

Tips for Finding and Positioning Yourself for Meaningful Part-Time Work

Working full-time, stressed out, and ready to walk away? Or perhaps you are a retiring Baby Boomer who wants to stay engaged but not in a traditional, full-time capacity. Either way, a part-time work arrangement might be the solution for you.

Today there are more flexible work options than ever before. The notion of having to be “all in” or “all out” is simply outdated. The where, when, and how of work continues to evolve at an exciting but intimidating pace for job seekers and employers alike. A growing skills gap, an on-demand economy, and a desire by all for flexibility are some of the larger, inter-related forces at play. As part-time work options grow, however, so will the competition for those positions. Consider these 11 strategies for finding and best positioning yourself for part-time work:

Be Clear on Your Goals

Maybe you want to transition to something totally new. Or perhaps you have no desire to have the level of responsibility reflected in your current job title. Professionals choosing part-time work often have a “been there, done that” mindset. They’ve already proven themselves professionally, and sometimes seniority and responsibility (and the stress that accompanies both) are not as important as work environment, flexibility, or the opportunity to explore a new field. It is important to communicate these desires up front -- with honesty, confidence and evidence of having “thought it through.”

We have found that job seekers are most effective when they address the concern about being overqualified for a job head-on, before the question is even raised. Doing so goes a long way to alleviate the employer’s concerns that you will become bored or lack commitment. In these situations especially, the employer is looking for you to express an eagerness, energy, and excitement about the job opportunity.

Hook Them with Your Talent

While your goal may be to find part-time work, no employer is going to hire you just because you desire flexibility. Hook a prospective employer with your talent first, and then negotiate for the flexibility. Start with your value, and be careful not to provide too many personal details related to your desire for flexible work.

Target Employers Open to Flexible Work

Despite the trends, not all companies are going to be open to flexible work arrangements. Strategically target companies that are most likely to hire you. This will involve legwork on your part and a general understanding of the types of companies and organizations that are more open to flexibility:

Current or Past Employers - Colleagues that already know you are the most likely to hire or refer you for a part-time arrangement. Why? Because they trust you and know the quality of your work. Don’t be afraid to initiate a discussion about flexibility with your current employer. If you do, however, be prepared

to make a business case for the flexibility. Come up with a proposal – including proposed schedule, management plan, and advantages and disadvantages to both you and the organization. If you get shot down, give it some time, tweak your plan, and ask again. Don't limit your inquiries to your current employer. Colleagues that have left the organization, clients, vendors, and customers may also be in a position to hire you.

Small, High-Growth Businesses - Small businesses have a financial incentive to hire using a part-time model because it gives them access to a higher level of talent at competitive rates. While large companies may be able to offer more in the way of salary and benefits, if you're seeking flexibility, you may opt to work for a small business that pays less but offers reduced hours, work-from-home options, or a flexible schedule. Small businesses have very limited budgets for recruiting, so you have to find them. These business owners live in your neighborhoods, attend your churches, and volunteer in your communities. While HR professionals at larger companies are all too often trained to weed out resumes, the small business owner with a desire for top talent will be enticed by your skills and experience.

Companies with Formal Workplace Flexibility Policies - Companies that have formally embraced a corporate culture of flexibility are probably the easiest to find because they will promote this as part of their external branding. Descriptions of their flexwork benefits and policies will appear on the "Careers" page of their website. They will tend to be mid- to large-sized companies that are more established and have the resources to develop a formal work flexibility policy and related processes and systems.

Sell Your Strengths

Remember that you are not the only one who benefits from a part-time work arrangement. By embracing part-time, growth-oriented companies with tight budgets now have an effective way to bring in talent to support their growth without having to break the bank or settle for someone less experienced or committed. When talking to employers, use these selling points:

Staying Power - You are looking to commit and stay awhile, especially if the opportunity offers the flexibility you desire. Simply put, your motivations tend to differ from traditional full-time job seekers who may be looking to move up and out. You will bring some stability to a fast-growing business.

