

A TEMPORARY SOLUTION FOR A NEW AMERICAN WORKER

Nowadays, a cohort of workers prefers temporary work — and the flexibility it offers them — to long-term, full-time employment.

For one thing, job security is not what it used to be. In businesses across America, temporary workers are becoming a part of business as usual. In March, *USA Today* reported that in a few years, a quarter of the American workforce will be made up of contract workers, sometimes called "permatemps."

American workers are also being pushed by external forces to change the ways they survive and flourish. Increasingly, workers operate as independent contractors or free agents, roving from job to job. They live in a world of temporary office space with temporary cubicles and temporary co-workers.

Even though the nation's unemployment rate has stubbornly stayed above 9 percent for 19 months, the number of temporary jobs is on the upswing. In fact, since September 2009, the total number of temporary-help employees has risen by nearly 500,000, a 29 percent jump for the category, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. During the same period, overall private jobs have grown less than 1 percent

In the United States, says Juan Carlos Cruz, Manpower's director of communications, "economic uncertainty remains and companies are doing more with less. Companies are focused on maintaining financial flexibility and, therefore, more flexibility in their workforce. Older, younger, urbanites and rural people are all part of this trend." Being a temp, many people say, offers malleable work schedules, opportunities for travel and chances to choose employers rather than the other way around.

Like Carla Hernandez. A 34-year-old painter, Hernandez had a full-time job with an established employer but gave it up to pursue her own creativity in an entrepreneurial fashion. Until November 2008, she was a traveling exhibitions registrar at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and since leaving she has worked at seven or so different places.

However, many people do not choose to be temporary workers. They would like to have full-time jobs with benefits and some security. Temps say they don't get a chance to make lasting friendships and they don't share in the job security that full-time workers enjoy. It's harder to apply for credit cards and home loans. And there are always concerns about benefits. Companies such as Assurant Health offer temporary health insurance and Manpower provides health care plans to some of its temps.

Perhaps we are evolving to the next level of Henry Ford's vision as we shift from mass production to a mass of producers, and from an economy in which laborers who once worked with interchangeable parts on the assembly line become themselves the interchangeable parts.

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