

Entrepreneur

Hiring Temporary Talent

Temporary employment is expanding beyond the typical clerical assignment.

By Chris Penttila | Entrepreneur Magazine - May 2009

Jack Longinotti has been a full-time CFO at three companies. But he also moonlights as a “temporary” CFO. These gigs have been full- and part-time, and have ranged from three months to two years.

“I tend to work at companies that are either very fast-growing and in their formative stages or have a special circumstance that needs expertise,” Longinotti says. “The engagement can be very intense.”

When it comes to temporary employment, most of us envision the clerical worker who answers phones, not the marketing director who parachutes in for six weeks to help launch a new product. It’s hard to know how many interim executives are among the approximately 2 million Americans currently temping or employed on staff at temporary agencies. “We’ve never tracked that [statistic],” says Gary Steinberg, press officer for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But they’re out there, and a bad economy could encourage more top-level people to temp their talents.

Crist Kolder Associates, a firm that places permanent CFOs, receives 50 unsolicited resumes daily from outplacement service firms and job hunters. “There is just so much churn out there right now, it’s amazing,” says Scott Simmons, a partner at Crist Kolder.

Year-over-year Business is up more than 47 percent at Business Talent Group, a firm that places interim CEOs, CFOs, marketing directors and other C-level talent. The 1,500 people on BTG’s roster have helped clients launch products, devise new pricing strategies and enter new markets. Even in a recession, “companies still have businesses to run,” says BTG co-founder Jody Miller. “[We] offer the ability to have really targeted expertise when you need it. It’s kind of a talent-on-demand notion.”

Last summer, Craig Snyder was CEO of 18-employee Houston internet media company Internet Reit, which had let go its CFO and urgently needed someone with high-tech and CFO experience to help the company through an audit and appraisal process. Internet Reit approached BTG, and a week later, Longinotti was on board. He stayed through December. The cost was “very similar to what we’d pay a full-time person,” says Snyder, 45. “And we were able to wind down the contract pretty effectively without having to deal with severance.”

Be prepared to discuss the scope of the role, payment terms and confidentiality agreements. Interim executives want to make an impact, so share your company’s shortcomings and inner workings. “You have to allow interim executives to become insiders,” says Bob Stegmann, a managing partner for Tatum LLC, which sends its nearly 1,000 C-level specialists on interim assignments.

Longinotti expects to do more interim CFO work for both troubled and growing companies this year: “There are lots of opportunities.”

Chris Penttila is a freelance journalist whose work has also appeared in The Costco Connection, Oregon Business magazine, QSR Magazine, TheStreet.com and other publications. She lives in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, area, where she manages two kids, a husband and a feisty cat when she’s not writing.