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Jaime: Welcome to *Eventual Millionaire*. I'm Jaime Masters, and today on the show, we have Barbara Turley. Now, you should check out her site at [thevirtualhub.com](http://thevirtualhub.com) for all of your virtual assistant needs. Thank you so much for coming on the show today.

Barbara: Thanks so much for having me, Jaime. It's very exciting to be on your show.

Jaime: Thank you very much! Now, I so appreciate people talking about virtual assistants because there are so many nuances when it comes to this, and I know we can dive really, really deep, but you've had this for a ridic – well, in the internet world years, a ridiculously long period of time, so tell me a little bit more about how you've started the business and how you've come from.

Barbara: Oh, yes, yes. So, the funniest part about this business is I call it my accidental business because I really didn't mean to start this. We all try and have business plans and all these massive strategic ideas that we're gonna work on, and this one was very organic; it happened by accident. I was doing business coaching, and most of the clients that I was coaching were all suffering from the same problem regardless of the business that they had. They basically were trying to – let me just unmute my Skype, hold on.

Jaime: All the people message you when you're – of course.

Barbara: All my VAs in the Philippines are coming online soon. Anyway, so, basically, they were all having the same problem. They essentially – if they didn't hire staff, they were never gonna be able to grow and do all the things they wanted to do, but if they didn't grow, they weren't gonna be able to afford to hire staff, so it's this vicious cycle that we all fall into.

So, I had read Tim Ferriss's *Four-Hour Workweek* like we all had, I had a VA in the Philippines, and I just started recruiting friends of my VA purely to help clients out, not as a business, and before I knew it, I just was getting more demand for that than I was for business coaching, and I was like, "Hmm, I wonder if there's business in this?" I literally pivoted overnight. Within about a month, I was like bang! We're in a new business. That's it. No website, no name, nothing, just an offer that people wanted, and it started very organically like that.

Jaime: And, what year was that?

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Barbara: So, it's five years old now, so what are we in? Yeah, 2014 it started out. End of 2014.

Jaime: And, it's grown – now, you came perfect timing as far as the wave goes, and I love how you're like, "Oh, I actually listened to the market, they told me what they wanted, and I just delivered it." You've seen a huge growth trajectory for it too, right?

Barbara: I have. Look, today we have 150 staff, we've got full – I've got a Philippine company, we've got full office space operations in the Philippines, it's a big operation now. However, when you look at competitors and other people, you think, "Oh, it's 150; it should be 500," but full disclosure, I also have a 3 ½-year-old daughter and a 6-month-old son, so I feel like I've been doing this whole thing with children, and it's kind of hampered the growth a little bit, but I've learned a lot of lessons along the way, though. So, like you were saying, it's just – it's not as easy as people think to get outsourcing right, and especially in another country, so I've got a lot of war wounds and success stories along the way.

Jaime: We're totally gonna dive into that, but what I find so hilarious – and, I know you know this – it's like, "All right, 150, but I could have been doing 500." Right? That's what we always do. "But, I could have –" We were talking about this before the other day. You've got small children and are running 150 staff. That's insane as far as what you're able to handle capacity-wise, too. How do you handle it all?

Barbara: I have a really good team. So, I realized early on that I was accidentally good. I didn't realize that I was actually quite good at operations and I was quite good at running people, team leadership, and all that sort of thing. I have an amazing team, and I also love mentoring people, so I tend to allow my team and my people to take ownership of certain things, and they love that, and they love to take something and win with it.

Now, that doesn't mean abdicating all involvement or responsibility. It's about leading people correctly, which is a mistake a lot of people make. So, I have a great team. Also, I'm very good at learning the lessons very quickly. So, I spent the early part of my career – I spent 10 years as an equity trader in investment banking, and to be honest, it taught me how to make very fast decisions, how to listen to the market, which is what you said, and how to match supply and demand really quickly and know when the market is turning.

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So, for example, I saw a shift a few years ago that I was doing a work-from-home model, and I very quickly realized that the problems that were occurring with that – on a small scale, there’s not problems with it, but if you wanna scale that, it’s quite difficult. Now, other people have achieved it, and kudos to them, but I just realized pretty quickly that if I wanted to be taken seriously in the market, both globally and in the Philippines by the employee base, I was gonna have to change the model.

So, a lot of the growth-hampering – I think that happened along the way from me, apart from having children, was I changed the model completely and I kind of started all over again after the first two years. So, this model is kind of the new one, and that’s been vastly more successful for me.

Jaime: What were the little inklings that you were seeing that you’re like, “Oh, I totally have to switch”? That’s huge as far as expenses go, and a totally different shift. Yeah, that’s a lot.

Barbara: Yeah, and I made everyone an employee, so there was health cover and benefits, and I did the whole thing. Yes, it cost an absolute fortune, and I’m probably still trying to come out of the back of that, but I’m looking at the long game and not the short game. Look, things for me – let’s be honest. Do you know that someone is working, or are they at the shopping mall on their phones saying that they’re working?

So, there was a lot of operational oversight that became quite difficult to do, and at 20 people, if you’re running 25 people, you can totally do that. I got to 50 people and imploded. I was like, “I just can’t handle this anymore,” and the complaints – too much going on, too much trust, and I thought, “Can you do this with 500 people?” Now, there are companies that do it. For me personally, I was like, “I can’t do it at 500 people.” So, that was a personal decision that I wasn’t doing it for me.

