



Information Overload

Issue 18, February 2004

Welcome:

Having interests in libraries, records management and employment issues always makes choosing a topic for the newsletter an interesting one, especially as we like to cover a topic in depth rather than just giving an overview. But how to choose the topic? Well we watch the newspapers and the electronic sources, and then we look at the topics dominating the list serves, and if all else fails we just pick a subject and go for it (so to speak). This month it was hard, do we cover the privacy issue that has been dominating the newsreels as journalists seek (and sometimes do get) access to medical records (Rush Limbaugh, Robert Atkins and Nicole Kidman), the rush by government agencies to fulfil the requirements of WA's records act (Don't forget that all Record Keeping Plans have to be submitted to the State Records Office by 7 March 2004) or do we cover the library campaign 2004@yourlibrary?

Well to be honest, they are all fantastic topics, but this month we have chosen a topic that has taken us back into the realms of HR, and a subject that affects everyone who is responsible for staffing. The problem with trying to maintain services caused by staff shortages through a myriad of causes, eg., sick leave and holidays, or people who are under pressure because of deadlines or special projects that have them wondering if and when they are going to get home of an evening because of the work load. I'm sure you know exactly what I mean. So this month's edition we will be focusing on the use of contract staff as a way of solving (at least temporarily) some of these problems. We will also be looking at the move towards a more casualisation of our workforce and the various industry bodies and government measures to try and ensure a fair and equitable system for employers and contractors alike.

As always, if you would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au. If you think that any of your colleagues would like to receive a copy of this newsletter, please ask them to send an email to training@iea.com.au and we will add them to the list.

We hope you enjoy reading, have a great week.

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- To be or Not to be a Contractor;
- The Political View;
- Job Trends;
- To Use Temps or Not to use Temps that is the Questions;
- Getting the best out of your temp!
- A Thought to Ponder

To be or Not to be a Contractor:

There are a lot of reasons why people undertake casual work. These include:

- A desire to work part-time or to fit work around home, family and study commitments;
- More variety of work (places, people and tasks);
- Can pick and choose the jobs they want to do;
- New graduates and recent arrivals can gain experience in a wide variety of situations before deciding on career path;
- Well paid. A contractor can receive between 20-30% higher pay than the equivalent job, due to the fact that contract staff get addition

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money in lieu of holiday and sick pay;

- Networking and Mentoring opportunities not open to mainstream employment options;
- Great way to meet a wide variety of people;
- Exposure to new systems and software; and
- Promotes personal growth as well as professional development.

The downside of casual work, and of course there are some - are:

- No guarantees of additional work once the initial contract has finished, which some people find very stressful, and can cause a large turnover of staff in the contract arena;
- Do not get paid when you take time off through absence (for whatever reason) or public holidays;
- Uncertainty of job length – even some fixed term contracts can finish before the due date if restructuring occurs or work finishes;
- High learning curve. Most employers expect contractors to “have been there and done that” they usually do not have the time to train a person “from scratch” so it may be difficult for the new graduate with little or no work experience to break into the contracting arena;
- Potentially stressful – not everyone enjoys meeting new people and new challenges on a very regular basis;
- Lack a sense of belonging – some employers and employees treat casual staff as “just the contractor” and do not include in lunch time gatherings or staff meetings;

The Political View:

Australia's peak employer body, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), recently warned that the federal Labour Party's proposal to re-define industrial rights for casuals is misreading the

labour market. According to the ACCI, surveys of casual staff say that 70% want to remain in the casual workforce, with the main reason being an economic one. The proposal to allow casual staff access to holiday and sick leave will mean a reduction in the take home pay of “casual staff” by 20-30% (the current casual loading rates that casuals receive in lieu of holiday and sick leave entitlement).

The ACCI also found that 45% of casual employment is among the young and student workforce who are not looking for a current long-term labour commitment, and more than 70% of casual employees have a clear preference to remain in casual work.

*Human Resources, 28 January 2004 p1
“Employers Caution on Casuals”*

Job Trends:

There have been some significant changes to the workforce demographic in the last couple of years.

During the middle part of 2001, more than 15,000 full-time jobs disappeared. The only job growth was in part-time and contract employment. *Human Resources, Sept 2001 p2)* We then saw a down-turn in employment after the wake of September 11 and employers taking stock of themselves, their organisation and their competitors, the market place was very much stagnant, with job security very much at the fore-front of people's career expectations. Again, there appeared to be little in the way of job growth except within the part-time or temporary sector.

Since then, the overuse by business and government of the R word – Yes I am talking about the word Recession, has caused some people to believe that growth is not possible at this time. Organisations who are told something often enough will eventually come to believe it (regardless of fact), and have taken to downsizing their regular workforce as a way of cutting costs. Of course, the recession did not bite, and organisations are now left trying to find

suitable people to do the work, hence the growth in the contractor sector again.

To Use Temps or Not to use

Temps that is the Questions:

Versatile and well-qualified temps are invaluable in a wide range of situations including:

- Providing specialist skills and competencies that are not required permanently;
- Covering critical roles at very short notice, such as sick leave;
- Catering for longer-term absences, including higher duty assignments;
- Fulfilling key roles during periods of permanent head count restrictions;
- Carrying companies over prolonged skills gaps (eg., whilst recruiting permanent candidates or waiting for internal transfers to take effect);
- Supporting start up operations or new product/service launches until permanent head count needs are established; as well as the
- Times of overload and special projects that cannot be handled by the current workforce.

Whilst temporary assignments can be handled by an organisations own HR department, most organisations these days

are falling more and more towards the use of temping agencies. Establishing a good relationship with an agency is vital, having confidence in their ability to provide a suitably qualified and competent person rather than just someone to make up the numbers is all part of this relationship.

Most agencies will have interviewed the candidates, tested skill competencies and undertaken reference checking before offering them work through the agency. Some agencies will also ensure that the person who they ask to undertake the contract “fits” the organisations culture.

Getting the best out of your “temp”!!

Make sure that you:

- Are ready for them; You are paying by the hour for these people, so make sure that the temp has all the right tools needed to do the job – before they arrive – this includes a computer logon (if using the computer is required as part of the temps role);
- Arrange a suitable induction – speak to your HR department if you are not sure what you should be including, but it should cover such areas as – work hours, dress code, breaks, location of kitchens and toilets; emergency exits, lunchroom, stationary supplies, how to answer the telephone and who the person should report to.

A T hought to Ponder:

“I don’t know why we are here, but I’m pretty sure that it is not in order to enjoy ourselves”

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email training@iea.com.au

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