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Filling the Gap

by Brent Hodgen

Jim who has been on the team for 6 years and has been a key player in the success of many of the project team's efforts has decided to leave your organization. He is leaving to pursue another interest outside of IT and has a business plan and loan in hand to seek out his dreams. You do your best to keep your chin up knowing that Jim's departure will leave a big void in the existing team who incidentally has just begun a high profile solution which will be a major effort of high importance to your year.

Your instinct is to counter and try to persuade Jim to stay. If you can persuade Jim, chances are you may be buying a couple of months before he again chooses to leave. Now the project is in full swing and his departure will be more disruptive. Wish Jim well and bring in a consultant to fill the gap.

On many levels bringing on a consultant to replace Jim is a wise step. Jim was a key factor in your project team and bringing on a highly skilled consultant will prevent the rest of the team from feeling they will be overwhelmed with the workload while the search for Jim's replacement begins. Replacing Jim with a full-time employee that will fit in with the team can be a long search process and bringing on a consultant sends a strong message to your staff that you care about their project and their work/life balance.

Bringing on a consultant may also give you the opportunity to have the consultant mentor your staff and possibly allow you to groom an internal team member who sees Jim's departure as an opportunity to stretch. Granted, back filling down the line may not be an option initially, but with the skills of the consultant this could be good for the employee who wants to grow and sends a positive message that you promote and reward those who excel on the team.

Another advantage with bringing on a consultant is the flexibility to renew their contract or share the consultant on future projects. Again your staff is going to appreciate you bringing on the consultant and if the project scope changes in 2-3 months and



you see that you can go another 3 months with a consultant, then you may not have to hire a full-time employee afterall.

If your project comes together and you were not able to find your full-time replacement but were able to grow within and can back fill with a more junior resource, consider using the contractor as a trainer/mentor for the new team member. As this is occurring talk with other associates and let them know you have a consultant who has over four months of experience and placing them on another team will be beneficial in not having business knowledge walk out your door.

While at first glance the hourly rate of the consultant may appear to be higher than a full-time salary, consider and calculate the total cost of a full-time employee. The actual and inherent costs of workers compensation, disability insurance, unemployment insurance, employment tax and wage withholding responsibilities, pension plans, training expenses, health insurance, sick and vacation days, fringe benefits, and other administrative expenses...traditional fulltime resources are not cheap. Add to that if the new hire does not perform, the cost to let the employee go and you start all over again. Ask your HR department to calculate the total cost of a full-time employee. Depending on your benefits package, a consultant may prove to be a very cost effective option.

Look below the surface when determining which way to go, full-time or contractor when the next IT resource need becomes apparent. At the end of the day, you and your management team may just be surprised which is the hands-down winner.