Jaime: I love this. Okay, we’re gonna dive into that in just a second too, but you talked about abdication versus not, and to be able to go into the nuances of what that is because I feel like especially as newer business owner, they’re like, “Oh, you should totally delegate to a VA,” and no offense, they suck as managers – they don’t even know what to delegate, first of all. Then, they don’t even know how to be a good manager. Give us a – let us walk through all the information that you’ve got.

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Barbara: Sure. So, the first thing to remember is that the word “virtual assistant” unfortunately has exploded in terms of its meaning. Anyone from – anyone with a heartbeat who can type through to anyone who can code an app, so you’ve got this whole breadth of virtual assistants, and what we’re forgetting is that they are assistants. They are not project managers. They are not content writers.

Now, some VAs will do that stuff, but it’s because they have specialized in those areas and they’re not really what a traditional virtual assistant is anymore. They are a virtual expert. They have an expertise in a certain area, and they happen to be virtual.

So, coming back to the “assistant” thing, everyone thinks, “Just get a VA, it’s the panacea, it’s gonna solve all your problems.” The reality is first, you’ve gotta temper your expectations around what it is, first of all, you’re looking for, and then what it is that the person you’re hiring for \$3.00 an hour online is actually capable of delivering.

So, a lot of people come to us, even, and they say, “I need a VA. My biggest fear about hiring one is that I’ll have to constantly talk to them, I’ll have to micromanage them.” Now, nobody likes to be micromanaged, but in my speak, what I hear when somebody says that is “I don’t wanna create processes, I just want them to get on, show initiative, and do the job.” Even a local employee – even someone who’s pretty good, you still have to lead, provide direction, have your systems, have your processes, and then delegate those out to your people to run.

So, systems run your business; people run your systems, and you’ve gotta train your people – regardless of their level – on how your systems are, and I would say the lower rung is the virtual assistant that’s taking on the recurring operational-type process-driven tasks that are really low-hanging fruit for you to take off someone else’s plate, if that makes sense.

Jaime: Oh my gosh, totally.

Barbara: The VAs in Australia and the U.S. that are listening – you guys are like online business managers. You’re a cut above, and you’re probably underpricing. So, just me talking about the VA world – you’ve gotta be careful around your expectations.

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Jaime: Thank you, thank you, because the hard thing is because we're sold a dream that's like, "Oh, it's \$3.00 an hour," and we want somebody who's gonna be a CMO. It doesn't commute that way. Just so you know, it does not make sense. I can't say that I haven't been through what that was – I was like, "Oh, but I thought it was like this," and then you start getting in there, and you start realizing what the expectations can be and how you can work within that, and it's amazing also, so I wanna make sure that people aren't like, "Well then, screw it all." I feel like people go, "Oh, never mind."

Barbara: Yeah, which is really hard, but if I could put it in financial terms – obviously, I'm selling my own book here, but the reality is I do have a background in investment banking in the financial world. If you get offshore teams right – If you get it right – that's a big caveat – it pays the largest dividends than you could ever imagine in your business because of the cost effectivity on your bottom line.

You are basically freeing up – if it's just you, for example, in the U.S. or wherever, you're freeing up your \$100.00- or \$200.00-an-hour time or whatever your time is worth to do more sales, to do more strategy, to do more client work, or whatever it is you're doing, or freeing up your team. Let's say you're a large business, and you've got account managers, and you've got salespeople. They're doing admin work that's tying them down that really is cost-effective to leverage an offshore team, who are delighted with the career progression of this type of work. So, yeah, the dividends it pays are enormous for your business if you get it right.

Jaime: Exactly, if you – if you stick with it – so, I had a bunch of people in the Philippines for VAs beforehand when I was managing, and then I realized that I am not a good manager, and I can get better, and I put someone in between me and the team – now, we have a handful of people in the Philippines. That works so much better when you actually have someone that's a better manager doing that, so please don't give up just because you feel like you tried it as an entrepreneur. Most entrepreneurs suck at managing anyway, and we need to get better, so there's so many nuances, like I was saying before, to how to do this.

So, when it comes to – let's say we have a lot of tasks, we have admin, we really wanna shirk – not shirk, but put this low-level task, maybe if we have an executive admin and we know that they have even more tasks. Where do you start on the systems side? How crazy do the systems have to be when you start to hire a VA?

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Barbara: That's a great question because some people go nuts on us, and other people are too vague. So, it's kind of a happy in the middle. So, the first thing I would suggest is before you go hiring a VA in the Philippines, it's probably a good idea to map out what exactly that role is going to entail. So, a lot of people don't do this. They're like, "I just need a VA," and they're gonna –

Jaime: "Don't tell me what it is," exactly.

Barbara: They go, "I need a VA, but I don't know what I want them to do, but surely, when the VA comes in, we'll figure it out together." Now, you can do that if you're a good manager. That's okay, and you can work that out together, but it's probably better to sit down. When I say map out what the role is, the tasks, and are there process attached, people get overwhelmed with that and go, "I don't know what that means." So, let's distill it down into what actually that means.

Every single business, no matter how teeny-tiny small or large, has departments. You've got your marketing department, your sales department, product delivery, invoicing – there's all these little departments. So, if you were just to map out each of your departments and list down the recurring tasks first, what are the little small tasks that need to happen on a recurring basis daily, weekly, monthly that keep the engine of the business moving, and you write those down.

And then, you think about, "Well, of those tasks, is there a specific way I like it done in my business?" Everyone has a different flair, and I would suggest starting out with a few bullet points of how that task is to be done, and there's your process. You don't need to go wild.

