

# STRATEGIES

## Temps need on-the-job support

### Clear instructions lead to efficiency

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**C**runch time can happen any time. It's flu season and key employees are bedridden. It's vacation season and key employees are away. Meanwhile, it's business as usual.

Most companies, especially smaller ones, generally look to temporary placement agencies for help.

While it is rare to find short-term help who can step right in and do specialized work, temporaries can help with a multitude of tasks.

To make sure the temps you hire really are helpful during your company's crunch time or can efficiently fill in while a staff member is on leave, take the following advice:

- **Plan.** What exactly do you need the temp to do for you? What might come

up? Before contacting your human resources department or an agency, write down your needs and wants. Specific requests get filled the quickest, since salary and experience level are more easily determined.

- **Inquire.** Ask your staff how and where temporary workers would be most useful. Then ask your best workers to recommend someone for the job. Consider giving some sort of reward if the recommendation turns into a hire. Recommend-a-friend temps are generally less expensive than using agencies. However, temps from agencies usually have been screened and tested for skills.

- **Communicate.** Let your employees know what you're doing. Even the most secure employees may feel threatened when suddenly new faces are in the next cubicle. Letting staff know beforehand, and letting them help determine the best ways to utilize temps, can get them excited about the extra help, because they'll know you're doing this to help them as well as yourself.

- **Prepare.** Don't pay good money to



have your temp sit around watching you create a workspace. Before the person arrives, allocate a workspace, find a phone, a computer and any other supplies the worker might need.

- **Who's the boss?** Assign a buddy to meet the temp at the door and introduce him to the supervisor and co-workers. Let the temp know who to go to with questions. A trip around the building to find the coffee, copier, restroom and café wouldn't hurt, either.

- **Communicate again.** Provide new temps both a written and verbal explanation of exactly what you want done. Be clear about work rules, office routines, daily starting and quitting times, breaks and the length of the assignment.

- **Be reasonable.** Don't expect a temporary mail clerk to know everyone's

location within five minutes or a receptionist to immediately understand all the peculiarities of your phone system. The project can be challenging, just be realistic about what a newbie can accomplish.

- **Communicate some more.** The assigned supervisor or buddy should check in with the temp to answer questions and evaluate progress. The most basic instructions can be misunderstood, so it's a good idea to follow up to make sure the project is on schedule. It's much cheaper to correct mistakes early than have to write off a whole day's work simply due to a miscommunication.

- **Respect.** Temps may not be around long, but while they are, they are a crucial part of your team. Remember, you would not have called them in if you could do all the work yourself. Treat these workers just as you would anyone else — or better yet, treat them as you would like to be treated. After the project has begun, get their feedback and suggestions. Professional temporaries — there actually are such animals — have experience in a variety of environments. They may have perspectives you've never dreamed of that could end up saving you a bundle.

- **Temp-to-hire?** While most employers, especially smaller ones, use temps specifically for special projects, there are those who actually intend to keep good workers on after completion. If you are one of those employers, don't withhold that information. It may be the extra incentive necessary to motivate superior performance.

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### TEMP FACTS

The staffing industry has expanded rapidly during the past 25 years and so has the use of temporaries.

- Temporary employment placement increased from 165,000 people in 1972 to more than 2 million in 1995, reflecting an annual growth rate of more than 11 percent.

- Nine out of 10 U.S. businesses use the services of a staffing industry firm, according to a recent survey by Business and Legal Reports.

- More than one-third of the companies surveyed plan to increase their use of staffing industry services.

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that from 1994 to 2005, temporary employment opportunities will have expanded by more than 50 percent.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics