

# How to hire a temporary manager to fix a problem you can't

*Sometimes you need a hired gun to do the really tough jobs. Here's how to choose one who fits your company's needs*

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(Thomas Barwick/Getty)

Interim managers can step in temporarily at your company to fix problems you can't. We asked the experts for their best tips on how to enlist a hired gun:

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## There's no shame in asking for help

"Companies sometimes don't ask for help even when they really need it, because they don't want to lose face. The reason is people feel, 'I should be able to do this myself. I'm failing because I don't know how to solve this problem.' They should realize that when you need expert advice, you should go and get it. We can solve problems that companies have struggled with literally for years in a month or two and change the way the business runs. A CEO shouldn't feel that they are a failure. They should actually feel that they're successful because they realized they needed extra help."

*Steven Parker, CEO, Atticus Interim Management, Toronto*

## You're getting more than a consultant

"Interim executives are involved in the implementation and execution of what the business requires, whereas typically consultants are not. They will be there for as long as you need them there. Once they complete their agenda, then you have no further obligation to them. That's the advantage. They also adapt to different organizational cultures, but they don't get embroiled in them. Interim executives can have a ripple effect within your organization, as they can provide mentoring and support to junior executives. They have an opportunity to help you grow your management team."

*Mark Olson, President and CEO, Osborne Group Contract Executives, Calgary*

## Let the right one in

"Because interim managers are hired for a set period, there's only so much time to ramp up to where you want to be. It's important for that person to have industry experience, of course. Interim managers have the hard skills but they don't always have the necessary soft skills. They go into a company and they want to change people, and issue all these memorandums. They have a get-in-and-get-out mentality. That doesn't work. So when you're interviewing candidates, it's very important to ask the same question in different ways to get the truth. Once they're talking, you start to see their idiosyncrasies. You have to be a great listener to spot those idiosyncrasies."

*Sonia Cameron, Senior Partner, Cambridge Management Planning, Toronto*

## Expect brutal honesty

"Quite often, I'll hear people say, 'We're going to hire one of our own because they're going to be more loyal.' In many cases, that's what created or contributed to the problem in the first place. Some companies don't have a group of people who are going to have the candour or the honesty to tell you the issues that they see. But interim managers are supposed to be apolitical. I tell clients that I don't want a full-time job. I like the challenge of coming in, finding an issue and coming up with a solution, working with people to get the change in place, and then moving on. I want to work myself out of a job."

*Catherine Cook, interim manager at various small- and mid-sized businesses, Calgary*

## Prepare to accept their advice

"For a company to get the best out of the interim manager, you have to communicate. The interim manager goes in with no agenda, aside from the mandate you give them. That makes communication from the client extremely simple. There's a free dialogue without any encumbrances. An interim manager has a set period of time to accomplish objectives. Give that person the freedom to do it. We have to dig through the symptoms of the problems to get to the root cause, and some of those root causes are painful. For example, you might have to accept that a certain employee is not a good manager and needs more training. Be brave. Take our advice."

*David Rosengarten, interim manager in the defense, heavy equipment and auto industry, Toronto*



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