Now, the next step of it, though, is once you delegate that process, you wanna see how someone else performs doing it, and then get feedback from them on their experience of doing it, and that's how together, you start to evolve your process, because mistakes might happen because you didn't think of the IP that you have as you were doing the process, et cetera. So, usually, people just fire the VA rather than saying, "Well, maybe they didn't think the way I do through the process, or I didn't explain it properly." So, that's a very simple way of starting, and I think most people can handle that concept of doing it that way.

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- Jaime: Self-responsibility is always an interesting thing. So, I love that you're 80/20-ing the beginning of this because I feel like, just like you said beforehand, people either go way too far all in – "I have to have all the systems and processes" – and then they're so fine-tuned that sometimes, the VA can't follow it. They can't understand.
- Barbara: Because there's so much detail, and they're nitty-gritty every time they do the task, and then the complaint is they take too long to do the task. They've got to read a chapter of the book before they can do it.
- Jaime: Exactly! It's so funny – and, I'm hoping one day – I know there's things like Walk Me and there's more virtual training for SOPs that we're getting a little bit better at besides just the documentation. What do you guys use as far as documentation goes to make it easier for the software side of giving systems?
- Barbara: So, I'd love to say that we do – we should be doing it all – videos, audio – but the two we do – we use maps a lot, visual maps, so like –what are they called?
- Jaime: Mind maps?
- Barbara: Mind maps. Can you tell I'm not the one who builds them? I've got a team. So, we do a lot of mind-mapping, we do a step-by-step process as well, we're huge users of Asana. It's not a process management tool, it's a task management tool. However, inside the task in the description, you can easily put the bullet points and the little Loom video of how to do it if that's what you want to do. Keep it simple. You don't need an intranet. That's all great, but we just keep it simple, and ours runs pretty well with that with the huge team that runs off that.
- Jaime: I love that. That's exactly what we do too, just as a side note, so I totally condone that method also. Otherwise, it can get too complicated. When we think of corporate – and, I remember having the internal wiki and all this stuff, and sometimes, people that are business owners are like, "Okay, I'm gonna do all the things," and it's like, "Let's just get you moving this much, and we'll add in videos later. We'll add in more."
- Barbara: Yeah, just get a free version of Asana and put a couple of bullet points in the description. There's a process, right? And then, you will evolve that over time as mistakes happen and as experiences
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change, but people – you’re right, they try to overcomplicate things, they have too many SaaS products – they’ve got Slack running, they’ve got Asana, and they’ve got 400 other things that you don’t really need. Just keep it simple because otherwise, you just overcomplicate everything.

Jaime: So, when you evolve things, like you were saying, I think that’s the thing that’s tough too. Even if we have a part of a process, a busy business owner taking the time to go, “Oh, I need to update that process” usually falls to the bottom of the priority list, so how do you make sure they get the information they need in order to perform the task?

Barbara: So, the VA – this is where you’ve got this team huddle; the team communication is really important. So, as a business owner, a lot of business owners, again, are not connecting enough with their team. They’re like, “I don’t have time to talk to them. How often should I talk to them?” I recommend the daily huddle. It’s fast – huddle concept is to bring all your team together for a non-negotiable – they say 10 minutes, but depending on the size of the team, it can be half an hour.

They do it – I bring 12 people together every single day across the world, and we do 30 minutes, and we run through all the pipelines from recruitment, training, onboarding, clients, leads, sales, customer support. Now, customer support is a really important area because you’re getting feedback there on what is the experience like for your client, and typically, that’s the first area I say to people, that you wanna be evolving processes from there because every time you get a question or a complaint, go back to your onboarding process for your clients and change the process right there and then.

Now, you don’t have to do it. You can say to your VA, “Can you change that process? And, I wanna know in a week’s time” – this is important – “how is that new process going with the clients?” So, you don’t get the “I forgot to do it, I didn’t do it.” Because you just haven’t asked. So, you want to set up the reporting lines as well, and you wanna stay – that’s oversight. You’ve gotta stay abreast of what’s going on in the business. It’s a two-minute conversation the following week.

Jaime: Who writes that down? That’s the other piece. I have somebody record everything that I say because I forget to write things down, so who’s putting – do they put it in Asana? Where does that

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information go?

Barbara: First of all, you need – so, the huddle concept falls into the meeting rhythm concept. In your business, you need to establish with your team a meeting rhythm. Now, people hate meetings, but you don't have to love them. We have hardly any of them, but everyone knows the huddle is a big thing for us every day, and then we have a couple of other huddles like HR or smaller meetings.

But then, you also need a communication rhythm. So, you need a set of rules around how everyone on the team communicates. So, for us, even though we discuss it on the huddle, whoever's discussing it has to write it in the task and tag the person who the baton is being handed to. So, you can't say, "But I said it on the huddle." Now, I'm terrible because I don't write anything down, but I lead the huddle. I don't actually do anything. There's the other people –

Jaime: Me too, yes.

Barbara: I'm the conductor of the orchestra; they play the instruments. That's the best tip I could give any owner listening to this, that you have to be the conductor of the orchestra. You're not playing the instruments, but you're the one driving it.

Jaime: Yeah, especially going through your – I know that even if I said I was gonna write it down, I just am not good at that. I'm just not good. Even if I'm like, "Yeah sure, I'll totally do that," somebody else has to be responsible that I check in with because yeah, Jaime's not so good at that. But, knowing that is really important.

Barbara: I could see updating Asana. When people are updating all the pipelines and stuff in Asana, I can see if they're doing it real-time, so we're doing it while we're on the call. There's no, "Oh, I'll do that after the call." We do a little bit of that, but it's important to have people – now, that's our communication rhythm and our business because it's very live, but you've gotta establish what is your communication rhythm, and then everyone has to be on the same page. Not one person doing email, and another person doing Asana, and another person likes Slack. It's like, "No, this is how we do it."

