to move forward in a way that is constructive, that can help you get more done.

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You're always going to then turn into what I call a helicopter CEO where you're just hovering and making sure that everything is done exactly the way you want it to be done with zero flexibility. And that just leads to a lot of tension. And it's not worth it. So thank you for knowing yourself enough and being willing to look inside because now look, now she knows and you've got a solution and you won't have to worry about that again.

Tobi: It's so good. And what's she's also currently doing is making an entire manual of all those things so if ever she was not my assistant or was temporarily out of commission or whatever, it's all documented. It's written like the other SOPs in the rest of our business and other things. And I don't have to keep making these decisions over and over again, which is beautiful. Well, this has been so fun. It's so interesting because often I don't talk quite so much about someone's exact offering and business.

But this is so important because I think so many people could change their entire life if they (a) know you and your company exists, (b) truly understand what this could look like to have a relationship with the right assistant and support person. And then (b) see how much they can learn about themselves to make this so much easier, I guess that's c. a, b, c. So anyway if they want to come and learn more about you, work with you, what do they need to know? How do they find you, all those good things?

Trivinia: Yeah. The simplest way is to go to priorityva.com or you can find me on any social at Trivinia, I got really lucky there, at Trivinia all on social. I am the one who is replying to my DMs. I am the one who is doing all of those things. So if you want to reach out to me directly you can also email hello@priorityva and I will answer those as well.

Tobi: Amazing. Well, thank you. It has been such a pleasure. I'm already working with you on other things. It's so fun. You're so of service. I mean I asked you a question when we came on today, I'm like, "Why does your video look so good?" And you immediately went into, "I'll send you my camera. I'll send you my settings. I'll send you how to set it up." You're so

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good at that. And so thanks for taking such good care of me and I know all your clients, it's a joy and I can't wait to work with you more.

Trivinia: Thank you so much Tobi, I appreciate you having me.

Tobi: So fun.

Okay. So I hope it was all it was cracked up to be. I found this experience so helpful. They saved me so much time. They did a much better job than I've ever done, hiring for myself. I learned so much. And I am continuing to learn so much about myself as I train me to be a good leader for Haley and the rest of my team, I'm sure too. And so I hope you will check out Priority VA. And let us know, Trivinia and me if you like this episode. We'd love to hear from you out in the world of Instagram.

And I'll see you back next week for more of year four of the *Design You* podcast. See you soon.

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