

58: Why You Need an Assistant



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Bonnie Koo, MD

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Welcome to *The Wealthy Mom MD Podcast*, a podcast for women physicians who want to learn how to live a wealthy life. In this podcast you will learn how to make money work for you, how you can have more of it and learn the tools to empower you to live a life on purpose. Get ready to up-level and your life. I'm your host, Dr. Bonnie Koo.

Hey, everyone. Welcome to episode 58. So, as you guys know, I was away for about 10 days. I was in Hawaii and then I was in Las Vegas for my business mastermind. So, in case some of you do not know what a business mastermind is, because it's people in business like myself, so people define it differently.

But the way I define it is that a true mastermind is where you and others mastermind with each other led by a master. And when I say you and others, basically the members have something to contribute. We each have something to contribute and we're generally equal partners of our success and we're generally at equal ranges of income, in a business mastermind that is.

And so, I was in a mastermind called The 200K Mastermind. And now. I sort of graduated to the \$2 Million Group. And right now, there's 12 of us. We're all coaches. This mastermind is only for coaches. And one thing we do, which might make you guys kind of cringe, but in business this is totally normal – and it's about money – is that we do a leaderboard, meaning that we have to report our income and it's listed from top to lowest.

Now, some of you might be like, "Oh my god that's horrible." But to me, it's exciting. So, I'm not the top earner. I'm not the lowest earner. I'm sort of in the middle. But I love not being the top earner in the room.

You might be asking why. Now, sometimes, it doesn't feel good, I'll be perfectly honest. But by not being the top earner, I can learn so much from the other women who are making so much money.

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I also love that in this business mastermind, money is celebrated. We get so excited when one of us makes money. It's not because we think making more money is better than not making money, but it's showing that it's possible and it's an example of the value that we created.

Now, I got a little off-track here but the main reason I wanted to talk about this mastermind is, so, this mastermind is for coaches who have made at least \$250,000 annually inside their coaching business and they want to scale to \$2 million.

And so, one of the things that we learned – this is my second three months in the mastermind – is we basically were all told that we all need to hire an assistant. Like, all of us.

Most of us had one, but not all of us had one. And the reason why is she said that you cannot be the CEO of your business and your life. And I don't mean you can't make decisions for your life, but she says you can't be managing everything in your business and managing everything at home, especially if you're a mom.

And the reason is because then your mind is so bogged down with all the decisions and the things that really keep you from thinking at a higher level. And so, this got me thinking, because I don't usually talk about me having an assistant to my clients, because most of my clients aren't necessarily in business. Some are, but most of them aren't they're employees.

And so, but I was thinking, you know, I think every female physician needs an assistant. I'm going to repeat that again. I think every female physician needs an assistant. Whether you're a breadwinner, whether you're a mom or not, you need an assistant. Yes, you too.

You do not need to be famous or a CEO or super-rich to have or need one. If you're listening to this right now, then I already know that you need one. You needed one probably years ago. And you can have one for just five hours a week.

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I think a lot of people think like, “Oh, but I don’t need that much help.” Or, “I can’t hire someone full-time.” You don’t even need to hire someone full-time. But it’s not even about the time save. Because I think, when I talk about this to people, the first thing that comes to their mind is, “Yeah, I guess I would save five hours a week. Not that that wouldn’t be useful, but I could still do it.”

And I just want to stop you right there because some of you are thinking this already, I know. I know it. I can hear it. It’s not so much about the time you save. It’s also about the mental energy.

Think about it, as doctors, depending on what you do, but even if you’re not seeing 20 patients a day, you’re a surgeon, we are making high level decisions all day long. That is taxing on our brain That takes up a lot of energy.

Having an assistant keeps your brain agile. It keeps your brain free to focus on the important decisions that you need to make for your work and for your family. And so, what I want to do today is go over why my assistant does for me.

So, I do have- an assistant. She’s part-time. And she’s my assistant in business, but she also does personal stuff for me. And actually, the original idea I had for this episode was to talk about this system that I created with her called the Digital Shitbox. More on that later though.