Jaime: Ownership, of going, "This is the way it is, and this is how we do it." Even if I can't do it, right? "You're working for me, so, yeah." How did you figure out your KPIs? It sounds like you're very

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attuned to what those KPIs are for your daily huddle.

Barbara: Yeah, all mistakes. I'm gonna be brutally honest here. You would think, "Oh, she has this background in investment banking." I wasn't good at any of it. It all developed from mistakes that happened. So, even the huddle came, not because I was reading all the stuff – I kind of knew a bit about it, but I wasn't really focusing on it, and we were having mistakes happening. Even though we had a great communication rhythm, Asana was working well, but for some reason, things were getting missed. So, I introduced the huddle, and I was like, "Okay, we're gonna introduce this now," and then it improved vastly, and then we had people listening in on the huddle. I was like, "Okay, now we have this new process."

So, this is this process evolution thing that you have to accept, that SOPs and processes are living, breathing, dynamic things that do not stop. They have to be changed, and it's moving with the market – that is, your business – and the experience of the people in the business. So, mine is all trial and error, and it's pretty good now, but again, it's for a business of this size. So, what happens when I've got 500 staff? Everything will have to change.

Jaime: I appreciate you saying that, too. There's different levels. How often do you experiment or test, especially with stuff like this?

Barbara: Every day. So, like I said, I'm matching supply and demand all day, so in the business that I have specifically, it's a people business, so stuff is coming up all the time.

Jaime: I can only imagine. Go you.

Barbara: It's like sick leave. You get one person that's always sick, and you're like, "Okay, maybe we should change the process for that sort of –" So, I feel that process development becomes too big a job. If you're saying that you're gonna do it every six months, then you're never gonna do it. So, just tweak slow, small, little tweaks around the edges every single day, and in 12 months, you'll have transformed all your processes.

Jaime: How do you get everyone on board with that, especially if you're making a lot of tweaks? It's like, "Wait, we changed the sick leave, and I didn't realize it." Are you putting out memos? How are you dealing with all that?

Barbara: Oh, that's a good question. So, on my internal team, we have about

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– you’d think I would know the exact number. I’d say there’s about 25 or 30 people, but really, there’s 10 or 12 that are the leadership team sort of thing. They then have their own pipelines and processes down, so the leaders of those departments have to disseminate that, and they’re pretty good at it. I think I’ve just trained them well to – that information flow is important, and that we all do the same – again, it’s the same methodology. They have their own pipelines that they’re running, and their team are trained to do it differently than ours.

So, I think it’s – you’ve gotta come together with your team and establish your way of working, and then, how that fits for the rest of the team, and try to – as much as possible – bring them into the way that you’re gonna do it without pushing someone who’s an introvert into being an extrovert, if you know what I mean. You’ve gotta work – you want them all to do what you want, but within your own capability and your own version of it to a certain extent.

Jaime: We need way more into that because it’s the other piece. Especially when we’re working with bigger teams and communication, but we’re also talking about different humans. They have different love languages, they have different ways that they take things, they have introvert and extrovert – there’s just so much nuance to humans in general, so go you for having a very human-based company. How can you manage that? What do you do to try and go, “Oh, this person’s an introvert, and they wanna hear that information this way or they get it better this way, or they’re visual, or analytical”? How do you deal with all that?

Barbara: That is a very good question. I’ve gotta think a bit deeply about that. So, basically, the leadership teams are the ones who are dealing with me, and maybe I’ve brought people and mentored people up into those roles – Okay, I know what I’m gonna say here. This is about recruiting well. So, here’s a recruitment tip. You can meet someone you love, who’s very talented, who knows what they’re doing. If they are the wrong cog in your wheel, it won’t work, in my experience. This is maybe just for me.

I find because we run a virtual team and we have a lot of processes and systems – and, I’m quite system-driven – I need people who are able to plug into our system and work the way we are. Otherwise, you have one of these kids is not the same as the others, and it just doesn’t work. We’ve had that. It doesn’t mean I get rid of them. I’ve had situations where I’ve had people who just didn’t quite fit in the model, but they were very talented, and one of them

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– this is a great example – one of them was a developer-type guy, just kind of quiet and likes a dark room, and we tried to get him into this thing, and it didn't work. He'd forget to show up for the meeting – just disastrous.

So, I said to him one day, "I just need you to find something to do. Find a project and bring it to me." And, he brought me a problem that our VAs were facing where they had to do an end-of-day report which was tedious, annoying, they hated it, and he built a little tool that helped them to do it really fast.

And, that tool was about two and a half years ago, and it evolved into an entire custom-built platform that we now use for HR management, and he's the leader of it, and it's just –it brings a joy to my face every time I talk about it because it lit him up, and it unlocked him as a person, and he presents once a week to the team on the new developments for the thing, and the rest of the week, he just works on it, and that's it.

Jaime: I got goosebumps from that story. That's perfect.

Barbara: Yeah, I do too. I talk about that one. That was a lesson that sometimes you've gotta find – you've just gotta throw them a bone and hope they take it.

Jaime: Okay, because leadership and managing employees is so important. Give me some more recruitment tips, though, especially with knowing who's like you. So, we know that we need to match up company values for them, we know – especially if it's a detail-oriented role. There are assessments for this stuff, but what is some of the fine-tuning that you do to find the right people?

