

Making Your Temp Job Permanent

By Amy Lindgren

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Temporary jobs have always served as a pressure valve for difficult employment situations. Not enough money to hire a staff person? Hire a temp instead. Not enough experience to compete as a candidate for the job? Go in as a temp and build your skills. The temp option has taken pressure off employers and workers alike through good and bad economies.

There's just one problem, at least as far as the worker goes: There's no promise of a temporary position becoming permanent. And while many temps like the freedom and variety of short-term stints, I'm willing to bet at least as many would prefer a full-time, permanent place to park a coffee mug.

If you've been considering temp work or are in this situation, you need a strategy. While some positions never become permanent due to their nature (think end-of-the-year inventory counter), others may be great entry points to a company or job you would really enjoy.

But unless the position is labeled temp-to-perm from the beginning (which means they're trying you out before deciding to make an offer), you'll have to play your cards well to turn a short-term option into a long-term job. Here are some tips:

- 1. Hedge your bets.** Sign up with more than one temporary agency and keep in touch with each recruiter so you don't slip through the cracks.
- 2. Tell your recruiters your real goal** is a permanent position but that you're more than willing to take any temporary assignment they offer.
- 3. Stand by your word — take any assignment.** Unless the position is flat-out awful or entails three buses and a rickshaw for a commute, do your best to accept. In this initial stage, you're building your relationship with your recruiter, and you need to demonstrate a willingness to work.
- 4. Be reliable, trustworthy, etc.** When you report for your assignment, remember that you represent your agency and your recruiter as well as yourself. A successful first assignment usually leads to better assignments with better companies.
- 5. Stay in touch with your recruiter** while on the job. If the agency doesn't already request a report, send a weekly update on the tasks you're conducting on the job. Keeping your recruiter informed not only strengthens your relationship, it

also allows him or her to evaluate whether your services are being billed appropriately — and whether you're being compensated fairly.

6. Make friends on the job, but not too many. It's a paradox of temp life that you are supposed to be friendly but not too friendly. The client company expects you to get along well with others but not to waste time chatting and gossiping.

7. Develop a thick skin. I've never understood this, but I've experienced it myself and I've heard reports from my clients: Even in a small work group, the temp often will be excluded from social events and small celebrations. I wouldn't expect the temporary worker to be invited to someone's wedding, but why would you pass around birthday cake and exclude one person? Whatever. Just keep smiling and remind yourself to pick up a cake of your own on the way home.

8. Please your bosses. Your first challenge is to figure out who your boss actually is. Inevitably, someone will act bossy until he or she is finally pushed aside by the real person directing your work. Once you understand the chain of command, follow it religiously. It's the only real way to avoid politics while also ensuring the person who butters your bread is well cared for.

9. Track your work. Keep a record of the tasks you perform each day as well as the completed projects. Eventually, you will use this information to a) update your resume; b) update your recruiter; or c) impress your boss.

10. Tell your temporary boss your real goal is to work in a permanent position. Ask if your role could turn permanent. If that option is remote, request advice or contacts within the company for permanent positions once your assignment has been completed.

11. Collect letters of recommendation. When your position is nearing an end, ask your boss for the favor of a written recommendation to use in your job search.

12. Take the high road. If your assignment shows signs of turning permanent, tell your recruiter. It may cost the company extra to "buy" you from the temp firm, but that's more than balanced by the money saved in not conducting a search for candidates.

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