And so, I feel so strongly that every female physician needs an assistant. Because this makes such a huge difference for me and I know it will for you too. And then, at the end, I’m going to give you some quick tips on how to hire someone. Because that’s the most common question I get when I tell people about my assistant. They’re like, “Well, how do I find someone?”

Along the same vein, I have a CPA. I have a fractional CFO slash bookkeeper because there are people with a lot more expertise than me on these things. And this again frees me up to focus what I want to do, which

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is to coach my clients, run my business as the CEO, think about my business, and think about my clients. I think I said in an earlier episode that I consider it my job to be a think tank for my business and my clients.

Okay, so first, if I haven't convinced you already, why do I have an assistant and why should you have one too? Number one, our time is really valuable. And to take this further, our brain time is really valuable. We only have so much valuable brain time or focus time a day. And like I said, you're a busy physician. You're making tons of high-level decisions a day, all requiring you to think at your highest level.

You need to be on top of your game. Just like you don't room your patients or you don't make appointments or answer billing questions, there are many things you don't need to do either.

I feel like we know this in terms of working as a doctor. But for some reason, we don't apply this to our non-doctor life. As a woman, as a mom, this is hard for us to do because we've been sort of conditioned to be able to do it all and it's like some kind of weird badge of honor. I want to tell you, it is not a badge of honor.

There is no prize for doing it all. None. Now, inside a business, of course, it makes sense to have an assistant. And I will liken this again to being a doctor. Your best use of your brain time as a doctor is to diagnose and make treatment plans. Someone else can literally do the rest. And I'd even go to say that someone could actually execute the treatment plan, what I mean by that is do the counseling for the treatment plan.

For example, you know, when I treat acne patients, it doesn't take me long to figure out what's going on and what they need, you know, based on a few questions and examining them. And then, I create the treatment plan.

And someone else that's well-trained could then explain to them how to take the medication. Because to me, that's actually the most important part of acne treatment, is really explaining how to use medication properly. Like,

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I really don't like slapping medication and being like, "Okay, this, this, and that, see you later."

I really took the time to explain, especially if I gave them any topical medications, like, "This is how you apply it. This is what it looks like. This is how much you're going to use. This is when you're going to do it. This is what might happen."

But that doesn't need to be me. And so, I want you to really start asking yourself, noticing throughout your day, what are things that you're doing that you really don't have to do?

Now, where you can get into trouble with this is there might be things that you actually kind of enjoy doing, so you don't mind doing them. But I want you to ask yourself, "Is this a good use of my time? Could I enjoy my life more if someone else did this?" That's a great question.

So, you might be asking yourself, "Well, what can they actually do?" Anything you can train them on, really. Any task that is repetitive or requires time for you to be on the phone.

Now, I said earlier, this includes things that you might actually like doing, but it's not a great use of your time. For example, I used to love researching travel plans, looking at the hotels, looking at the flights and piecing it all together.

I still enjoy it, but I don't enjoy it as much as I used to. And it's not a great use of my time. So, now my assistant handles that all. It's amazing. And I'm going to name a few things that she's done for me, just to give you examples of what they can do.

So, recently I got a medical bill and it didn't have all the information I needed, meaning it wasn't clear to me if it was something I had to pay. It almost looked like, "Well, maybe this is something my insurance should have covered."

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And so, I had her call to get more information. So, I have her basically – any time that I didn't have to be on the phone, because wait times et cetera, I have her do. Because sometimes, I'll change my mind about things like flights. And we all know that the wait times can be really long.

Like, one time, she had to change a flight on United and she was on the phone for two hours. And that's two hours I didn't have to spend time on the phone.

Another thing I have her do is do research. Personal research. So, for example, Jack, my toddler, he's three and a half right now. He's always doing like flips and like super-active, so I was like, "You know what? I think he'd really enjoy being in a gymnastics class."

