

Getting Your Foot in the Door

Working with Staffing Agencies

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Maybe you are a new social worker just out of graduate school, or are a social work professional returning to work after caring for a child or an elderly parent. Maybe you are a seasoned clinician looking to transition from private practice to working in a nonprofit where you are part of a team. In all of these instances, enlisting the help of a staffing agency or recruitment firm may help you reach your career goals a little faster.

Temp agencies, also called staffing or recruitment agencies, offer employment options for social work professionals who are looking for income while seeking a more permanent job. There are a number of staffing agencies in the Boston area that serve the human services and health care fields,



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including a few specifically tailored to social work positions. These include: Social Work P.R.N., Delta-T Group, Arbor Associates, and Maxim Staffing Solutions. In addition, many hospitals and health care systems have their own in-house temp agencies where they select candidates from a “temp pool.” For example, the Partners HealthCare System oversees its own Bulfinch Temps, while Cambridge Health Alliance has an internal temporary staffing department.

Some individuals may be hesitant to enroll with a staffing agency because they want to avoid being assigned to a one-day or one-week position. **While some temp agencies still focus on short-term, immediate openings, most staffing agencies today focus on temp-to-perm assignments, long-term stints, and even direct hire opportunities.** Not only does this type of recruitment attract a more talented and serious candidate pool, but it also helps employers streamline the human resources hiring/screening process.

Even if the temp job does not result in a permanent position, it can help job hunters gain professional networking connections while keeping their work experience and skills up-to-date. Employers are more impressed by a resume that contains present or recent positions, instead of a work history where the last job ended two years ago. For job hunters who do not want to commit to a single employer and position, and prefer to keep some level of independence, temping is a great option. Similar to per diem status, it enables social workers to select their own schedule, while offering the flexibility to choose what assignments they wish to work.

For new social workers, or those who are thinking about switching to a different concentration of social work, a temp assignment can be a good first step. It allows you to test the waters before diving in head-first to a new situation that may turn out to be much different (disappointing, stressful, toxic) than you expected. Conversely, it may result in your discovering and falling in love with a social work concentration or a nonprofit agency you had never considered. An assignment through a staffing agency can also result in some new professional references for you, including job leads you never may have heard about otherwise.

Another benefit to temping is purely emotional. If you are in a rut and the thought of emailing one more resume makes you want to scream, a temp job can help you break the cycle of frustration and anxiety while being productive and helping others. It can also cut through the feelings of loneliness and isolation that job hunting often brings. Temping is a great excuse to wake up early, dress in professional clothing, and engage with others. Temping is also an excellent opportunity to learn something new, keeping your skills — and your mind — sharp.

If you are looking for your next professional move up the career ladder, and temping feels too uncertain or too flexible, working with a recruitment firm may be the answer. Executive recruitment firms, sometimes called “headhunters,” can help get you connected to employers hiring for high-level positions. Many companies turn to recruitment agencies when they need assistance in selecting candidates for positions like executive director, program director, outreach manager, grant writer, and more. If you do a search for “non-profit recruiting firms Boston,” you will find many options, including a few national firms that hire locally.

While staffing agencies and recruitment firms are not the solution for everyone, they can provide a combination of income, work experience, social connection, and a sense of purpose that can keep job hunters motivated until that perfect position comes around. 🌟

Do you have a job search question you would like answered? Need help with your resume, cover letter, or job search? What other career topics would you like to see addressed in Social Work Voice? Let me know at epipitone.naswma@socialworkers.org.