



For the Job Seeker

How to Select a Staffing Company

Whether you want a temporary job or a permanent position, working for a staffing company is a great career move. America's staffing companies match millions of people to millions of jobs. Every day, 2.9 million people are on assignment with staffing companies. In 2006, an estimated 4.4 million staffing employees went on to permanent jobs.

There are three main types of job placements in the staffing industry:

- *Temporary or contract*, where you work for a staffing firm's customer on an interim basis
- *Temp-to-perm or temp-to-hire*, where you work for a staffing firm's customer on a trial basis to determine if the job is a good fit for your skills, interests, and career goals—if so, you become the customer's employee
- *Direct hire or permanent*, where you are recruited by the staffing firm and then hired by its customer

You can work in virtually any occupation with a staffing company. The staffing industry is no longer personified by the temporary file clerk you see in the break room or the college student brought on board to transport boxes to the new office space. Today's staffing employees include truck drivers, accountants, day laborers, scientists, computer programmers, nurses, call center operators—even CEOs.

Here are some reasons why a staffing company might be perfect for you.

We Know Where the Jobs Are

Administrative assistants, lawyers, CFOs, and construction workers—all have found jobs through the staffing industry. America's staffing companies have jobs in virtually all occupations, including ones you've probably never thought of, such as pilots, biotechnologists, teachers, videographers, and dentists.

Businesses of all types and sizes turn to staffing firms for flexibility and access to talent. They know that staffing companies are experts in recruiting and matching employees for temporary, contract, or permanent positions. So when they have job openings, they increasingly go to staffing firms to help meet their work force needs.

You Have the Flexibility to Have a Life

Times have changed. The days of spending 30 years with one company and earning a gold watch are over. In fact, it's often said that the average person will change careers—never mind jobs—five times in his or her lifetime. This presents a wealth of career growth opportunities with the staffing industry.

Working for a staffing firm allows you to experience countless industries, companies, and careers you might never have thought of trying—without a long-term commitment. If you're not happy with an assignment, job setting, or location, you can move on and start fresh with a new job. Since businesses always need temporary help, steady work is common.

Moreover, temporary employment allows you to work when and where you choose. You can work full-time or part-time. Take a summer off. Work just three or four days a week. Fit your schedule around college classes.

American Staffing Association

Or maybe you've moved to a new city and don't want to jump into permanent employment right away until you get a lay of the land.

Besides flexibility, there's an enticing variety of work. One day you might work for an information technology company, the next day a medical supply firm. Your choices are endless.

A Staffing Firm Can Be a Bridge to Permanent Employment

About three quarters of temporary and contract employees move on to permanent jobs. What's more, eight out of 10 businesses say that staffing firms offer a good way to find permanent employees. Whether you are new to or re-entering the work force, are between jobs, or are just looking for career growth, staffing firms can help you land the right position.

Temporary or contract assignments get your foot in the door with a staffing customer, making you a prime candidate if the position becomes permanent. Or you could get a temp-to-perm gig, where you tryout the job and see if it fits your skills and expectations. Furthermore, many staffing firms recruit for permanent positions directly with the customer. So if you're looking for a permanent job, don't be fooled by the antiquated notion of "temp agency." Today's staffing firms offer lots of options and opportunities.

You Can Choose Your Job

One advantage of working with a staffing firm is that you're exposed to a variety of companies, jobs, and opportunities. Assignments can range from a few hours to a few years. After several assignments, you'll have a much better idea of your ideal corporate culture, the type of boss you work best with, and the kind of projects you enjoy.

Two Words: Free Training

Many staffing firms offer employees a wealth of free training. This could be tutorials in PowerPoint, Word, Excel, and a variety of other software and information technology products and programs. It could be a design portfolio critique or a workshop on advertising copywriting. Or it could be seminars on resume preparation, interview skills, or how to behave at a customer work site so as to make a good impression.

How Much Money Will I Make? What About Benefits?

This usually depends on location and experience. After all, a paralegal with two years of experience in St. Louis is unlikely to command as high a salary as someone with 10 years of experience in New York

City. However, in today's tight labor market, staffing firms offer competitive wages and benefits to attract the best talent—some staffing employees make more than their permanent counterparts.

Many firms provide paid vacation and holidays, medical and dental coverage, and retirement plans. Many also offer direct deposit of your payroll and pay you a bonus when you recruit a new employee. Be sure to ask about what benefits are offered when you interview with a staffing firm.

What Kind of Work Will I Do?

Virtually every occupation has a place in today's staffing work force, including:

- **Office-Clerical:** Secretaries, general office clerks, receptionists, administrative assistants, word-processing and data entry operators, cashiers, etc.
- **Industrial:** Manual laborers, food handlers, cleaners, assemblers, drivers, tradesmen, machine operators, maintenance workers, etc.

American Staffing Association

- **Technical, Information Technology, and Scientific:** Engineers, scientists, laboratory technicians, architects, draftsmen, technical writers and illustrators, and computer programmers and designers
- **Health Care:** Physicians, dentists, nurses, hygienists, medical technicians, therapists, home health aides, custodial care workers, etc.
- **Professional-Managerial:** Accountants, bookkeepers, attorneys, paralegals, middle and senior managers, advertising and marketing executives

Many staffing companies specialize in one or several skill sectors. A lawyer is not likely to find the kind of work she's seeking from a day labor firm, and a nurse is not likely to get a job through an accounting staffing firm. So when you're checking out which firms to explore, plan to contact those that serve your occupational niche and request specific assignments for the kind of work that interests you most.

How Are Staffing Assignments Made?

Assignments are made depending on the ratio of candidates to jobs, your skills, and your experience. While some firms retain a pool of employees always at the ready to meet customer needs, most staffing companies cannot guarantee your work schedule, or that you'll always get an assignment in your field. When you contact a staffing firm about possible employment, be sure to ask for a realistic assessment of what to expect.

What Are the Trade-Offs?

While many staffing employees love the flexibility and variety of work and locations that temporary work provides, these kinds of arrangements are not for everyone. You need to be punctual, reliable, and courteous. More and more staffing firms screen for drug use and criminal backgrounds. You must be able to come into a work environment and hit the ground running. It can be challenging to catch on quickly to unfamiliar material, work styles, and office procedures, but you learn a lot from such experiences.

Since you may be changing work sites, you may not have the opportunity to get acquainted with co-workers or feel like part of the team. Or may make lots of new friends. Every situation is different. One thing is certain: you get the freedom of flexibility. If you don't like the job or work environment, you're not tied down to a permanent job. There's always another opportunity awaiting you in the staffing industry.

How Do I Apply With a Staffing Firm?

Becoming an employee of a staffing firm is easy. All you need to do is:

- Register with one or several staffing companies
- Fill out an application
- Take any qualifying tests
- Be interviewed
- Get training, if necessary

But, first, you'll need to find a good firm. That would be a member of the American Staffing Association. ASA members have 15,000 offices across the nation—there's probably at least one in your community. ASA members pledge to adhere to a code of ethics and good practices, most of which deal with employee relations. And ASA members do not charge their employees fees for placing them in jobs. Moreover, because ASA promotes legal, ethical, and professional practices for the staffing industry, you can be assured that its members are kept abreast of the latest developments in labor laws and human recourse best practices.

How Do I Decide Which Firm to Choose?

Staffing work is a partnership. Just as the firm wants to find talented employees, you want a firm that will suit your needs. Here are some tips on finding the right staffing company:

American Staffing Association

1. **Figure out what skills you have.** Go back to "square one." Sit down and make a list of your skills and talents and what knowledge and education you have acquired. Figure out your values, interests, aptitude, personality, and desired lifestyle. Once you have done this, you can better chart your career path. The process will also help prepare you for resume writing, filling out job applications, and interviewing. Learn all you can about the nature of the jobs that interest you. Pay attention to educational requirements, salaries, working conditions, upward mobility, and future outlook.
2. **Check out the staffing firm.** Ask your friends, neighbors, relatives, and business acquaintances what they know about any firm you might be considering. Visit a firm's Web site. Does it display the "member of [ASA] American Staffing Association" graphic? The site should give you a good idea of the kinds of jobs the firm offers. Most staffing firms also let you apply online.
3. **Pay attention to how you are treated during the initial contact.** Were you greeted politely on the phone? What was the atmosphere in the office when you visited? If a company is unpleasant to deal with when you don't even work for it, how can you expect it to take care of you? Besides, if you're unhappy at your staffing firm, it will hurt your performance for a client.
4. **Tell the firm what you want.** Let the firm's recruiters know what work you want, where, and your ideal schedule.
5. **Be persistent and patient.** Sometimes a staffing firm will have an assignment just waiting for someone like you. Sometimes it takes a while to find a customer that needs your skills—or it takes the customer a while to respond (after all, they are people, too, who have meetings, family obligations, vacations, and other things that tie up their schedules and slow down decision processes). Check in with any staffing firm you've contacted at least once a week to remind them of your interest and to demonstrate your eagerness. Keep gauging their interest. If you're not getting the kind of response you could reasonably expect, maybe you should consider checking out other firms that may be a better match for your skills and job requirements.

Whatever you do, don't give up. America's staffing companies match millions of people to millions of jobs—every day. Surely there's one for you!