And so, I gave her some parameters, what I'm looking for, and I asked her if she could come up with three options for a gymnastics class and tell me why she chose them.

Now, this is something that I don't personally use her for, but when I was at my business mastermind, we were all kind of sharing what our assistants do for us. And one of the ladies shared that her assistant is local. Mine actually isn't. Mine's virtual, although I have actually met her in person.

But her assistant is local and makes sure that everything in the house is there. Meaning she doesn't run out of toilet paper. This person does her grocery orders every Sunday from Instacart et cetera and she's like, "Yeah, I know it doesn't take that long to order things on Instacart but if I don't have to think about it, that's amazing." And so, I could see that be useful for a lot of you ladies.

Okay, so now I want to talk about the Digital Shitbox that I use with my assistant, and also Matt, and we use this for, and we use this for both personal and business stuff.

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So, first, what is a Digital Shitbox? So, the name kind of came from this. All of us have a physical junk drawer. I'm not the only person who has one. And maybe we have multiple junk drawers or multiple junk boxes.

So, in my household, we have called that the Shitbox. And we have multiple Shitboxes. Although, I've really tried to pare it down to like one. And if it gets full, we have to throw something away.

And then, I came up with this concept of a Digital Shitbox because one thing that I really struggled with, and I'm guessing a lot of you too, is dealing with all the bullshit paperwork that comes up that you need to keep track of. You're like, "Yeah, I need to scan this." And I would have piles of paper to be scanned and it would never get scanned.

Because some of these things, I couldn't just put them through the document feeder. We have a printer that also serves as a scanner and it has like a feeder thing. But if it wasn't the regular size, it would have to be manually scanned and I'd be like, "I don't have time for this right now." And I'd put it in this pile and this pile would just get bigger and bigger. And oftentimes, it wouldn't get done until it had to get done, like for tax time for example.

And so, another thing is Matt and I have – our health insurance has an HSA or Health Savings Account and so we keep all the receipts. We don't often get reimbursed, but we want to have them on file so we can get reimbursed later because we invest our HSAs. And so, those receipts were piling up and then for business, receipts were piling up and I was like, "Okay..."

And this assistant I've had for about three months now so I was like, "You know, I have an assistant. How can I make this easy for me and how can she help me with this?"

Because I used to think, "Well, she can't really help me with this unless she lives here because I still have to scan all these freaking receipts," and I get

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annoyed, as you can tell. And so, as soon as I asked myself, “How could this be easy,” one of my favorite questions to ask whenever I’m feeling stuck – I just had a lightbulb moment and the answer was so obvious I feel even kind of dumb sharing with you guys.

But have you noticed sometimes you get so stuck that there’s no solution, that we can’t see the solution until we literally pause and ask, what if there is a way to make this easy? And so, what I realized is, on my iPhone – I have an iPhone, but this would work if you have an Android too. So, I have a Dropbox account and you can download the Dropbox app on your phone and you can literally take a picture of the receipt and upload it to Dropbox.

So, what I specifically do is I don’t take a picture. I do the scan function and it basically takes a picture but it converts it to a PDF and it’s able to smartly figure out the outline of the receipt, although sometimes I have to fix it, and then I upload it specifically to a folder. We call it the Shitbox. It’s basically a Digital Shitbox. But whatever you want to call it. If you don’t like curses you can call it your junk drawer, box, whatever you want to call it.

But basically a holding folder for all the stuff that you need to scan but you don’t want to deal with. And then, my amazing assistant, once a month, goes through it and puts it in the right place. So, if it’s a business thing, she puts it in the business folder and we have a specific way we label them. We label it by date and the subject, so it’s sort of easy to find. We don’t have to keep opening things.

Because what I did previously is I would upload things and I never change the name so it would be the weird default name that Dropbox or my phone saved and then I could never find it because I never labeled it correctly.

