



# Finding and Keeping Highly Qualified Employees

*What was once considered a family issue is now a workplace issue*

Two changes in the business world, combined with the Family and Medical Leave Act, have direct bearing on what it takes to attract and keep highly qualified employees.

## **More Women Working**

The first fundamental change in the work world is the most obvious, but is worth stating anyway: the increase in the number of women in the workforce. Among married couples, two-wage earner families have become the norm rather than the exception. When women were not in the workforce, having a child or caring for a relative were not workplace issues. Now, with many more women working (single and married), those previously family issues have become workplace issues.

One way for companies to attract and retain high quality workers is to broaden their family and medical leave policies. Indeed, from an employee's perspective, the guarantee of a job at the completion of such a leave has emerged as an extremely desirable aspect of an overall benefits package. From an employer's point of view, low employee turnover decreases training costs and results in fewer disruptions to continuity.

While many employers may be philosophically in favor of the idea of a family leave policy, they may be concerned about getting competent work coverage during the employee's leave. Assigning the work to

other employees or outsourcing certain functions may be practical in some cases, but not in others.

## **Temps are More Skilled**

Fortunately, a second fundamental change in the work world may provide an effective solution – the rise in the number of qualified individuals who are working for temping agencies.

While “temps” previously may have been mistakenly considered somewhat lower in employment value (i.e., people, who for one reason or another, couldn't find full-time work), today more individuals are choosing temping as an alternative work style.

Consequently, the greater number of skilled workers available to fill in on a temporary basis nicely complements the need for temporary help when an employee must take a prolonged leave.

## **The Impact of the FMLA**

The Family and Medical Leave Act, enacted in 1993, requires that businesses with more than 50 employees provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for illness of an employee or family member, childbirth, or adoption. Many businesses have elected to extend leave policies beyond 12 weeks.

Although the FMLA does not legally apply to businesses with fewer than 50 employees (and some states may cover leave separately under state

statute), small businesses face the same competitive pressures as do larger companies in attracting talented employees. Consequently, it would seem to make good business sense for small businesses to voluntarily enact benevolent leave policies.

Implementing the FMLA may be seen as a “win-win-win” situation.

- Families “win” when they know the workplace recognizes the importance of caring for newborns or aging parents and provides job security during certain leaves.
- Individuals who have chosen temping as an alternative work style “win” with the recognition that they can step in and make valuable short-term contributions.
- Finally, companies “win” by providing a benefit that helps to attract and keep highly-skilled employees, a benefit that can often be implemented with minimal disruption.