

JIT Staffing-Balancing Employer and Employee Needs

By Margie Weiss, PhD

The world of work is changing as workforce demographics shift to an aging, increasing female and more ethnically-diverse group of workers. Women's share of the labor force projected to reach 48% by 2008. Men's share of the labor force is expected to decrease from 53.5 to 52.5 %. In 1999, 75% (46 million) of employed women worked full-time, while 25% (16 million) worked part-time. In 1999, 3.7 million women held multiple jobs and 60% of women age 16 and over were either employed or looking for work in 1999. The increasing number of women in the workforce, along with the increasing age of the workforce has implications for work-family balance. Both the older worker and women are more likely to experience the pressures of handling multiple priorities-childcare, parent-care, household management needs. Each generation approaches balancing work and family life in different ways.

While employers are interested in growing economic capacity; an increasingly diverse and complex workforce are interested in balancing family and work commitments. Workers are seeking more input into flexible scheduling, self-paced work environments and meaningful contributions to their chosen profession. Meanwhile, employers are constantly trying to enhance productivity by leveraging internal resources with external market demands. While there seems to be some inherent conflict between employer and worker needs, Just-in-time (JIT) staffing may hold the answer to the dilemma.

Employers are faced with increased competition for skilled workers. Professional and related occupations are projected to grow faster and add more jobs than any other major occupational group, with 6.5 million new jobs by 2012. Three-fourths of this job growth is projected to occur in professional occupations, such as computer and mathematical occupations; healthcare practitioners and technical occupations; and education, training, and library occupations. And, professional occupations are the only major group projected to generate more openings from job growth than from replacement needs (5.3 million job openings due to replacement needs <http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm> Accessed 4/26/05 How will employers balance the demand for professionals and the supply of workers for those positions? JIT staffing may be one way of maintaining productivity without adversely impacting on ROI.

JIT staffing utilizes the services of a staffing service to meet the demands of higher work load, project-based work load or staff absences with trained, professional staffers who are employed by a staffing agency. The staffing agency assumes the risk of covering employee benefits, hiring and retaining a trained workforce. The employer has the flexibility of filling positions for short or long-term engagements, depending upon company needs. Monica Vomastic, president of Landmark Staffing Resources noted, "A contingent workforce can provide seasoned, professionals to help companies meet peak workforce demands. It is a capacity-driven solution for employers, balancing the fixed and variable components of their workforce. For example, hiring a seasoned worker as an interim "coach" for a young professional allows for a quicker knowledge transfer between the older worker and young, untrained workers. A short window of parallel staffing provides long-term gains for the employer as information shifts from experienced to inexperienced worker. Staffing services provide workers for project-based needs, saving the employer the HR headaches of hiring and

then downsizing to adjust to workflow. Sometimes companies hire interim management to launch new products or help with time-limited promotional campaigns.

JIT staffing provides workers with increased flexibility in scheduling. It is not unusual to find staffers who are willing to work to cover absences in a work site, help with long or short term projects or engage in “consultant” or “coaching” positions. Some staffers are transitioning from one career to another and are looking for variety rather than a long-term commitment to one company. Others are looking to “try out” a company prior to a long-term commitment.

Temporary staffers find it easier to stay out of office politics and to just enjoy a focus on their assignment. Others select working through a staffing service so they can maintain a schedule that accommodates travel, longer vacations, elder care or childcare needs.

Staffing services are on an upswing, with a daily employment rate of 2.65 M and sales of \$16.4B for the past 2 quarters show the strongest growth since the late 1990’s. The tenure of temporary employees is increasing, along with a substantial growth in higher wage occupations. Affinity Health System Human Resource Manager, Kathy Schultz, noted, “Intermittent staffing needs can be effectively met through staffing agency employees if the staffing company has good mechanisms in place for adequate screening and training. Often, the staffing agency has quicker access to trained workforce professionals who are interested in short-tem or project-based work. These individuals are often very motivated workers who are willing to work for a specified period of time.”

More people are opting for the flexibility that can be provided by employment through a staffing agency vs. the traditional long-term employment options. JIT staffing may be a cost-effective staffing solution for employers seeking to maximize the differential between fixed and

variable workforce needs. And, JIT may be one way to decrease work stress and improve work-family balance for today's workers.