

Staffing temps see assignments as path to regular job

By Kathy Gurchick

More than three-fourths (77 percent) of current and former temporary and contract staffing employees see their work, and the skills and experience that comes with it, as a route to a regular job, says a new survey by the American Staffing Association (ASA).

And most staffing employees who want permanent jobs find them, according to the 13,196 phone and Internet respondents from 186 ASA member companies.

Nearly half (47 percent) of respondents say they plan to continue temp or contract work until they find a regular job. A way to improve skills, earn extra income, have a choice of assignments and maintain a flexible work schedule also were cited as important reasons for taking on temp or contract work.

Respondents were from all staffing sectors, the ASA said—office, such as clerical and administrative; industrial; health care; technical; information technology and scientific; and professional-managerial, such as accounting, legal and marketing.

Seventy percent were on assignment for a staffing firm, and the rest had been employed by a staffing firm at some time since Jan. 1, 2005. Fifteen weeks with a staffing firm was the median length of employment.

Ten percent surveyed indicated they were previously students, 4 percent identified themselves as homemakers, and 3 percent said they were retirees.

Determining how many of those surveyed succeeded in going from temp or contract work to regular employment was "complicated," according to the report, by the various stages of employment that respondents were in with their staffing firm employer at the time of the survey.

Among those surveyed, 3,973, or 30 percent, were not on assignment at the time of the survey.

Four percent of those 3,973 workers had decided to stop working. The remaining workers were still in the workforce but not on temp or contract assignments, and 53 percent had taken a regular job. Eighty-six percent of those regular jobs were full time.

Forty-three percent landed their regular job from their assigned employer, either as a result of a "temp-to-perm" assignment (27 percent) or because of good performance in the temporary assignment (16 percent).

Twenty-nine percent had been staffing employees but landed regular jobs unrelated to their assignments, and 25 percent got a job some other way.

'A good way to find people'

Job futurist Susan Ascher, president and CEO of New Jersey-based **The Ascher Group**, is not surprised that many temp and contract workers see the work as a route to full-time employment.

"It is a good way to find people," Ascher told *HR News*, though she advises HR people to "go ahead and keep looking on the outside while you're plugging that position.

"It's like the car that you test-drive," she said. Unless you take it for a spin around the block, she said, you won't know if it fits you. And sometimes employers who are fully staffed are so impressed with a contract or temp worker that they want to find a way to hire the person, according to Ascher.

Using temp or contract workers may be something for an employer to consider if there is an immediate need to fill a job, she observed, because "you don't fill a full-time position in a month unless you're very, very lucky.

"Hiring a full-time person creates an immense risk to the company in the sense we're living in a society that's very litigious. It's much more proactive to look at a contractor, see if they can do the job and see if you want to make that commitment" to hire that person full time.

Ascher advises HR not to overlook temporary or contract workers who currently are on staff when filling a full-time opening.

"There shouldn't be such delineation between those folks," she said, urging employers to consider all types of workers.

However, she warns temporary and contract workers that while their job might be converted into a full-time position, they shouldn't necessarily get their hopes up.

"It's important as a contractor to understand why you're coming in to fill this position," she said. Reasons may include employee vacations, pregnancies, illness or special projects, she said.

"It's no guarantee," she said. "The market is constantly in a sea change, constantly in a flux."