

Temp workforce shifts

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Brenda Lyle Porter had spent three months out of the workforce and found that her job search was not going well.

“Things weren’t happening as quickly as I had hoped,” said Ms. Lyle Porter. “I wanted a permanent job, but it wasn’t happening. I decided to try a temporary agency because I had worked for one in the past and it was a good experience.”

Ms. Lyle Porter, it turns out, made the right decision.

Within a week the employment agency MRI placed her at National Systems Contractors Association (NSCA) in Cedar Rapids, Ms. Lyle Porter was offered a permanent position.

“For me, I have a lot of confidence in myself and once I know I can handle the tasks assigned to the job, I knew that it was something that I could do,” said Ms. Lyle Porter. “I enjoyed getting to know my co-workers and the work environment.”

This is only one of many examples of local companies hiring temporary workers with the intent of making their placement a permanent one – a trend that benefits not only the employer but also the job seeker.

“The number of temporary jobs leading to permanent positions has absolutely increased. As the market upshifts or upticks it only increases the opportunities,” said Cindy Lyness, general manager of MRI of Cedar Rapids. “A number of our clients enjoy the flexibility to assess talent on their performance and abilities. It also allows temporary workers to understand the culture or atmosphere of a company before a commitment is made.”

MRI of Cedar Rapids is a franchise of Management Recruiters International, the largest executive search firm in the world. The company specializes in placing people in four areas: insurance, long-term care, Eastern Iowa business and contract or temporary placement.

“Companies use long-term temporary projects to test the waters,” said Erin Kray-Dusil, senior account manager at MRI. “Using ‘just-in-time’ employees are a cost-effective way to handle the marketplace changes without incurring the cost of benefits.”

After the economy took a nose-dive in the late 1990s and many companies were forced to lay-off employees, companies now take a more careful and strategic look at hiring staff, said Ms. Kray Dusil.

“It was painful to terminate employees, and they do not want to make the same mistake again,” she said.

Melissa Jensen, temporary services administrator at MRI of Cedar Rapids, views her job as a local “employment” talent scout. Although employees are deemed “temporary,” it is still important to make sure they possess all the necessary skills and fit with the company, she said.

“I work with temporary workers and make sure that their skills are updated and that there are no gaps in employment,” said Ms. Jensen. “And I work with the companies as

well, because it is important that it is a good fit all around. The employees want to be with a good company for a long-term match and businesses want quality workers.”

Aaron Schroeder, branch manager of Team Staffing Solutions in Cedar Rapids also sees the development of a definite trend. The time frame from temporary to permanent employee could take anywhere from one day to three months, he said.

But Mr. Schroeder said he also noticed that the caliber of people applying for temporary jobs has increased as more skilled workers looking for employment due to layoffs and downsizing.

“Going through a temporary agency takes the guesswork out of it for a company,” he said. “It offers a wide variety of choices.”

According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 2 million people work as contingent employees, which include contractors, on-call workers and temporary employees. In 2003 staffing companies showed a dramatic increase in the number of temporary workers employed on an average daily basis. The 2.27 million increase came after two years of declining numbers

“Many more employers are hiring on contract than just looking for to fill permanent positions,” said Meagan Moore, senior recruiter for TEKsystems in Cedar Rapids, which is a sister company to Aerotek.

“There used to not be as many contract openings and owners and managers wanted to hold onto full-time jobs and find the right person,” said Ms. Moore, adding that clients are now more confident in their abilities and are willing to take a chance or gamble. “It puts control in their hands and they think ‘I can get this job if I show them how good I am,’ and then it can likely become permanent.”

And employers also enjoy the flexibility.

Katie Chism, director of education at NSCA feels that their company has been very fortunate in the type of temporary employees who have been placed with them.

“What we like most is witnessing how an employee’s work habits fit within our work environment or culture,” said Ms. Chism. “It offers us a chance to see if we have them ‘on the right seat of the bus’ as we call it. It provides us an opportunity to make a change and it has worked out very well for us.”

For Brenda Lyle Porter, she could not be more pleased with her experience as a temporary worker.

“I would recommend temporary work to anyone. Some people take a job right out of college and find out that it just doesn’t work out,” said Ms. Lyle Porter. “And I don’t know if it is a trend, but I know that it was a wonderful experience and I would do again.”