

Why agencies and contractors don't agree

Why can't contractors and agencies get along? One would think that both parties would happily work together to earn money?

Yet what emerges from a roundtable discussion held by the London-based [Professional Contractors Group](#) in April of this year, is that contractors and agencies don't understand each other, don't get along, and each doesn't think the other party is doing a good job.

Best Practice for Recruiters and Contractors

The event, organised conjointly by the Warrington-based employment services provider, [Parasol](#), brought together over 20 contributors from across the flexible working world at the [Institute of Directors](#) in Central London. The group included contractors, umbrellas, recruiters, and professional trade organisations notably the London-based [Association of Technology Staffing Companies](#) represented by chief executive Ann Swain.

All of us contractors have gripes about agencies, some justified, some less so. We often find that agencies take up a lot of our time, then disappear the minute the particular slot under discussion went to another. Agents often just don't work with you to try to find a good posting. And there are problems with timely payment and with unreasonable demands for margin increases.

Do Contractors Expect Too Much?

On the other hand, agencies complain that contractors expect too much from them, seeking advice and career guidance which they are not prepared to provide. Contractors forget that agencies are volume producers which need to place as many contractors as they can as quickly as possible. "The importance of customer care is sometimes lost because of the pace of modern business," says Swain.

All of these issues were touched on at the roundtable which PCG saw as the first of a series of encounters in which these issues would be discussed in greater depth.

Says PCG managing director John Brazier: "Our intention was to begin the process of exploring "best practice" around developing the right agendas, protecting the industry, understanding and supporting contractors' motivations, and of course conforming with legislation. It is clear that in the time available we barely 'scratched the surface' of much of this so it would be good to build on this initial gathering to explore further many of the issues that were raised and debated on the day."

“ The importance of customer care is sometimes lost because of the pace of modern business ”

Ann Swain-ATSCo

The Fraught Issue of Advice

For Swain, agencies should give some advice when necessary. "Some contractors need advice, others don't," Swain said at the roundtable. So agencies should be flexible and be able to help out when contractors need it.

But Nick Butcher, chief executive at the Burgess Hill, West Sussex-based recruitment agency [Capital International](#) pointed out that giving advice had become a dangerous issue for agencies. "A lot of recruiters have washed their hands of advice-giving because of the threat of debt transfer established under the [managed service company legislation](#)," Butcher said.

Some contractors present said that they didn't need advice from their agencies, just money-making job introductions. What they did feel was that they weren't getting enough of these, while agencies were taking up their time trying to find out about the market, hoping to learn of other companies in the hiring mode. The recruiters and trade organisations present agreed that contractors should report such unethical behaviour.

But overall, there was much ground broken, and hopefully participants and others will drill down on these issues in the coming reunions of this kind that the PCG plans to hold. Watch this space for news of what's coming up.

“ Some contractors need advice; others don't ”

Ann Swain-ATSCo

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