

HR Contracting – develop your career!

Why are some HR professionals getting fast tracked HR experience through HR contract assignments yet there is still resistance from the profession to consider contracting? Amongst the HR profession, contracting has traditionally been seen as a short-term measure to an employment or financial situation. This typically covers a range of circumstances from filling in between permanent positions or returning to the workforce after parental leave through to practitioners from overseas working on visas.

What many people in the HR profession do not realise is that contracting represents an excellent vehicle through which to develop their HR skills and ultimately increase their marketability in the job market.

Contracting – a path to open new doors

In the permanent HR recruitment market, there is still a tendency to recruit HR practitioners on the basis of where they have gained their experience rather than on true capability. Despite the growth in HR jobs and increasingly limited talent pool, many organisations continue to be blinkered in their outlook when it comes to recruiting HR practitioners. Companies are refusing to consider those who come from industries outside of their own. This trend does not always extend to the contract market.

With the current strong employment market, organisations are often willing to be more flexible in their outlook when recruiting contract staff. This flexibility offers the opportunity for HR contractors to gain experience in industry sectors which might otherwise be closed to them in the permanent market.

This subsequently allows HR contractors to build a broad portfolio of skills across a range of industries, in the process enhancing their CV and opening up future opportunities in the permanent market.

Therefore, HR contracting can allow the individual to increase their skill set far more quickly than would be possible working for one employer in a permanent role.

Why the resistance to contracting?

Previously, it is fair to say, there was a stigma attached to contracting and a preconception that contractors were second best. Concerns around security and how working as a contractor

would be viewed by a potential employer, also dissuaded many HR practitioners from seriously considering contract work as a viable option. This has certainly changed in the last few years as people have become motivated by goals other than security such as work-life balance and increased flexibility.

Another factor is the entry in to the workforce of generation 'Y' and the length of role tenure continuing to fall, the stigma previously attached to people having multiple roles no longer rings true. Furthermore, in today's environment of constant change, security is a rare commodity even in the permanent arena, with employers far less likely to discriminate against practitioners who have had multiple contract roles.

So why contract ?

As the HR profession evolves, organisations are increasingly looking for practitioners with strong commercial aptitude and the ability to engage with multiple stakeholders in a business as well as a people context. Contracting allows the HR practitioner to develop their exposure to a range of organisations and business scenarios as well as to enhance their soft skills such as stakeholder management and relationship building, skills which are becoming more and more sought after.

While HR contracting certainly offers the HR practitioner the chance to develop their skills and experience, there are also a number of other intrinsic benefits for the HR contractor:-

- increased variety of work
- lack of involvement in company politics
- the chance to take holidays between contracts
- increased independence
- the ability to choose projects based on career goals
- increased work-life balance and getting paid for every hour worked.

Of course, contracting isn't for everybody and there are drawbacks such as lack of paid annual and sick leave (this is often built in to the contract rate to compensate) and lack of social and financial continuity. Despite the potential and assumed drawbacks, contracting offers numerous advantages and benefits, not least of which is the opportunity to build up an impressive portfolio of skills across a broad range of industries. For those ultimately looking for permanent employment, contracting offers the opportunity to 'try before you buy'. Contracting can be a great gateway for those looking to enter a new industry and can very often lead to the offer of a permanent position.

With a buoyant economy the need for contract roles will no doubt increase as employers continue to face a shrinking resource pool and ever expanding workloads. For those HR practitioners looking to broaden their skill set or move across industries there has never been a better time to consider contracting! **HC**

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