

MAKE THE MOST OF WORKING ON CONTRACT

*Kim Cochrane
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Mary-Frances Fox, a career consultant and president of Work Creatively, www.workcreatively.com, explains what you need to know about working on contract.

A contract position can prove to be the perfect solution to help you achieve your career goals. It can be a great opportunity to test out ideas about what you would like to do within your career and allow you to prove yourself in a relatively short period of time.

It is important from the outset to have a career plan in place to ensure that you're on the right track and doing the work that you do best and enjoy doing. Once you have that figured out, you can use a contract to gain experience in a particular area and possibly advance awareness of you within the same company and among other freelancers you meet there. Chances are you'll work with these people again, especially if you make a point of keeping in touch.

"While working on contract you should think about how you can best solve the business problem that you are working on and demonstrate your key advantage — the ability to hit the ground running," says Fox.

Permanent jobs are becoming less the norm, and the ranks of the full-time are going to be increasingly filled in with outsourced and contract jobs. Recruiters and hiring managers don't look unfavourably on those who have worked on several contracts, but it is important to understand why you are taking this particular contract.

"When explaining to others about the work that you do, you should be able to explain the projects you worked on in business terms. How did your last contract grow your expertise in the type of work you prefer to do? If you think in these terms you'll be further along in your career plan. Don't label contracts as such on your resumé, but if they advance your overall direction you need never feel shy when asked why you've had so many contract jobs," says Fox.

A contract is a viable option when it increases your knowledge and/or contacts, but there can be pitfalls to consider as well. Too many people leave themselves no choice but to go from contract to contract without really advancing their career image. If you target the role you want each contract to play in building your marketability, you'll be much further ahead.

Very few jobs remain static for longer than 18–24 months now, so it is important to analyze your options and position yourself accordingly. Because you can add new energy to the team, and contribute your external experience to the organization, organizations will appreciate you. Contract staffers may initially seem like keeners compared to full-time employees, and it is possible you will receive more interesting projects. So earn staff's goodwill by being outgoing and helpful.

Finally, think about what you do best, keep samples of your work, write case studies, develop and sustain relationships with your colleagues, and make sure that you continue to network.

What should you keep in mind when considering a contract?

When working on a contract, you must be aware that you need to continue to generate career options for yourself and network for the future. Many people forget this or don't place enough importance on it. Relate your career objective to what you do best and love to do the most and get as much experience in that area as you possibly can. Then remember that your career is not your resumé and it is not static, it is you. In order to be successful, you must do great work, learn as much as you can about client/company needs and the market for what you do, and build your networking ties!

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