Barbara: The biggest tip I can give is that it's very hard to do. Skills can be taught. Character – you cannot teach character, enthusiasm, positivity about life, and mindset. So, we – in our recruiting for all VAs, we're like, "Don't worry about skillset experience. We can teach you that stuff, but we cannot teach you to be enthusiastic about life, we can't teach you to have strong moral character and values," and sometimes, we get that wrong, but we have ways now of – is this a cultural fit? Are they gonna shine in here? Because we can teach the rest, and that's okay.

Detail – that's the first level. Then, the next layer down is like, "Is it a – what role are we putting them into?" So, just because you find someone that's a great cultural fit, has all the character, and all

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that stuff, still doesn't mean they're right for the job. So, you've gotta think then, "Well, there's no point in putting a floaty person into a detail-oriented role and trying to fit a square peg in a round hole."

So, it's again being realistic about – and test them. Don't just ask them. Give them some tests, and try and catch them out in the tests, and you'll see their natural flair. You might be like, "Well, this person isn't detail-oriented, but God, they did a great infographic that was designed really well. Maybe they're more of a social media person." That's how we do it, anyway.

Jaime: Oh, so you actually – tell me about the tests that you run them through so you can take a look at them.

Barbara: Okay. So, our staff – this is why recruiting is so hard. Our hiring rate would be about between two and four percent, so if we have to hire 10 people, we need 500 people to apply per month, so it's really hard, and the first test, honestly – people will apply for the job, and we invite them in for testing. In the Philippines, over 50% won't show up. It will say that they'll book it, and they won't show up, and they won't contact us. That's the first test fail.

Jaime: Lucky you. And –no.

Barbara: Yeah, unprofessional. It's okay that something came up, but if you've contacted us – and, some people do, and they're like, "I'm really sorry, can I reschedule?" That's fine. Test No. 1 there. Test No. 2 for us is English, because of course, English skills in the Philippines – they all sort of speak English, but it's different levels. So, we have a couple of really deep English tests they have to do, and most people fail. So, that's kind of – 80% of people are gone at that point.

And then, after that, we put them through branding tests. We make them listen to a podcast, and pick out the top five points, and make an infographic. Even if they have no idea what's an infographic or what's a podcast, we give them some training, and what we're looking for, again, is not are they a great designer. Have they got the guts, and the grit, and the determination to take something they don't know how to do and go, "I can do this"? And, that's what we're looking for. I don't care if the infographic is a mess. They've got grit. We're testing for grit. That's really what that's about.

And then, if someone has flair for design, we're like, "Wow, this

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person actually has – great!” And then, we tick that box and put them down a design route. And then, the final one is a bit mean. We make people do a video where we fire random questions at them that are off the wall, something like, “What’s your favorite thing to have for breakfast?” And, what we’re looking for there is people’s ability to just think on the spot and not panic and just goof out of the whole thing. You get a lot of people’s personality through that.

And then, after all of that, we decide if we’ll bring them for an interview, so only at that point will we say, “Yes, we would like to interview you,” and 50% of people will fail the interview. So, dubious character comes up in the interview, so –recruiting is hard because it takes that level of focus to actually get it right.

Jaime: And, you must have – that sounds like an amazing process. Were you really good at that before you started this business?

Barbara: No.

Jaime: So, you learned a lot.

Barbara: This is all trial and error. This is like, “Oh my God, we had a bad hire again.” So, every single time we have an HR issue or a resignation – even if it’s a good resignation – or we have anything happen with our staff, we go right back to the recruitment process and go, “How do we eradicate this problem? How do we stop this happening again? Don’t bring them in. Ask better questions.” We built it over years of being burnt, to be totally honest. That’s the reality of it. You can be burnt. So, anyone that has been burnt in the recruitment market, go easy on yourself because we’re doing it all day long and we’re still getting burnt, so –

Jaime: We need to hear that information. I know a lot of newer – not even newer business owners, but newer to hiring, are like, “Oh my God.” This skillset people have refined over a long period of time, and they still are like – the percentages aren’t great, just so you know. Well then, I bet you have firing tips also. So, what is your process for metrics and knowing when they’re not aligned, not doing a good job, and letting them go?

Barbara: So, here is the interesting thing about recruiting. We have refined our recruitment process to the nth degree at this point that we hardly ever – now, I am saying hardly ever fire anyone. Even if we lose the client, we keep the VA because we have invested so much

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time and energy in training them, and usually, they have worked out because they're a cultural fit, they're a character fit, and we can coach the rest.

So, my first tip about firing people is to hire better. Take more time to hire better. Now, you will fire a few people. Sometimes, with mistakes – let's look at the most basic things. People are making mistakes in process. If you work together on – ask them why they feel this mistake is happening, you might find some gold there. They might say, "Every time I do this step, this happens," or you will unearth that they're just not doing it, that they're lying.

So, it's about knowing that nuance and not going straight for the "You're a liar" to trying to work with them first, and then, if it just keeps happening, you can ask yourself is it a skill issue or is it a will issue? They're different, right? Skill, you might be able to fix it – might, if they're smart enough. If they're not, well, you may need to let them go. A will issue – fire them, because they don't wanna be there.

Jaime: How do you determine will issues? That's the thing – because your hiring process is refined, you have a lot less of that. The people that don't have has refined hiring processes will limp along for long periods of time, being like, "It's fine, everything's fine," and it's not a good fit, and how do you determine the will versus the skill?

Barbara: It's attitude. You can tell from the tone of the person how they take feedback. If you give them the feedback or you ask them to do something and you've asked a few times – and, we all hate doing this. I've asked, I've asked, and they're just not hearing you. They're just ignoring you. They're just not doing it.

