

Temporary Workers

An Effective Solution to Shifting Business Levels in the Accounting Industry

By Sandra Miles, CPC

While the U.S. and Canadian economies are slowly emerging from the recession, employers are still being cautious when it comes to hiring. To bridge the gap in shifting economic times, many accounting firms are turning to temporary workers as an effective business solution. Particularly interesting is the fact that such temporary positions are being considered at mid and senior levels, rather than in administrative or support roles. This is a relatively new trend that could greatly impact the way that accounting firms operate and ensure smooth business practices and levels.

From data control analysts to human resources and mid and senior management positions, temporary workers are offering an increasingly diverse skill set in accounting. Coined 'interim-management,' executive level candidates can provide accounting firms relief from mounting client workloads during busy times of the year, such as the first quarter and year-end periods.

Recent statistics reveal that temporary workers have in fact become a significant part of the workforce across industries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, temporary help added nearly half a million jobs between September 2009 and September 2010. Moreover, the American Staffing Association reports that \$7.9 billion of the staffing industry's \$61.4 billion in sales in 2009 were generated from temporary and contract staffing. In Canada, temporary or contract work has become one of the fastest growing job opportunities, seeing a 13 percent jump from March 2009 to March 2010, according to Statistics Canada.

BENEFITS OF A TEMPORARY WORKFORCE

The benefits of a temporary workforce for accounting firms are numerous. Most significantly,



temporary workers increasingly offer a diverse skill set. From administration to IT to project and account managers, and right up to the CFO level, temporary workers are going beyond administrative or supportive roles.

Whether an employee takes an absence (due to factors such as illness, vacation, or maternity leave) or during key busy times of the year, temporary workers allow firms to strategically manage fluctuations in business volume by scaling up or down on an ‘as-needed’ basis. People can hold temporary jobs for varied amounts of time, but the average tenure of temporary and contract employees ranges from three to four months.

WORKING WITH A STAFFING AGENCY

A staffing agency can be an integral part of ensuring smooth integration of temporary workers. It is essential to develop a close working relationship with a chosen staffing agency before hiring temporary staff. Getting to know the agency, its approach, and its culture, and allowing them to do the same, is essential. Act as a joint employer with the agency, and allow them to perform due diligence on the worksite to ensure a smooth working relationship.

Beyond being cost-effective, another especially important benefit to working with a staffing agency relates to being able

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Beyond diverse skill sets, hiring temporary workers through a staffing agency can be extremely cost-effective. Since temporary workers are employees of the agency, the agency handles employee on-boarding, payroll processing, government remittances, I-9s, and more. Firms are also not faced with the financial commitment of a permanent hire through things like payroll, benefits, exit interviews, and severance packages.

Another benefit of temporary workers is the potential to find top talent for permanent positions that may arise in the future. Firms are essentially able to ‘preview’ an employee to see whether he or she is the right fit for the position and the company in a permanent position. In a 2011 CareerBuilder survey, 31percent of small businesses planning to hire contract or temporary workers expected to transition some temporary staff into full-time, permanent employees.

On the flip side, temporary work offers several advantages for employees, including flexibility, a break from routine, the ability to learn about a particular industry, and opportunities for full-time employment down the line.

to make a clear distinction between temporary and permanent staff. Failing to make the distinction leaves firms liable for unequal treatment. A staffing agency can help ensure that there is no doubt about the worker’s status and the lack of eligibility for the benefits of permanent employment.

Visualize temporary staff as the spokes of a company. While permanent staff are the nucleus, temporary staff are the spokes that move in and out of the picture as business levels shift. In this way, temporary workers are an extremely viable business solution during a tough economy as accounting firms may not have the courage yet to make the permanent hire commitment, but still need to keep the wheels of their business turning. □



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