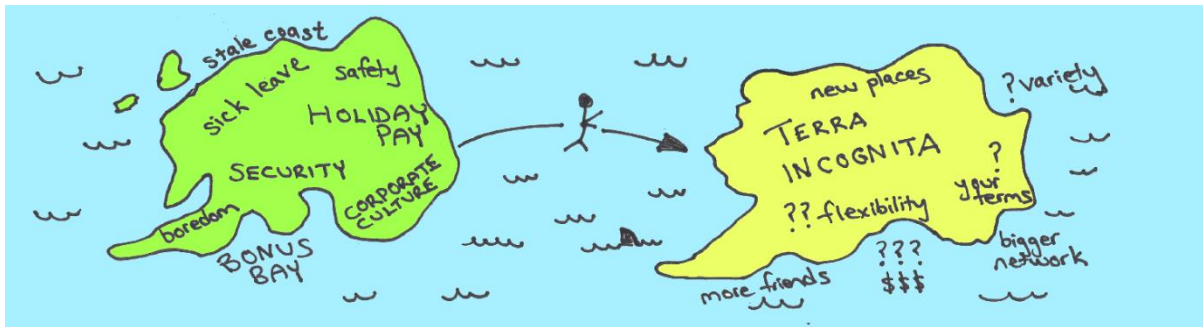


10 Reasons to Consider Contracting

Shôn Ellerton, November 10, 2019

If you have always worked as a permanent employee, you could be missing out on some of the advantages of being a contractor.



“Have you worked in a permanent role your whole working life?”

“Have you been searching for jobs online but only including those which are permanent roles?”

“Are you afraid that working as a contractor is not secure?”

“Are you concerned what would happen if you are sick off work as a contractor?”

“Are you worried about not being ‘part of the family’ as a contractor?”

These are some of the questions someone asked me in the past more than ten years ago, but I did not pay much attention to them at the time.

I had it in my mind that securing a permanent role is *always* the option to go for.

Only in the last couple of years did I decide to give contracting a go and I have to say, I have been pleasantly surprised how it opened out new vistas and opportunities which I have been missing out for years being pigeonholed in the same industry for two decades; namely telcos.

I may consider a permanent role in the future again; however, being a contractor has given me so much variety and invaluable experience within various industries; a feat that would have proved far more difficult if I continued along the conventional road of permanent employment.

I have listed below 10 positive reasons that contracting may be an attractive option based on my experiences as a data specialist in the world of contracting.

Just be aware that many of the below points are subject to how the contract is worded, but generally, they apply for most contractors out there.

1. The freedom to move around at short notice

Being a contractor means that you have more freedom to switch between jobs at much shorter notice periods than for those on permanent jobs. I was once hired as a contractor for a job which was discussed in detail during the interview. However, it panned out that the job they wanted me to do was not what was discussed and not at all suited to my skills and expertise. Unfortunately, there was no official job description that came with the role; however, I explained to my manager, knowing that I had other options in the pipeline, that I was providing no real value and we both agreed to break off the contract. Seldom do I encounter such experiences, but they can happen to anyone.

2. Fewer issues with flexible times and overtime pay



As a contractor on an hourly or daily rate, any additional hours or days you work respectively goes on your timesheet. It is not technically overtime, but rather, just more hours incurred on your timesheet. With permanent and contractor positions alike, it is, of course, important that one gets written acknowledgment from your manager before overtime is agreed.

You may work an average of 38 hours a week but on some days, you may come in early and leave early, or perhaps you work four long days and have the other free. Naturally, it all depends on your specific job role and your manager.

3. No less secure than a permanent job

Every contract I received for a permanent role had a clause written into it stating that at any time and for any reason, either party may terminate the contract by giving one month's notice. On one occasion, I was hired as a business development manager, and eight months later, there was an organisational change resulting in a total of 26 redundancies within managerial positions. I was

one of the casualties. Many long-term fixed contracts offer more security than typical permanent role contracts. However, contract jobs are often the first to go when headcount needs to be reduced.

4. Remuneration is often higher

It is not uncommon for remuneration rates to be significantly higher than those on permanent roles. A close friend of mine has been contracting for many years and makes enough to only require working half of the year, the other time being productively spent on his young family and having the time to travel. One must, of course, make allowances for sick days, holidays and bonuses which are normally limited to those on a permanent basis.

However, on the flipside, a friend and ex-colleague of mine has a permanent position with a software training company and his bonus component is very attractive often exceeding his base salary by 2 to 3 times depending on work performance. This is when a permanent role can really pay off but I know of only one person with such handsomely-paid bonuses.