They're just continually – then, I think it's – even if it's not a will issue, it's not a good match, and I think a person – you can tell them that the next step is "Listen, I'm going to have to let you go," or you can just ask them straight out. "Do you wanna be here?" I'm very direct. I'm like, "Do you wanna be here or not? Because if you don't, I think we should cut it, but if you do, I think we can work on it. Do you wanna give it another month?" That's it.

Jaime: I love it.

Barbara: Be direct. Have the conversation.

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Jaime: Yeah, and it's always an interesting thing, and this is where you are an amazing leader, and a lot of the people listening might need to step up into the leadership role a little bit more instead of pussyfooting around. There's just a lot of tactics. So, give me some leadership tactics that you've really learned as you've grown this.

Barbara: So, people talk about being vulnerable as a leader. Now, that doesn't mean being a drama queen. You can't be on the phone every day giving your life drama to your team, but at the same time, it's okay – so, sometimes I'll say to my leadership team – I will literally be on the huddle, and I'll say, "Guys, we're bleeding, and I'm anxious. I feel anxious, I feel scared; I just want you to know that we just need to lift," and they rally around you. They come and rally around you.

So, that's tip No. 1. No drama queen, but it's okay to tell them when your anxiety is high and that you need them to just know that you're there for them – the business is okay, but you're feeling a little anxious and you want everyone to step it up a gear. They'll respond well to that.

Jaime: I wanna break that down a little bit more because that's huge. The things that you said is very – not unique because we've been told a lot with Brené Brown, vulnerability, and stuff like that, but there's a very fine line between "Ahhh! Fix it!"

Barbara: Drama queen.

Jaime: "You need to" – right, making it their problem versus them supporting you, because it sounds like the way that you did it, they can rally around, whereas I've seen other people do it, and it's like you're blaming your team. There's a lot of ways that they can do it that can be interesting. Can we just break it down a little bit more on how you learned how to do it?

Barbara: Yeah. So, I think I was – because the business started very organically, there was a mess in the beginning, and I was quite close to the team, and you gotta be careful you're close, but not too close as well, so there's a fine line with that too. So, I think if I could distill it into one comment – because we could talk about this for hours – it would be that we are – "I'm not the head and you work for me, we're a team." So, I'm like, "Hey guys, I'm anxious. Here's what's happening. Can we get together as a team?" I ask them, "What do you guys think? Tell me. What are you seeing out there? What's happening?"

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It's just amazing – it won't happen the first time you do it, but if you build that kind of a “Hey, I'm on the team too, I've got my sleeves rolled up here, and I want us to work together and idea-share, and you tell me what you think” – if I could distill it into one thing, I think that's it. It's not like your fault, and I'm the leader, and I own it. It's us. We are in this together.

Jaime: That's a level of openness that makes it encouraging for them to actually help, and want to help, and support you instead. I really appreciate that. More on the leadership tick, because I love this.

Barbara: Yes. So, a follow-on from that point would be what I have found through my journey with learning to lead because honestly, I wasn't in a leadership role in corporate at all, so I had to look –

Jaime: Oh, really?

Barbara: No. I was a trader, so I was working by myself, so I was quite insular. I was on teams, kind of, but in a role that I ran myself, so that was kind of new to me to run people. So, that vulnerability thing at the right moment is good, and then there's a moment where they need you to lead, so they need you to go, “I'm now stepping, I'm gonna go into the jungle, and I'm gonna cut the jungle down, and you guys come behind me.” So, there's that balancing act.

But, the other thing I find is when I do that and I throw them the problem – now, not all teams are gonna do this, but I've thrown a couple of times, not expecting them to come back with a solution, and they've rallied together and taken ownership of it, and I say to them, “I didn't expect that,” and the answer I get is, “It lit us up to do that. We were on fire with ideas.” It's allowing people to take ownership, to feel ownership over a problem, and to solve it, because everyone loves doing that. If you allow them, give them permission to do that, you will find that you get great results eventually. Maybe not the first time, but over time, you do. But, they trust you.

Jaime: Where does it come in, though, on your opinion?

Barbara: That trust –

Jaime: What was that?

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- Barbara: They have to trust you. So, for example, if they try something, and it goes wrong, and you rip everyone's face on, then they're not gonna try anything ever again, so you've gotta allow them space to make mistakes and to try things. That's exactly where I was going with that, actually, also, because it is one of those things where having the openness to be able to do that, but then you can't – if it's not the way that you would have done it or whatever, the criticism after the fact also creates a closed loop. There's just so many pieces of it.
- Jaime: Here's the thing, though. If you know how you would do it, then that's the time to lead. That's the time to say, "Here's what we're doing." If you're facing a problem that is causing you anxiety and you're kind of thinking, "I'm stumped here, I'm a bit –", and you go to your team, and then you're one team, one dream, saying – admit to them that you don't know. Tell them you don't know. I think that will really work.
- Barbara: Love it – actually being honest with how you feel, and not in every situation – of course, I really appreciate that there's a navigation to it that I'm sure you've learned from wisdom –
- Jaime: Don't start crying. Don't start crying on calls with them or anything like that. You've just gotta temper the vulnerability a little bit.
- Barbara: Well, that's the other piece. We're hearing that it's better to be doing this, which is amazing, and I love Brené Brown's work – it's absolutely amazing, and I also appreciate how much she talks about it because there are definite levels to where we're at. It's not permission granted to be your crying self as you would be to your husband or your inner circle, right? It's not the same thing.
- Jaime: You have to be a strong leader. So, there's being a strong leader and being vulnerable as a strong leader, and then there's being vulnerable as a weak leader. If your team see you as a weak leader, they will not follow you. They will go to someone else. That's when the will will go. So, people need a strong leader, and it's okay for you to be strong but vulnerable at the same time, if that makes sense. It's hard to give you exactly what that means.
- Barbara: That's exactly – I love these things. That's funny because a prospect that I spoke to not that long ago was saying that his whole team had turned on him, and I was like, "Lead me – give me the breadcrumbs on how this even happened." And so, the distinction
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of a weak leader – what are some character traits or what are some things that come up if you are a weak leader to see if people can self-identify? Nobody wants to call themselves a weak leader – nobody – and yet, I have a feeling that some people that are listening are doing things or feeling things that might be leaning them toward that way.