So, all I do is take a quick scan picture with Dropbox. When I say scan picture, I mean scan into a PDF, make sure it gets uploaded to my Shitbox folder. And then, once a month, she goes through it and she clears it and she knows – I’ve trained her on which receipt goes to what. So, if it’s a HAS receipt, she labels it by date and the person, so whether it’s me, Matt, or

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Jack. If it's a business receipt and it's specifically for a business trip, she puts it in a specific folder for each trip. And other things, like other important documents that might come in the mail.

And so, you need to sit down with your assistant or really just sit down with yourself and figure out, "How do I want these documents organized?" Because the last thing you want to do when you need to find something is, well, spend the time to find it. You waste so much time and it's so frustrating.

Okay, I think you guys can tell this is getting me really excited because when I discovered this I was like, "Oh my god, this is amazing." So, I did have to spend some time kind of backtracking, because as I mentioned before, I had piles and piles of paper. But it actually was so much quicker than using my actual scanner and the quality is totally fine.

And so, I think I spend, honestly, like 30 minutes taking pictures. And then, once I was done, now I just do it as they come and it's like two seconds and I don't have to think about filing it because she takes care of it for me. Every once in a while, she'll have a question about where things should go. But otherwise, it's pretty seamless.

Okay, back to you. I want you to start making a list of what you would love to offload. I want you to spend some time thinking about this purposely. So, if you're like me and you like to jot things down, on my iPhone, I would make a file in your notes and just start typing in things. Whenever you notice, like, "Hey, this is something I can offload to an assistant," that's where you should start.

And then, whenever you see yourself doing something repetitive or something that you know an assistant can do, I want you to write it down. And then, depending on what it is, you may even want to record yourself doing that thing, like a screencast on your computer, if it's something like on your computer for example.

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There's a program called Loom. And it lets you do this for free, like a screencast. But it's only up to five minutes. And if you have a business like I do, it's definitely worth investing in a screencast software like this. It's a great way to train employees.

So, let me give you an example of how this could be useful, the screencast, for a personal thing. So, not anymore, but in Jack's old daycare, we had to specifically order his lunches. And so, every month, I had to log into this website and it was super-annoying because I had to click on each day. Because of course, they selected everything including the juice box and the cookie and I would always unselect the cookie and the juice box. And I might change the food around if I knew it was something he wouldn't like.

And so, I had to spend time literally each day clicking on these things. So, this is something I could record as a screencast and I would talk while I'm doing it so they could see what it looks like. And I could say, this is how I want it done. And then, I can share that screencast with my assistant.

And let's say this is an ongoing thing because the thing is, once you get bought into hiring an assistant – and I'll talk more about how to do that in a bit – just like nannies, you might go through different nannies or different assistants. It might take some time.

And so, by doing a screencast, you save yourself the time to train them. So, this is a great example of something tedious that I can delegate and I just record myself doing it, and so it's much easier for them to learn than me trying to explain it to them, right?

Now, I'm betting some of you are thinking, "Yeah, but these things, they don't take a lot of time and I can do them." But that's not the whole point. Remember, they take up your brain time and your attention. And what I see a lot, including myself and my clients, is we get like decision fatigue from all the little tiny tasks hanging out in your brain in the back of your brain, like, "I've got to do this..."

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It's like this nagging feeling that there's something else to do. Wouldn't it be so much nicer to come home from work and, like, be able to really relax your brain? All these little things, even though they're not, like, hard or take up a lot of time, they're really taxing on your brain because there's something called task switching.

Every time you're switching between tasks – there's no such thing as multitasking. I'm sure you guys know this already. And every time you're switching between different types of tasks, it's extremely taxing for their brain or it really slows you down.

And I know all of you would love to have some more time just to relax, hang out with your family, have time for yourself. I have no desire to win the trophy for the mom who did everything; bake the cakes, bring Jack to and from school, do the laundry, have a perfectly clean bathroom, run my business. Remember I said, there is no reward for doing it all. None.

