

Secretaries Log On from Home

By Benning W. De La Mater, [Berkshire Eagle Staff](#), Thursday, March 23, 2006



1. Life Coach Lin Schreiber

The best part of [Donna Gunter's](#) job? She goes to work in her robe. She also gets to work whenever she wants.

Gunter, 42, is a virtual assistant, a cybersecretary if you will -- someone who works as an administrative assistant from home for businesses across the globe.

Gunter, who lives in Orange, Texas, works for Stockbridge's Lin Schreiber, 57, a life coach who helps baby boomers prepare for retirement.

"This is my fourth year working with a VA and it saves me so much time," said Schreiber, owner of Revolutionize Retirement. "I needed someone to take care of the administrative end. She can't come in and file paper work, but she can do everything else. And Donna could be next door or across the planet. It doesn't matter."

VAs perform a variety of secretarial tasks for executives and business owners. Schreiber says Gunter's work frees up time for her to do the crucial parts of her job, such as speaking with customers and conducting workshops.

"What she can do in six hours would take me 48," Schreiber said.

When Schreiber recently went to India for 21 days, she was relieved when she came home to find only five e-mails in her inbox, one of them from Gunter outlining the 10 most important things Schreiber needed to do after her vacation.

But VAs do more than just secretarial chores. Many specialize in fields such as medicine, insurance or real estate. Gunter's specialty is the Internet.

She helped Schreiber create her Web site, market informational books and tip guides, and increase her Web site's Google rating. Gunter said her favorite part of the career is flexibility.

"What's cool about it is that I can live in a rural Texas town, where the main industries are timber and bass fishing, and still have clients on the East Coast, in England and Canada."

Gunter lived in the Berkshires for 11 years, working at the Adams Youth Center and Massachusetts

College of Liberal Arts. She moved back to her home state in 1998 and pursued self-employment. She investigated a career in life coaching and saw that a number of coaches use VAs. She went through a training program and became certified.

VAs are contracted on an as-needed basis, working for blocks of time at a set rate. Gunter charges \$55 an hour for a 12-hour minimum.

Mary Vasquez-Slack, 42, owner of My Versatile Secretary, is a Pittsfield-based VA who specializes in working for event and workshop planners. She says VAs have been around for as long as the Internet.

"In our virtual world, you use the fax, the telephone, the postal service," she said. "They all make it very easy to work from home. It's exciting. I love it."

Vasquez-Slack worked in hospital administration and at Berkshire Community College. She also became a VA by going through a training program. For a local contractor, she once created documents, contracts and multimedia presentations to help in the building process. She charges \$30 an hour for a minimum 10-hour block, and has about six clients to date.

"For business owners, it's great. They don't need me every week, and it gives me flexibility," she said. "I'm working for myself, and the best part is that I'm able to do the things I like to do, rather than being a secretary stuck with (menial chores)."

Vasquez-Slack said VAs can make anywhere from \$30,000 to \$120,000 a year based on how hard they work and market themselves. The job is perfect for stay-at-home moms. Being accredited allows you to get on a list with other VAs. Business owners will often interview a number of VAs over the phone before they choose the one who is best for them.

Schreiber said she knew Gunter was the one for her the minute she spoke to her. Gunter said she knew the job was perfect for her based on the morning routine.

"It's great," she said. "I don't have to commute to work. I save money and time on traveling and gas. And I can work in my bathrobe."

Benning W. De La Mater can be reached at bdelamater@berkshireeagle.com or (413) 496-6243.