Jaime: Things like “divide and conquer” – criticizing people on public calls, like big team calls. We all lose it occasionally. Let’s be honest. We’re all human. It’s okay to lose your shit, right? Sorry, but it’s totally fine. Apologize afterwards. Come back and be vulnerable afterwards and go, “I’m so sorry, I did it the wrong way,” whatever. But, when I hear of teams ganging up and leaving a leader, it’s very hard to look at yourself in the mirror because a strong leader that is respected and people want to follow you – it’ll take a lot for them to leave you – a lot – and they would probably be devastated leaving you.

So, I think you’ve gotta look in the mirror at that point and ask yourself why people don’t wanna follow you, but it’s a hard one to do. It’s kind of like – you know people who just have natural sex appeal? I feel like it’s like a natural, innate ability of some people to lead really well. But, you can learn to be better, so I think if that happens to you, do some work around yourself to be a better leader.

Jaime: We have a tendency to work with the owner and the operator, and then we ask the operator confidentially, “How is it really working with them?” And then, we can coach the owner around some things that have to do with that because it’s hard to – it’s hard to have these open conversations, especially if you haven’t built that trust to begin with, to realize what you’re actually doing. So, they see all the problems, but they don’t know why. “I’m so confused.” Awareness is the first step, but trying to figure out what that is is really difficult unless you have somebody that can be honest and truthful.

Barbara: I think as well, for your leadership team, it’s important – as entrepreneurs, we tend to overwhelm our teams because we are charging forward and leaving our teams in a bloodbath behind us.

Jaime: Right, “Pick up after me.”

Barbara: Yeah, and we’re always talking about revenue targets and how big we wanna be. Does that matter for them? I think breaking things

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down into strategic quarterly focuses, and allowing people to have one or two focuses, and giving them permission to say, “These other things are gonna happen later this year” – that’s leading.

It’s saying to even your ops manager, “I want you to do this in this quarter, and I want these other things, but let’s talk about them later this year and map that out.” So, that’s leading and allowing them to revel in the success of that particular project, and then reward that and be like, “That was brilliant. Now, let’s move on to the next one.” People need to feel that, and not feel overwhelmed. It’s your job as a leader. You can be overwhelmed, but don’t overwhelm your team.

Jaime: We need to shout that from the rooftops. I need to hear that again too. How do you understand –

Barbara: I need to remember that as well for my own team. They’re probably listening, going, “Oh really? Really?”

Jaime: “Let’s write that on the wall for later.” Well, that was my next question. How do you understand what your team can handle? I know working with them for a long period of time, but there is – especially different types of people – how much do you chunk and give them at a time?

Barbara: I try – look, I’m a big believer in the power of singular focus. So, in anything that you do – if you start a business, nail one particular revenue stream first, before you start diversifying and offering loads of other things, and I think it’s the same with even sprints, or project management, or just allowing people – you’ve lots of projects on, but you’ve gotta give them permission to focus, to have singular focus, and not to go, “Hold on a sec, what about this other thing?” because you’ve told them to focus on one thing. Again, that’s a leadership. It mightn’t work for every business, but I have found that to be very successful for me personally.

And then, to ask them – every now and then, catch up and be like, “How’s it going?” – the “How’s it going?” call. “It’s okay to be overwhelmed. Let’s talk about it.” And then, dig into why you’re overwhelmed.

Jaime: How often do you have – the “How’s it going?” call is amazing, because especially for people that are overachievers, sometimes they just keep taking it, and won’t actually complain or tell you how crazy it is unless you check in, so how often do you do those

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calls?

Barbara: I don't do them very often, actually. I should do them more often, and one of my leadership goals is to do those more often because I kind of – With the way I run the business, I can see when things are slipping because one of the things that I've done quite well – because it works for my control-freakness of being the owner/entrepreneur person – is Asana for us is like the motherboard, and I can see in 10 minutes flat every single day everything that's going on, so I can see what results are happening, I can see what's pushing through, and I can see what's falling through the cracks.

If stuff is falling through the cracks, I think to myself, "Well, there's something going on there for them," and that's when I'll trigger a "How's it going?" call.

Jaime: I would love to see your Asana. I get so jazzed about Asana dashboards. I'm a geek.

Barbara: You know what the hilarious thing is? I am the queen of simplicity. People think – I'm not even an advanced user of Asana. I just keep it simple. We've got loads of projects, but they're all pipelines and things moving, so you've gotta keep things moving. I don't really use the dashboard, so if I just can see everyone's load and what's been left behind –

Jaime: I love it. We didn't even have a chance to talk about the fact that you have two small children while you're doing all these things. I just adore that you're like, "We're paying attention to leadership, we're improving all this, we're doing all these things," and you have a 6-month-old at home, and probably not sleeping very well either, so pat yourself on the back for all that stuff, too.

Barbara: I'm exhausted. Look, one of the tips I will say – one of the learnings from doing this - is that I really wanted to prove that through the power of very good leadership and very good delegation, as a woman, you can run a large company and be the mother. Now, what I say about being the mother is actually being a hands-on mom part-time.

