

Q&A Column
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Email Subject Line: Should I “Temp” When Job Searching?

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Headline: To “Temp” or Not When Job Hunting

Summary:

Question: I have been looking for a full-time job for three months straight without any luck. Finally I found just the right position. But they can only offer a four month contract to start with. Should I take it anyway and hope they’ll keep me on, or should I continue seeking “real” employment elsewhere?

Antonio B, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

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Headline: To “Temp” or Not When Job Hunting

Dear Mark,

Question: I have been looking for a full-time job for three months straight without any luck. Finally I found just the right position in a company that’s respected in my industry (automotive). The thing is they can only offer a four month contract role to start with, given their current budget constraints. The position comes without benefits and no commitment to hiring me permanently, or even to extending past the initial term. Should I take it anyway and hope they’ll keep me on, or should I continue seeking “real” employment elsewhere?

Antonio B, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Dear Antonio,

Difficult decision. If you accept, you’ll be working again and will have your foot in the door at a company you’d like to stay with. However you’re pretty much taking yourself off the “real” job market while you’re there. So there are some definite pro’s and con’s to consider.

First some clarification. There are basically two different types of temporary jobs: “contract positions” and “temp assignments.” A *contract position* is generally offered by the employer itself. It may include some benefits, and it could pay you as if you were a regular employee. Or it could simply treat you as a third party supplier, pay you a daily rate or agreed upon salary, and not deduct any taxes at source (as a contractor, that would be considered *your* responsibility). Terms of three months to a year are not uncommon. *Temp assignments* are typically found through personnel agencies and staffing firms, such as Manpower, Drake, Addeco and many others. Most times you will be treated as an employee of the agency that you secured the interim job through. Positions could last from one day to several months, and could convert to permanent on occasion.

During the course of my own career, I have taken on several short-term assignments in large companies. Interestingly, one was advertised as a five month role with absolutely no possibility of extension. Every single manager who interviewed me made it clear – no more than five months! Once I was in there and proved myself, however, the contract was extended to 12 additional months, and then they eventually hired me full-time. Total duration of the five-month-only

position? 3 ½ years. (Alright, so then they downsized me while I was married and my wife was pregnant. But I did get a great severance package which softened the blow considerably!)

In other words, Antonio, even if an employer or agency tells you that there is no chance whatsoever of extending the position, once you are in there things could change. But does this guarantee you anything. Nope. Many temporary positions end exactly on the day specified in the original agreement. And then you're back on your own looking for a longer term job again.

Here are some things to consider in making your decision:

- does the employer have a history of turning temp roles into permanent positions?
- can you commit to the term of the contract you're accepting and not leave the employer high and dry if a better offer comes up elsewhere while you're working for them? (Your reputation could suffer by doing this, especially in smaller communities or when working with an agency who might refuse to represent you again, or come after you financially).
- Will you regret putting your work search on the backburner when, if you had kept at it full speed, you might have landed something more solid?
- Would you be able to explain to a future employer why you accepted a temporary job instead of going for your true goal? (One reasonable explanation might be that you wanted to explore a few different working environments before being ready to commit to the one that's ideal for you. Now you're fully prepared and can't wait to get hired by the interviewer who's asking you this question!)

Regardless of what you choose to do here, try to be sure that you're doing it for sound strategic reasons, not just because you're exhausted and frustrated by your work search and this seems like an easier option. And if you do take on this role, make sure to keep networking; inside your new company, with outside contacts, and with recruiters you've been dealing with. This way you'll be readier to roll if the longed for extension doesn't appear.