5. Every new work contract is an adventure

Moving around from job to job in the contractor world can be enlightening. I've worked in several places within differing industries as a data engineer and find the change of scenery along with its new environs and surroundings refreshing. The commute to work is not the same boring way and you're not sitting in the same boring desk collecting cobwebs. You don't have to put up with the same canteen or choice of cafes. Sure, there are some who never like change and quite content to do the same exact thing for decades, but I'm not one of them.

6. Being more detached from corporate politics

One notable change that I experienced when I first starting contracting is the absence of getting embroiled in company politics and all the corporate paraphernalia that goes with it. Competing for managerial positions, shareholdings, bonuses, or other corporate benefits or perks aimed at permanent staff doesn't apply. The only thing you care about is getting the job done well and on time. Getting kudos for your work done by your manager and agent ensures that you'll more likely to get further opportunities.

7. Better chance of not getting pigeonholed



The biggest danger of being a specialist rather than, say, a programme or project manager is being pigeonholed into a role that the organisation does not want you to be promoted out of. Often, in permanent roles, a specialist's only way to progress up the corporate ladder is to quit and hook up with another company at a different grade. For jobs that require very specific skills, a contractor is often selected to fill the position rather than retrain or promote an existing employee in the organisation. This is, of course, unfortunate to those who are already working in the organisation and are denied the opportunity to retrain and learn the new skill required to fulfil the position. The worst situation occurs when existing employees are not only denied the opportunity to retrain but are made redundant as well. A balanced approach should always be taken in such situations.

8. And now for something completely different



As with permanent roles, there are often many ways to learn new skills; however, with contract roles, depending on the nature of the work, one could be working for completely new industries thus opening new doors in terms of experience.

For example, I have worked in telcos from 1997 to 2017; more specifically, rolling out of cellular networks. That is twenty years working in nearly the same industry! I often jokingly say that escaping telcos is more difficult than escaping the Earth's gravity. Since 2017, my skills as a data specialist has landed me jobs with health, government and the legal profession. I had absolutely no idea that I would, someday, be working at the Supreme Court in Adelaide.

9. Widen your network of colleagues and friends

There are some who work in the same office for years on end with, usually, others who have also worked in the same office for years on end. Seldom do solid friendships form whilst those work in the same office. Yes, sure, there are outings to Friday drinks or other social occasions, but usually, there is a delineation of being a colleague or a friend. It kind of reminds me of the old Looney Tunes characters, Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog, where work and play do not always mix well. Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog will never, of course, be best friends!

Oddly enough, I make new friends out of *ex*-colleagues. Of course, there is that initial interest of gossip of what happened to your old workplace, but with a good friendship blossoming, that tends to fade having non-work-related discussions eventually prevail. One of the best friendships I have come from a former boss. Only recently did we split the costs of sharing a holiday houseboat up the River Murray with our two families.

10. Less liable to take your work home after hours



To be honest, I personally do not know of any contractor who, after work, goes home, switches on the computer and then continues to work. There may be several reasons why this is the case. For example, many contractors I know adopt the approach that '*work is where work is and home is where the family is*'. I, personally, deliberately choose not to have my work emails connected to my smartphone. If an emergency happens, anyone is free to call me on the phone.

When I was a permanent employee, I worked many more hours in the day than I was obliged to do; perhaps out of the misguided notion that the harder I worked, the more I would be appreciated. There were, of course, thanks given for my efforts, but ultimately, it was almost an expectation for me to continue this way which eventually led me to burn out on some of the projects I worked on.

To sum it up

For years and years, I never considered being a contractor perhaps out of fear of uncertainty or the unknown. I always had it in my mindset that having a permanent role is always better being more secure and 'being part of the family' along with all the perks that go with it. The reality is not always what it seems. There are a lot of memes and posts stating how companies truly value their employees; investment in people and all that. Like it or loath it, employees are assets as far as the financial ledger is concerned. If an employee does not offer a return on investment to the business, the business decides whether retaining the service of that employee is still required. Companies do not owe anyone a living.

In the world of contracting, it is no different with respect to delivering a service. Moreover, there really is no difference as far as how the company perceives the value of permanent or contract employees. Many of us started our professional careers mistakenly believing that loyalty is one of the guiding principles embedded between employers and employees. Nothing could be further from the truth. Very few of us would consider working for one company for all their life expecting that loyalty bonds employer and employee like Siamese twins. For contractors, the bond between *agent* and employee is likely to be more loyal in nature if anything.

This article is not intended to persuade the reader that contracting is better, but rather, to highlight certain aspects of it which may be an attractive option over a permanent role.