

Temporary jobs can build solid bridge to full-time work

Most U.S. businesses with 25 to 99 employees use agencies to fill both temporary and full-time positions

BY DARAH HANSEN, VANCOUVER SUN; WITH FILES FROM POSTMEDIA NEWS NOVEMBER 30, 2010



People lined up to apply for jobs as SUCCESS hosted a job fair in Vancouver. Temporary jobs are a good way to build experience and connections.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Sun; with files from Postmedia News

It's been a year now since Samereh Moradi moved to Vancouver, and she's eager to find work.

But the Iranian-born graphic designer, 28, has discovered that even getting her foot in the door with a Canadian employer has proven more difficult than she imagined.

"I've applied in many stores, even Tim Hortons, but they said they don't have anything right now," she said.

Last week, Moradi decided to change tack.

She braved the cold weather on Wednesday to attend a pre-Christmas job fair, in the hopes of landing one of about 200 seasonal jobs on offer with local retailers, grocery store chains and a courier service.

Temporary work isn't ideal, said Moradi, but it's a good opportunity to beef up her Canadian work credentials and make some money while she's at it.

And, who knows? Maybe the bosses will be so impressed with her, they won't want to let her go.

But is Moradi fooling herself? Are there any real benefits to working in a short-term job?

"Absolutely," said Sandra Miles, of the Vancouver-based Miles Employment Group.

From newcomers looking to break into a city or industry to seasoned professionals seeking more flexible schedules, "there are lots of benefits to working temporarily," she said.

Last year, 1.8 million workers held temporary positions across the country, accounting for 12.5 per cent of paid employment (a slight decrease from the peak of 13.2 per cent in 2005), according to new data released by Statistics Canada.

Most, 52 per cent, of the temp jobs were contract positions, accounting for almost one million workers.

The majority of contract workers are professionals in the health, education and public administration fields.

Miles said temporary workers are an attractive option for companies looking to fill key positions, from entry level to top management, without the associated costs of hiring a permanent employee.

That's particularly true in uncertain economic times.

Hiring through a temp agency gives the employer quick and easy access to a fully screened, professionally interviewed, referenced and skill-tested worker pool, she said.

The agency is also responsible for payroll as well as all the government taxes, workers' compensation and insurance.

For the jobseeker, Miles said the temporary workforce is an excellent means to gain access to a hidden job market.

Up to 95 per cent of businesses with 25 to 99 employees use agencies to fill temporary positions, according to a report by the American Staffing Association.

More than half, 59 per cent, said they use the agencies to help them find good permanent staffers.

There are downsides to temporary work, of course.

Statistics Canada reports the wage gap between seasonal and casual positions and permanent positions is almost 34 per cent -- possibly attributed to a younger worker age, lower education, smaller company size and fewer available hours.

And for those looking for economic security, a temp job means "there might not be work for you next week," said Miles.

Still, given the opportunities, she's convinced the upsides largely outweigh the down.

"It's better to be working than not working," she said. "It gets you in the door to meet new people and be part of a company, rather than sitting at home for months on end waiting for that perfect job."

Miles also noted that sought-after professionals taking on temporary work will likely not experience a wage difference.

"You get paid market wage," she said.

There appeared to be no shortage of interest in seasonal work at Wednesday's job fair, hosted by the immigration support organization SUCCESS.

Moradi was one of approximately 1,000 jobseekers who came through the door to apply for mainly entry-level work with the Bay, Costco, T&T Supermarket, Safeway, UPS and Budget Car Rentals.

Jackline Ochieng, manager of employment services at SUCCESS, said these kinds of fairs not only offer jobseekers -- many of them new Canadians -- the potential to find paid work, but also help them gain confidence in a competitive labour market.

"We've found that people are not always very proactive in approaching employers ... These job [fairs] kind of act as a boost," she said.

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Top tips for jobseekers looking for temporary work

1. Prepare for your interview with the temporary agency as you would prepare for a permanent interview with any employer.
2. Show up for your interview on time, dressed appropriately and bring your professional resume, references and any supporting educational documentation.
3. Inform your references that they will be contacted.
4. Prepare yourself for any skill testing.
5. Be flexible, adaptable and available when offered your first assignment.
6. Be open and honest with your recruiter about what work you would like and wouldn't like to do.

Source: Miles Employment Group

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