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What's Good and Bad About Temp Work

What you need to know before signing up with an agency

By *Candice Novak*

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Even in good times, job-hopping is normal in this country. But with a slumping economy and anxiety about job security, [temporary employment agencies](#) are seeing a rise in applicants.



(Reza Estakhريان/Stone/Getty Images)

After six straight months of private-sector job losses, if you're looking for a job, you're not alone. Temp agencies are often the place to jump-start your search. They provide an option for those who have growing gaps in their résumés and those who are looking for extra money without entering (or going back) into the workforce full time.

McKinsey Quarterly called hiring temps, or "tapping into the world of talent," the third top business technology trend to watch as companies increasingly parcel out "more work to specialists, free agents, and talent networks." The American Staffing Association reports that temporary and contract staffing agencies employed 2.96 million people each day and 11.4 million individuals over the course of 2007.

For workers, temping can be the difference between getting by and not. But before you walk into an agency office, there are some things you should know about when to temp and when it's better not to.

The Upside

Filling gaps: If you have a blank-slate résumé or a growing gap in

employment dates, temp agencies provide a way to fill them. Elizabeth Freedman, who runs a Boston career development and communications firm, says temp agencies can "help newbies get a foot in the door to a wide range of companies."

Taking those positions can say more about you than you think. "Employers are experiencing the Y generation and millennials as having the attitude that tasks are 'below' them. By doing temp work, it indicates a good attitude and work ethic that is desperately sought by employers in their workforce," says Michelle Tillis Lederman, founder of Executive Essentials, a corporate training and coaching company.

Return from retirement: On the flip side of career experience, as the newly retired struggle to piece together their finances, they increasingly seek temp positions—a happy medium between full-time work and full-time retirement. Temp agencies say they are welcome. "The graying workforce," says Chuck Ray, the Washington, D.C., regional director of temp giant [Manpower](#), is becoming "more attractive to employers as they bring acumen and judgment to jobs."

Moving moms and dads: When a couple moves for one to take a job, the other often temps while looking for permanent work in the new location. Sue Shellenbarger of the *Wall Street Journal*, who blogs

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