

Thinking of Using a Temp? How to Choose the Best Temp Service for Your Needs

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For many companies, bringing in a temporary employee to fill an open position makes good business sense. There's no need to wade through hundreds of resumes; no payroll taxes, unemployment insurance, or benefits to pay; and no hard feelings if the person doesn't work out or the position gets eliminated. But before you randomly call a temporary placement agency from the phone book or an online listing, you need to know how to work with a temp service so you get the best talent possible.

The fact is that working with the wrong temp firm can be costly. If you have to go through numerous temps before finding the right one or waste a lot of time with an inexperienced placement professional, you're going to spend more money and experience more frustrations than you'd like.

Whether you've worked with a temp service in the past or are considering trying one, the following guidelines will ensure that you not only find the best service for your needs, but that you also work with the company effectively so you can build a long-term relationship with them and save time in the future.

- **Know the company you're working with.**

If possible, choose a temp service based on a referral from another business professional you trust. If you can't get a referral, then you have to do your own due diligence. Generally speaking, the internal workings of a temporary placement firm vary from place to place. Unless you are working with a franchise, the only way to find out how the firm works is to ask. Therefore, contact some local temporary help companies and ask them such questions as:

- How long have you been doing business in the local market?
- Do you belong to any national associations?
- What kind of testing do your temps go through?
- What kind of reference checking do you do?
- What's your firm's area of specialization?

Be honest with the company. If you have called other temp services or have had a bad experience in the past, let them know. Also, take into consideration the specialist you speak with. Does the person seem knowledgeable and caring, or is the person just trying to sell you on the idea of working with them? Remember, the person needs to be listening twice as much as they talk. True professionals are as interested in getting a feel for your credibility as you are theirs. Since the goal is to create a long-term relationship, you want to feel comfortable with your main point of contact.

- **Beware of pushy salespeople.**

Some temp companies may not give you the initial information you request via phone or email and will instead want to send a salesperson to your office. While this is not always a red flag, it is something to take note of. If the sales meeting goes smoothly, with the salesperson asking you many questions about your needs and not being pushy, that's fine. However, if the salesperson spends the entire time telling you all the reasons why you should choose them and doesn't seem interested in your needs, you'll want to find another service.

After that initial sales meeting, you'll often never see the salesperson again and will instead be talking with the internal specialist who interviews and screens the candidates. This is the person you want to build the relationship with. Some companies have their branch manager doing the outside sales,

providing ongoing customer service, and directly supervising the person who does the screening and placement. Some smaller companies have one person doing sales, screenings, and placements. Unfortunately, some companies pay more for the pushy salesperson than they do the person doing the placements. If any salesperson makes you feel pressured or rushed to use their services, call another service.

- **Don't make a decision based solely on price.**

All temp agencies have a markup, which is the difference between what the temp actually earns and what you pay the firm for the temp's services. In general, markups run anywhere from 30-60%. That's a huge spread. But as with all things in life, you get what you pay for. The companies with the lower markup generally don't do the same kind of rigorous screening as the companies with the higher markup.

So rather than choose a temp agency based on price, choose based on your need. If you're filling a job that would only require you to invest four hours or so to train the person, then the lower markup company is fine. You simply need someone to do a specific task. However, if the job you're filling requires discretion and critical thinking skills, then seriously consider a higher markup company. After all, if you go with a lower markup company and then have to replace the temp three times before you get the right person, you might as well have paid the higher markup to get a better screened person and avoid all that frustration.

- **Know the nitty-gritty details.**

Each temp agency will have different policies, and it's important that you find out these details before you decide to work with one. In addition to the current markup you pay for the temp, what's the fee if you decide you want to hire the temp full-time? Some companies will simply transfer the person to your payroll after a certain timeframe, while others will require that you pay an additional transfer fee.

Also, ask about a guarantee. How long do you have to decide if the temp they send you is working out? If the person is not working out, what's their policy for replacement? If the temp agency doesn't offer any kind of guarantee, that's a red flag, so find out why. Additionally, find out the level of experience and education of the person who is actually doing the selection. The more education and experience, the better.

- **Notice how the first temp order goes.**

Once you decide on a temp agency to use, your decision process is not 100% complete yet. Use your first temp request as the final test to the agency's professionalism. If you call in a temp request and the person only spends 10 minutes on the phone with you, they don't have enough information to give you a quality temp. Any temp request conversation should take 20 to 30 minutes, unless the salesperson has already obtained key information. The person should ask you such questions as:

- Who will the temp report to and what is that person's personality like?
- What will be the temp's main duties?
- How will you know if the temp is successful?
- How will you measure the temp's performance?
- Why is this position vacant?
- What's the culture of the department the temp will be working in?
- Will this role go to direct hire, or do you want a long-term temp?

Additionally, if you call in a temp request and the agency doesn't respond within a day to tell you the progress on that order, that's not a responsive temp service and you may want to look elsewhere.

Temporary Solutions for Great Results

Using temporary employees is a great solution for many companies. Fortunately, temps can be just as skilled as your full-time employees. The good ones, though, are in high demand. To ensure that you get the best of the unemployed, you want to find a service that targets and attracts the top 20% of the unemployed talent out there. Such temp firms are usually staffed by referrals and do very little advertising

to recruit their temps; they are so effective that people tell their friends to go apply, and therefore they get the very best of the unemployed.

Ultimately, any temp service is only as good as the people it places. If you have a job to be done, not only do you want someone technically qualified, but you also want someone who has a positive outlook, someone who works well with others, and someone who is a self-starter. So do your due diligence before working with any temp agency. When you do, you'll find great people to work with who will help your work go smoothly and add to your company's success.

Visit www.jeankelley.com for more information on Jean Kelley's consulting services.

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