Okay, now I want to leave you with a few tips for hiring and managing. Now, I could probably do a whole episode on this, and maybe I will if there's interest. Because I see a lot of people getting frustrated in hiring and managing.

And I see this a lot with nannies, because we're also perfectionists. Because I can do it better and faster. Yeah, maybe, but that also means you're still doing it.

And you could have a lot more free time and have a lot more enjoyment, impact on family, personal life, and your work. Okay, so, how do you actually find someone?

So, I kind of think of it as two different ways to hire. If you do not have the desire to actually do the hiring, because that is actually a skill, then you may want to go through an agency or even care.com, although you still have to do the screening.

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There are agencies, but obviously you're going to pay for that, because you're paying someone else to kind of do the legwork for you. But I think that's perfectly fine. And people get all hung up on, "Well, it costs more." But yeah, you're paying so that you don't have to spend the time to do it.

So, I really want you to start changing your mindset. It's not so much like the money I'm spending, it's what is this going to give back to me time-wise? And not even just time-wise, but enjoying my life time as well.

So, if you have no desire, you may want to go through an agency. So, one agency I've used in the past is Belay. I actually don't know if they specifically will help you find a personal assistant, but I think so.

I would say the main downside of an agency is not even so much higher cost. But also that assistant gets paid a lot less because usually the agency is taking a big cut. But I think, if this is going to help you get started faster, then do it.

The second thing is to ask around. Maybe there's another fellow physician mom or mom friend or physician friend that has a part-time assistant or help that could use some more hours. And this is actually how I found – she wasn't my assistant but I called her my part-time organizer back in Philadelphia. I think I posted in the local doc mom group about this. And this mom, her husband had this incredible ability to hire amazing people. And so, this person would come a few days a week, because she worked for this other family. And she would just come and organize things, take things out of the dishwasher, fold things, do laundry, and put away Jack's toys. And that was just – it was so nice to come home to a clean, organized apartment.

She didn't clean for us, but she organized. And so, I think that's also a great way to find someone as well. Now, I have gone through quite a few assistants I've learned a lot. I've done training on how to hire.

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And when you hire someone, you really want them to apply and you want to have some tasks or even a test project to see if it's going to work. So, just for example, for a personal thing, you could have them plan a family trip, for example, so you can see how they think.

And when you do hire them, you want to be really specific with your contract that it's a trial period for 30 days and that you can fire at will, basically.

And then two other tips I want to leave you with are some of you might be asking, how do you give them personal information? How do you trust them?

Now, this is where you've got to check references, you've got to do a background check. So, I do a background check where it checks their credit and all that kind of jazz. And I do I talk to the references. And we use LastPass, which is a password manager. And so, I can share logins with her without actually sharing the password and I can easily revoke it as well.

Now, the last thing I want to say is your assistant cannot read your mind. And this is what I hear a lot from my perfectionist clients is, "They're not doing a good job." And we often think they should just be able to figure it out. That does not work. They cannot read your mind. But they can, if you write it down. They can, if you do a screencast on how you do things.

I used to get so frustrated with my previous assistants. I think I really expected them to read my mind. And I'm sort of laughing and also feeling a little bad inside now because now I understand how ridiculous that expectation was.

I just didn't know any better. And so, you have to be willing to train your assistant. And that will take time. And you might be thinking, "But I don't have time." But this is going to save you so much time later. And you have to be willing to give feedback and not think twice about it. And just think of it

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as you're training them to your specifications. You can train them to also think the way you want to think, really.

Okay, well I hope I've inspired you to at least consider hiring an assistant and I want you to start thinking about all the ways they could help you. Take a few weeks to figure out what kind of tasks you could offload. And then just start. Start by hiring. You might not find the right person. It's kind of like dating, if I'm perfectly honest, meaning you might meet a lot of frogs, or you might meet the right person immediately.

And so, I can't wait to hear how much more time you're going to have, how much more you're going to enjoy your life because you're not spending all of your time doing little things that really don't need your attention. Okay, I will talk to you ladies next week.

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