Experienced and Affordable - You don't need training. You have deep industry knowledge. Plus, you have the practical experience to quickly read situations, prioritize, communicate effectively, and get the job done. Top dollar pay is not as important to you as flexibility and work environment. This makes you highly attractive, particularly to a small business looking for talent on a tighter budget.

Hyper Focused and Productive - Let's face it, with maturity comes less drama. You have a job to do in a limited time-frame. You don't waste time with gossip or water cooler talk. You know the core values of a professional work environment including responsiveness, respect for another's time, follow-through and a can-do attitude . . . characteristics that are not a given in today's workplace. You are highly productive, efficient, and results-focused. Our clients often tell us that their part-time workers produce more than many of their full-time staffers do.

Understand There May be Trade-offs

In a perfect world, an employee ought to be paid the same hourly rate, regardless of the number of hours worked. The world of work is far from perfect, and when it comes to achieving a flexible work arrangement, the reality is that there are often trade-offs. A professional with a specialized skillset or deep technical/industry knowledge or contacts is better positioned to successfully negotiate a higher rate. Nonetheless, most small businesses – a good target for part-time – simply cannot afford to pay what larger firms pay. The pay differen-

tial has nothing to do with your value; it is a budgeting issue. If securing flexible work is truly a priority, you may have to adjust or scale your rate.

Be Careful Not to Express Frustration or Desperation

Finding a job, in general, is hard work. Finding flexible work is even harder. Frustration and desperation are dangerous emotions in the job search process. Expressing just a hint of either can turn off a potential employer very quickly. Leave your frustrations at the door. Be as positive and energetic as you can. Recognize that not all employers are flexible, and express to the employer your appreciation of the flexible work arrangement and your commitment to their business over the long-term.

Establish Parameters Up Front and Stick to Them

The clearer both parties are from the outset with regard to work hours, schedule, location, deadlines, and expectations, the better. Once you establish the working framework, do your best to stick to it. For example, if you do not work on Mondays, do not agree to a Monday meeting. Instead, state that you are not available (without over explaining) and quickly offer an alternative date or solution.

Understand that Flexibility Works Both Ways

A successful part-time professional, however, also understands that there will be times when he or she has to work outside a set schedule to meet pressing business needs. You may have to rearrange your schedule or work additional hours virtually to meet a deadline or put out a fire. As long as such deadlines and crises are the exception and not the norm, emphasize that you will be motivated to do what it takes to make the business succeed.

You May Need to Change the Way You Work

Over-achievers can fall into the trap of working full-time hours for part-time pay. There is nothing worse than feeling as if you are not benefiting from the part-time arrangement. Acknowledge and accept that how you work in a part-time capacity may be different from how you have been used to working. You may have to say “no” to assignments outside of your focus area. Recognize that you may have more work than you are capable of completing in the agreed-upon hours, and it will be critical that you discuss and communicate priorities so that you meet expectations. Note: working differently may actually mean higher quality and efficiency. Employers love part-time workers because of this!

Embrace Technology Tools for Increased Productivity

Take the time to learn new technology tools that will improve your productivity and efficiency as well as how you communicate at work. New tools arrive on the market regularly, and many are inexpensive or free. Try DropBox or Google Docs for sharing and organizing files; Basecamp, Trello or Pivotal Tracker for managing tasks, schedules, work assignments and deadlines; and GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, or Skype for communicating with and across teams.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

There is some truth to the saying “out of sight, out of mind.” The burden will be on you to keep lines of communication open and effective. Be clear on deliverables and goals for every assignment. Make a point to schedule regular check-ins. Ask for feedback. Reach out via Skype or phone if an issue is sensitive and you are working remotely. Leverage technology tools. Find/create opportunities for face-time. Strive for concise, clear written communications to avoid wasted “back and forth” time.