

## Try before you buy

By Kevin Steele  
Sunday, July 2, 2006



Kevin Steele

If you are currently between jobs and focusing all your energy on finding your next career opportunity, you may want to seriously consider contract assignments while you continue your search.

Some people may feel that investing themselves in a contract assignment will result in uninteresting work while distracting them from their primary goal of finding a full-time job.

The truth may surprise you: More and more companies are utilizing contract employees, not only to fill temporary needs but as a way to evaluate a potential employee for a full-time opportunity.

In addition, contract opportunities can be very challenging in terms of complexity and responsibility and very rewarding financially.

Here are a few of the benefits you may experience by taking on a contract job:

**Cash Flow:** Being out of work for any length of time can put a serious dent in the household budget. Contract opportunities, while not typically offering benefits, can in many cases pay you as much, if not more, than you were making in your previous position.

**Experience:** Taking on one or two assignments gives you the opportunity to experience another company's business environment, systems and processes. Work projects can add skills and experience to your resume and increase your marketability. You may have the opportunity to learn new software or break into a new industry.

**Mental Health:** Being out of work can be an emotionally trying experience. Sometimes there are leftover feelings of anger at your previous employer. Some people who are unemployed for a period of time begin experiencing self doubt regarding their capabilities and value to a new employer.

Contracting can get you back in the saddle. Working with other professionals and reinforcing your confidence is key to being able to interview successfully for your next permanent opportunity.

**Flexibility:** Most employers understand that although you are contracting, your primary goal is looking for a full-time job. Therefore, they will be more understanding in allowing you the opportunity to interview.

Obviously, you cannot abuse this privilege and will need to communicate with your supervisor to ensure your absences are not at critical times nor will they impact your work or that of your department.

**References:** Having the ability to add two or three current references to your list can be a significant advantage. This is especially true for an individual who was previously employed by one company for a long period of time.

These new references can confirm to a potential employer that you were able to quickly adapt, learn new systems and procedures and contribute positively in a new environment.

**Resume Gap:** We all know when reviewing a resume, one of the first things a human resources professional, recruiter or hiring manager does is check for gaps: Those pesky places where the end date of a past job doesn't match the start date of your next - by several months!

By working in contract positions, you eliminate such gaps, or reduce the length of time absent from employment. Just make sure to indicate which jobs on your resume were contract assignments so there is no implication of you holding a full-time position for such a short period of time.

**Try Before You Buy:** Employment is a two-way street. Not only does your employer have to be happy with you, you have to enjoy your position and workplace. By "test driving" a company via a contract gig, you are able to evaluate first-hand items you won't be able to learn from research or interviewing, including actual day-to-day work, structure, culture, hierarchy and politics.

**Permanent Job:** Last, but most importantly, the contract assignment could turn into your next full-time opportunity. Many contract jobs are planned to evolve that way by the employer. Hires that take place under these circumstances have a high rate of success as many of the uncertainties and questions have already been eliminated or answered.

But in some cases, these permanent positions are created once an employer sees the skills and experience you bring to the table.

Broadening your search for a new position can not only be a plus financially, it can also give you the additional experience and credibility to increase your chances of success.

So, if you find your search taking longer than expected, consider a contract opportunity - you never know where it could lead.

*Kevin Steele joined Winter, Wyman & Co. in 1978 and became President in 1996. In his role, Kevin oversees the daily operations and strategic development activities of Winter, Wyman. Prior to joining the firm, Kevin was the North American HR Manager for Data General Corporation. He is a graduate of Providence College in Rhode Island. Headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts, Winter, Wyman specializes in permanent and contract staffing for Accounting and Finance, HR and technology professionals. Learn more at [www.winterwyman.com](http://www.winterwyman.com).*