

Part-time personnel, full-time headaches

by PHILIP M. PERRY

Motivating full-time employees is hard enough. But part-time and temporary workers pose a special challenge.

How do you light fires under people who are often saddled with low-level work, blocked from climbing the career ladder, and treated like "outsiders" by the full-time staff?

"Contingency" workers now account for 20 percent of America's workforce. That number is expected to rise to 30 percent within a decade.

"Part-time and temporary employees have become vital tools for keeping labor costs under control," says Carl Johnson, president of Princeton Employee Relations, Princeton, N.J.

Unmotivated contingency workers, however, are dangerous. Feeling demoralized, they perform listlessly and neglect customers. That threatens your profits. Worse, disenchanted part-time workers are apt to quit for greener pastures. That saddles your business with the costly task of training replacements.

Here's some good news. You *can* motivate these employees. The secret is to avoid common errors that "turn off" temporary help:

TIP #1 ▶ **Don't give them the cold shoulder.** Give them a warm welcome and introduce them to the staff. Make them feel a part of the family.

Bonus tip: Avoid confusion and hurt feelings by clearly identifying the chain of command to the new employee. Who is authorized to give orders?

TIP #2 ▶ **Don't turn them loose without orientation.** "Cover the basic things: what are the policies of the firm? What are overtime policies?," says Bruce Steinberg, spokesperson for the National Association of Temporary and Staffing Services, Alexandria, Va.

Bonus tip: Plan ahead. "Don't just assume that when people show up, you will get everything ready," says Steinberg. "Prepare their tools and anything else."

TIP #3 ▶ **Assign a mentor.** "A mentor is a tremendous motivational tool," says Don Schackne, president of Personnel Management and Administration Associates, Delaware, Ohio. "Select someone who is willing to teach and is patient. You can also assign a few permanent people as roving mentors."

Bonus tip: The mentor will feel good about the added responsibility.

TIP #4 ▶ **Don't exert too much control.** You'll never find out if there is "a better way" if you don't give the new worker the freedom to use creative problem-solving.

"When contingency workers believe they are making a difference in an organization, they feel better about being there," says Ian Jacobsen, a Sunnyvale, Calif.-based consultant.

Bonus tip: Encourage everyone to think creatively by recognizing new ideas publicly.

TIP #5 ▶ **Don't load down part-timers with "grunt" tasks,** those jobs no one else wants to do. Remember that everyone feels good about improving skills. What challenging tasks can you assign to the new employees? Ask them what skills they would like to acquire. There's nothing wrong with assigning low-level tasks. But make sure to *add* some specialized jobs to spark loyalty and enthusiasm.

Bonus tip: Rotate the mundane tasks among all employees to keep boredom to a minimum.

TIP #6 ▶ **Don't overlook work well done.** That's devastating. "The recognition of a job well done is even more important for contingent workers," says Dr. Peter Spevak of

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the Center for Applied Motivation, Rockville, Md. "Their own identity with the company is not as strong, and they need to be reinforced."

Bonus tip: Consider giving a plaque to the part-time "Worker of the Month."

TIP #7 ► Do not allow conflicts with full-time employees, who may feel threatened by part-timers, fearing for their own jobs. So explain to current workers why you are bringing in outsiders; communicate that the new people do not represent a threat to the jobs of full-time staffers.

Bonus tip: Reward successful referrals with cash bonuses.

TIP #8 ► Do not omit temporary workers from business activities. Invite them to workshops and seminars, employee lunches, parties, and any other normal activities.

Bonus tip: Hold a party for every

temp's birthday.

TIP #9 ► Don't overlook financial incentives. Times are changing: bonuses are not reserved for permanent staffers any more. "Develop some kind of a bonus plan," says Schackne. Perhaps insurance coverage or vacation time after a certain number of successful work hours.

Bonus tip: Pay contingent workers a little more per hour than competing businesses. This will keep competitors from raiding your workers after you have invested in their training.

TIP #10 ► Don't insist on rigid hours. Many part-time and temporary workers do not want to be tied down to 8-to-4 hours. Capitalize on that. If you allow for flexible hours, you will encourage employees to stay with you.

Bonus tip: Avoid panic situations by encouraging employees to let you know in

advance of any anticipated scheduling conflicts.

"In the past...temporary workers came, performed menial functions and left with little interaction," notes Marc Silbert of Robert Half International, Menlo Park, Calif. "Now, they serve virtually all aspects of the workplace. They should be recognized as the professionals they are." □

—The author is a freelance business writer based in New York City.

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