

Contractor doctor: can I get part time contracts?

Dear Contractor Doctor,

I'm looking to go contracting and am interested working for part time. Perhaps 2-3 days a week or perhaps cycles of 3 months work followed by 3 months holidays. Is there much demand for this type of working arrangement?

Thanks

[Name supplied]

Contractor Doctor says:

Good question. This is something that that permanent staff who contemplate contracting often ask. The 2-3 days per week scenario is an entirely different market to the full time contract scenario.

Let's first discuss the 2-3 days a week scenario.

2-3 days a week

Contracts of this nature are very rare indeed and are rarely advertised. That is not to say they do not exist, but they are not the most common mode of working.

The 2-3 days per week tend to be much shorter contracts. Perhaps 1 to 2 months. As such, the agency needs to make more money to fund the sales operation. Thus, the margins will either be significantly higher, like 30%+, or the rates will be large, like £800+ per day. Bear in mind that the rate needs to be high from the consultants point of view since they need to fund the fact they do not work as much.

The type of work tends to be for very senior consultants who have 10+ years experience and provide training and mentoring. Occasionally you get the odd development role for up to a couple of weeks but these are rare.

There are agencies who target this market. They tend to have a network of very senior consultants on their books who they can call on at short notice.

You will need to surf the internet and pick up the phone to locate them. To do this type of work will require more from you on the sales and self marketing aspects of yourself. Having your own web site and publishing some articles or doing seminars tends to be a good way to get known.

The other way of working 2-3 days per week is do do fixed price work. With fixed price, provided you meet the deadline, the working time is fully flexible. This work is again hard to find. You'll also possibly need to risk doing the requirements specification work for free before giving a formal quotation. There are some websites that offer you the chance to bid for work.

3 months on then 3 months off

This mode of working is much easier to do and the more realistic option. You simply do not renew your contract after 3 months and take a holiday!

However, bear in mind that most contracts are a minimum of 6 months with extensions and the client will expect you to renew if you are in the middle of a project.

It would not be a good idea to indicate to an agent that you have no intention to renew a possible contract - doing so would seriously reduce your number of interviews. Remember, their ideal situation is to get you into a position and keep taking a percentage forever.

If you do decide to leave a contract, or not renew then make sure you give the client plenty of notice so they can mitigate the risk, get a replacement and do a hand over. Make sure you do not burn bridges by just suddenly not turning up the next day!

One other point: Don't take more than about a year off between contracts. It will make it much harder to get an interview next time as your skills might not be up to scratch.

Good luck contracting!

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