



How To Win At The Gig “Game” – Tips for Successfully Sourcing, Onboarding, and Retaining Independent Workers

Insights

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Today’s employment “Game of Life” looks very different than it used to. One of the biggest reasons: the gig economy is expanding at a rapid pace. Other factors include the fact that there are four generations competing for work and working together, while certain demographics, such as the number of single women in the workforce, are on the rise. Meanwhile, employees’ definitions of family and work/life balance are changing. Add all of these together and you have the perfect platform for the exploding sharing economy. Working in the gig “game” appeals to those interested in an alternative, more flexible, more relaxed lifestyle. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, gig workers like being in control, having flexibility, enjoy variety, and enjoy choosing work that they are passionate about. As a result of the growth of this area, employees’ workplace expectations are changing. So, too, should employers’ practices for utilizing and integrating such workers into their business model.

It is estimated that roughly 55 million Americans are now freelancing. According to software company Oracle, almost 40% of companies surveyed are currently hiring on a project basis. Half of HR decision makers say they will be hiring more temporary workers by 2020. Considering these statistics, successfully sourcing, onboarding, and retaining gig workers should be a top priority for such employers. In fact, more employers chose retaining employees as an important benefits objective than increasing employee productivity and controlling health and welfare benefit costs, according to MetLife’s 15th Annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study.

What can you do as an employer to “win” at the gig “game?”

Before You Play, Analyze Your Need and Ability to Utilize Gig Workers

A definite “con” of gig work is inconsistency. Gig workers will appreciate companies who have already thoughtfully evaluated their need and abilities to utilize such workers.

There are lots of ways to test the waters before hiring gig workers as your “guinea pigs.” First, consider allowing existing employees to choose projects in different areas or departments. This can help clarify what projects might be well suited for gig workers as well as what skills may be necessary and required from a gig worker.

Next, consider partnering with a gig company who already has an existing product or service that could benefit your organization. This can help you assess whether a partnership with a gig company

could benefit your organization. This can help you assess whether a partnership with a gig company is enough, or whether your organization could benefit from utilizing workers in a more direct fashion.

Finally, consider sourcing gig talent through professional service firms. This can help you rest more assured that you are getting a pre-vetted, quality worker with the necessary skills and experience you require. This may also help the worker feel that you, as a company, take them more seriously by paying for the services of a professional service firm.

Do Not Pass “Go” and Do Not “Collect \$200” Until You Clarify Independent Contractor Status

Failing to clarify a gig worker’s independent contractor status from the beginning can be a big no-no. Often times, lawsuits ensue when a worker’s expectations of his employer are unmet, as that can lead to a worker feeling mistreated, taken advantage of, underappreciated, or undervalued.

Transparency with gig workers is key. Make it clear in your job posting that the position you are filling is an independent contractor. Reiterate this classification in any communications and interviews. Also, consider utilizing independent contractor agreements to memorialize that understanding, as well as to clearly outline any benefits and compensation information. While these tips cannot ensure a gig worker will not challenge their status through litigation, they can at least help get the “game” started off on a symbiotic foot (insert kumbaya music).

Don’t Be a “Control Freak”

Control is a very important concept when it comes to the gig “game.” Gig workers, almost by definition, crave a more flexible and relaxed lifestyle. Exercising too much control over gig workers could very likely drive them away.

Additionally, having too much control over a gig worker can get you into “Trouble” from a wage-and-hour standpoint. The amount of control an employer has, or doesn’t have, over a worker can often times determine whether or not that worker is properly classified as an independent contractor if challenged in court. The less control you exert over a worker, the more likely it is that worker will be properly classified (i.e. you “win”).

Consider Providing Portable Benefits to Gig Workers

Another “con” of the gig “game” is that gig workers don’t usually get employer-paid benefits. However, the concept of “portable benefits” for gig workers is slowly becoming reality. We have previously written about state proposals that would provide various forms of benefits to gig workers in exchange for an agreement the workers are, in fact, independent contractors. Providing some sort of benefits to gig workers will likely make those workers feel more valued and appreciated, which may ensure they remain with your company longer. Again, you “win!”

Overall, gig workers, just like employees, want to feel that they are integrated and part of the team, without giving up their flexibility. Employers who successfully strike that balance should be winning at the gig Game of Life.