So, working part-time – I've done that. I've done 50/50. So, I'm there for all the feedings, and I'm playing with the kids, and it's half the day that I'm literally with them. The problem with that and the lesson I learned the hard way is that if you can do 50/50, you

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can do it, but there's nothing left for you, and you become so depleted, and I did, and it's happening again at the moment. I'm finding – I moved countries while –

Jaime: Right, I didn't even mention that, yes, exactly. Because that's a good idea to do also at the same time.

Barbara: Well, I'm from Ireland, so I wanted to be closer. But yeah, I'm finding that this is happening again, and I need to watch it this time because the last time, with my first daughter, the business was a lot crazier because it was in that real startup stage, and I just became so depleted, and the brain fog was horrific. I made bad decisions, I was a bad leader, and I was a bad mother too. I didn't do either particularly well. So, I would be very honest and open about that and say I'm loving doing it, but it's hard. It's hard work –

Jaime: We always pooh-pooh –

Barbara: – to a good parent and a good leader and wash your hair at the same time.

Jaime: The reason why I love talking about this stuff is because it does matter, and it's usually us that goes to our self-care – any time for yourself – you can't even go pee without your kids banging on the door, right? To be able to have any time – and, I love that you said that because not that it's shameful, but we have a tendency to be like, "I can do it all, everything's fine!" and then die a little.

Barbara: I think all the moms out there are hiding it. We all say, "Oh wow, look at me, I work three hours a day, and I'm still a mom, and I can do it from home." One of these days, I would like to do a TEDx talk and make it funny. I'd be like, "Here's what it was really like working from home with my kids outside the door." Everyone thinks it's this amazing thing – "Oh, you get to work from home." Honestly, I think I should go work in an office because it's just – it's like hell on earth trying to manage it all. I've gone from changing a diaper to doing a team call. It's just not conducive to good mental state.

Jaime: Not even – I know, we're like – Thank you for saying that. We used to have an office that had windows, and the kids would be on the window, and I'd feel like the worst mom in the world – I'd shut the curtains and be like, "I've gotta get work done." There's only so much we can do.

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Barbara: I know. My daughter went through this phase – we’re still going through this – I might only work for a few hours a day, but I am a devil because I work for a few hours a day.

Jaime: Mine too.

Barbara: I give her all this attention, and she’s still not happy. I go, “I would have been better off doing 10 hours a day in corporate. If she doesn’t see me all day, she’s happier.”

Jaime: Isn’t that hilarious? It’s so funny, too – the same thing where they always want more no matter what it is, so we just have to be happy with everything we’re giving them and make sure that we’re happy on both sides of the coin. Otherwise, we’re gonna drive ourselves crazy, and that’s not worth it either. Life first. This is amazing. I know we have to start wrapping up. What is one action listeners can take this week to help move them forward toward their goal of \$1 million?

Barbara: Definitely the power of singular focus with a sense of urgency. So, people try to do too many things at the one time. Even with investing, they try and buy a house, start a business, save, all this sort of stuff. Do one thing, and do it really well, and with a sense of urgency and a timeline, and then nail that and do the next thing. Otherwise, you get scattered, and honestly, you will not achieve anything particularly well.

So, I have been very good at focusing on one thing at a time. People have often said to me at the Virtual Hub, “Why don’t you offer” – we do VAs. We do three different levels of VAs, but we just do VAs, and we only do it in the digital marketing area as well, and people have said, “Why don’t you do project managers?” I’d love to do all that – video editors, the whole lot – but we’re still nailing this bit, and I don’t feel that we have nailed it enough yet to be distracting ourselves with all the other stuff we could do. It’s just distracting, to be totally honest.

Jaime: Thank you for saying that, because there’s too many companies that I’ve seen do that, so I appreciate knowing the inner working of you trying to nail it. That’s amazing.

Barbara: Yeah, and I’m trying to be a mom as well. I could launch all these other things, but then I’m gonna sacrifice that, so I’m just trying to – I think the power of singular focus and being okay with that is good.

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Jaime: I so appreciate you're open and honest. Where do we find out more about you? How do we get a VA? Tell me more about all your offerings.

Barbara: Sure. So, the best place to find out about us and even a bit about me is [thevirtualhub.com](http://thevirtualhub.com). We've got tons of content on our site for anyone who's – anywhere from starting out and just getting into this VA thing, people who've made massive mistakes and wanna know all the – I even have a podcast – shameless plug – *The Virtual Success Show*, where I talk – it's very tactical. We talk about things like “When is it time to fire my VA? How many times a day should I talk to my VA?” It's very that sort of podcast.

If you wanna find out a little bit more about me, you can find me on LinkedIn. I don't do a lot over there, but I'm planning to do a bit more now that I'm out of the having-baby phase and I can actually do a bit more content. If you're looking for a VA, we cover all time zones, we are office-based, we are Philippines-based, and we do three levels of VA, and we mainly focus on the digital marketing world and platforms like Ontraport, Infusionsoft, HubSpot. We've got VAs that can do all the tinkering, build your campaigns, and mess around with Zapier, and all the stuff that's tying up all your time that you really shouldn't be tinkering with – just come to us for that. That's what we specialize in.

Jaime: I love it. We just had Zapier's CEO, and he told us a million things that we can do, so I know everybody's waiting with bated breath to be able to do some of these things that have been really low on their to-do list because who's got time for all that? Your team does. Thank you so much for coming on the show today. I really appreciate it.

Barbara: Thanks so much for having me.

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 53 minutes**