

The Art of Hiring Virtual Employees

Today's proliferation of technology makes it easier than ever for employees to work from anywhere. They become, in effect, "virtual employees." Virtual employees are popping up like virtual mushrooms after an imaginary rain, fueled by several trends: technological innovations, hiring advantages, environmental concerns over vehicle emissions and worry over corporate viability in a crisis, such as the World Trade Center bombing, Hurricane Katrina or a pandemic scare such as the H1N1 flu.

Other trend-drivers include addressing work-life issues, broadening the pool of candidates and reducing capital costs.

Not for Everyone

Not all employees are cut out for jobs with minimal supervision. What does it take to be a successful virtual employee and how can HR departments help managers identify those who have the right virtual stuff?

As with any employee, you need to:

- Clearly outline the requirements of the position;
- Communicate the availability of the position;
- Screen candidates;
- Conduct interviews;

- Make a hiring selection.

Minimal Supervision

One difference in hiring virtual employees is in outlining requirements for the position. You have to consider traits and characteristics that will function well with minimal supervision. These may include such things as:

- Effective communication and commitment to maintaining that communication;
- Strong organizational skills;
- Ability to maintain focus and be self-directed;
- Facility with current technology.

Employees least likely to be successful virtual employees are those who have a high need for social interaction, are easily distracted by outside demands, need an office setting to work productively and lack adequate child- or elder-care arrangements to ensure focus on work.

Another difference from the traditional hiring process is that you may well interview and hire sight unseen. While this has become common when hiring IT professionals, it is less common in other fields, and may be somewhat unnerving to managers used to face time being crucial to hiring decisions.

The key is focusing on the similarities,

not the differences. Much of the employment relationship is the same with a virtual worker as with an employee located in a corporate headquarters. And today's technology allows for even closer monitoring of performance, once clearly communicated and measurable performance goals are in place.

Those who have already embraced virtual operations agree that while close attention to communication and accountability are critical, the benefits of the arrangements can outweigh the drawbacks. ▲

Temporary Workers Can Be Part of Recovery, Too

It's been a tough year for most businesses. All our belts are tightened and we're getting by on minimal staff. But tough as things have been, the light at the end of the tunnel may be in sight, say national experts.

But if business does increase in 2010, how do you handle it with an exhausted, stretched-thin staff? Especially when you can't be sure if the increase isn't just a blip?

The answer is the same as in good times. Use our temporary employees to handle work your staff is stretched too far to handle. The upside to the dismal employment picture is that we have a lot of very well qualified, experienced temporary workers at all skill levels who can help you. If a business recovery proves ephemeral, it's easy to cut back temp staff without penalty.

But if business keeps recovering, these same temporary workers can be converted to permanent staff, if you choose. You win both ways, and can be ready to take advantage of a recovering economy.



For More Information:

How to Manage Virtual Employees

<http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/networking/teten-allen/052307-managing-virtual-employees.html>

Virtual Employees

<http://www.corpmagazine.com/Departments/HumanResources/tabid/72/itemid/385/Default.aspx>