

“MAXIMIZE YOUR CONTINGENT WORKFORCE”



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As was predicted over a decade ago, the flexible - or contingent -workforce is becoming more and more a way of doing business. This concept was born out of the fact that organizations, in order to be competitive and maximize their profitability, need to have flexibility in staffing to respond to the ups and downs of business cycles. This frees them from the financial obligation of paying salaries and benefits when the talent is not needed. Temporary agencies are flourishing as businesses realize the benefit of having specialized talent for specific projects or time periods.

Employers generally do not do a very good job when it comes to orienting and integrating temporary or contract workers. Perhaps this is because they don't feel a long-term obligation to them, and if they leave – well, they feel that they can just go to their source and find more “bodies” to replace them. Smart managers, however, know that regardless of the economy, good talent is hard to find. And for many businesses, temp assignments are the trial periods from which regular employees can be hired.

Employers can maximize the effectiveness of contingent workers and their experience with their company with some thoughtful preparation and practices:

- Develop a positive relationship with sources of contingent talent. Do this even before you need them. Identify as many sources as needed to cover both quality and quantity of talent. Never rely on a single source. Even when you have a preferred source and relationship, there will be times or circumstances when they will not be able to fulfill your need. Being prepared with a few secondary sources will reduce the stress and get the job done when needed.
- As with regular employment, it is important to be clear about the skills, experience and personal qualities required, and what exactly the person will be doing on the assignment. When a third party agency is involved, they will need these specifications to be able to source and screen effectively on your behalf. Time and money are wasted when an agent presents unacceptable candidates due to lack of clear understanding of requirements on the part of the employer.
- Take time on the front end to orient the person or team. All too frequently, contingent workers are shown their desk, the restrooms and the task at hand, without a larger context. For people to do the best possible job, they need to know the larger picture and how what they are doing fits into that. If there is likely to be an ongoing need, consider preparing a manual that would guide people as to the structure, resources, history and progress of the role or project.
- Let your expectations be known. People inherently want to do a good job. However, when a worker is left with only his or her best guesses and assumptions, the stage is set for frustration for all. Time, effort and energy are lost and the financial cost can be considerable, either through re-work or replacement of the individual.
- Check in periodically to evaluate progress and to assess needs and resources. Communication and support is a major key to the success of flex workers, as is for all workers.

Remember also that the flexibility that the employer has to replace contingent employees works both ways: workers who are in an assignment where they are not satisfied or treated respectfully can choose to leave and not return. This is financially costly and leaves the employer vulnerable in two ways: 1) the knowledge gained by the person will have been lost, and 2) quality replacements will become harder and harder to find as the economy recovers and the talent wars heat up.