

Senior Interim Management in Practice – A Personal Experience

The Author

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Senior Interim Management

I am Simon Jones, an Accountant with over 15 years international experience. I made a decision over a decade ago to work 'freelance' in my profession as I am very motivated by challenge and achievement, by variety in business situations, and especially by the implementation of change in organisations. I commenced my freelance career in Australia in the IT, mining and wine-making industries, and for the last 4 years have been in the UK leisure, aviation and water industries. What has made possible a challenging and interesting multiple sector career has been the 'transferable skills' of a professional vocation. Permanent roles in a diversified group over many years can provide a similar career path, however the added benefits of Senior Interim Management have more than adequately compensated me for the consistency many people seek in a full-time job, and the financial risks of not having continual permanent employment.

Above all, Interim Management provides me with 'a lifestyle beyond work'. Between assignments I have had the opportunity to do many other activities which permanent full-time employment does not, requiring as it does, constant focus and commitment for 48 weeks per annum. I plan on being in assignment for 8 to 9 months per annum, during which time I give considerably more of myself than if I were a permanent employee; and being a single man, in my free time I have travelled a great deal, trained myself in career enhancing skills which I have decided the nature and extent, have worked in many different locations in Southern England and Europe, and have met many

people, some of which have become good friends. I also have the added taxation benefits (IR35 permitting, still a very grey area), of running my own business, and until recently have had the advantage of deciding which assignments I have accepted to which I can add most benefit for my clients and for my own career progression.

I personally define Senior Interim Management as the vocation of senior experienced professionals capable of delivering key benefits for clients, often significantly changing the nature of the business. Perhaps controversially I exclude from this definition temporary staff who 'hold the fort' for permanent staff on holidays, parental leave, and secondments to other projects.

In the last few years there has been a greying of the boundaries between Senior Interim Management and Consulting, with many Consultancies establishing Interim Management Divisions to compensate for the downturn in the Consulting market. Many Consultants will recognise similarities in my Senior Interim Management definition above with the practice of Consulting, the main difference being I think that Consultants tend to advise, whereas Senior Interim Managers are more action oriented, but again, the boundaries between the two are converging. I call myself a 'Consultant, Senior Interim and Project Manager', however in the main, most of my assignments have been more action based than advising. Please see my web site if you would like a fuller description of my career path: www.InTheInterim.co.uk.

Interim Management is a riskier career path than permanent employment as successive assignments are not guaranteed. The recent world political and economic uncertainty has left many Senior Interim Managers without income if they have relied solely on their Interim Management practice. The major projects upon which Consulting and Interim Management rely have been put on hold awaiting improvement in the business outlook, which as I write is forecast to improve in the second quarter of 2002. As an adjunct to Interim Management I have also share traded, taking advantage of the 'buy low, sell high' axiom of equities trading, especially subsequent to the September terrorist events. Although my Senior Interim Management activities have taken a back seat since September, 2001, there has been an upside for me as well. I highly recommend having more than one activity besides

Interim Management in risky times. This can take the form of income from your investments, Non-Executive Directorships (NEDs), multiple clients, or as in my case, share trading.

My business' Interim assignments have come from two sources, namely recruitment agencies and my own network. But first, how does the mindset of a Senior Interim Manager differ from that of a permanent employee?

The Right Mindset

The right mindset is paramount to success. As Shakespeare's Polonius said in Hamlet, "This above all: *to thine own self be true*, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man [or yourself]." and Hamlet in Hamlet again "... thinking makes it so". In other words, you need to know fully what your skills, competencies and capabilities are (not always obvious), what your career and personal needs are, what you can offer your clients with enthusiasm, passion and dedication, and most importantly to whom you wish to provide your services. A permanent employee is more directed by the employer in these matters.

To help you, I have at my Best Links web page listed links to various documents I currently use to market and promote my business, including my personal and business profiles, my USPs (Unique Selling Points), and my service offerings, although with time these have tended to merge a little. I think these reflect the mindset of a Senior Interim Manager, that of a risk taker and challenge seeker, of being your own boss, in adding value to your client and your own career path, and especially in marketing, promoting and networking your business and yourself. The documents are not static and change in an on-going process as my personal and business perspectives change with the changing business outlook.

To structure my own thinking processes for the UK market I started with my personal profile (in the permanent world called a CV or Curriculum Vitae, 'the course of one's life'), listing my responsibilities, achievements and learnings in each of my assignments. I now have several versions of these, each giving a different view, and adaptable to the needs of a particular assignment. From this I created my USPs, the unique selling points which tell a client what I can provide to an assignment to fit the client's assignment brief. This document is a maximum of one page in length, and can also be used by agents as a summary to refer to, instead of

a lengthy Interim profile (Interim profiles are longer than permanent CVs because interims have more frequent assignments). USPs are statements of your competencies, capabilities and expertise, such as an overall statement 'Specialist Finance and IT advice and management to achieve shareholder value-adding performance and results, especially in *rapid change* situations', or more specifically 'experienced Finance representative on systems implementation projects to ensure optimal Finance involvement and benefits, and mitigated risks'.

From the various profiles and USPs I then developed my service offerings, the structured services I offer clients to help them achieve their business objectives. My own service offerings cover Financial Management, Corporate Finance, Business Systems, Organisational Development, and Project Management, with summary descriptions of each offering, linking these to my USPs.

With these well thought out documents, you can then carefully target agencies, companies and your peer network who will most likely benefit from your Interim services. Having gone through the mental processes of developing your Interim mindset, using these documents as a structured thinking tool, the details are forged in your mind for ready presentation to clients, etc. If your own documents ring true to you, if you feel encouraged, motivated, passionate and energetic about their aims, then you are on the way to a true Interim mindset and Interim practice. And don't forget to put this all on your web site, visible to anyone who needs it as a ready reference to your Interim Management business.

The 30% - Interim Recruitment Agencies

Recruitment agencies are an invaluable resource for obtaining assignments. Nearly 80% of my assignments have been through agents, more than the 30% often quoted as the proportion of total Interim assignments sourced in the UK each year. Last year there were about 2,000 Interim assignments sourced by clients through agents covering all functions. Russam-GSM has publicly available information at their web site which expands these statistics.

The Interim Management Association is the Industry body which represents some 12 recruitment agencies which focus mainly on Interim assignments, out of the many thousands of

recruitment agents in the UK. I am registered with most of these, and have had assignments from Albemarle Interim Management and PricewaterhouseCoopers. My other UK assignments have come through Michael Page Finance, and Indigoselection. I am registered with another 23 agencies which I consider to be a priority in my assignment hunting, many with multiple offices and contacts, and another 40 which I keep in regular contact. Many of these are very good business people and I have built a level of trust with them for the long term.

From my experience of working with UK recruitment agents I can recommend some key practices for you to follow:

- Always establish key working relationships with the right person for your needs in each agent office, starting with a face-to-face interview. Keep your contacts regularly updated by email of key changes in your availability, recent assignments, etc., and ring them occasionally to continue the personal touch.
- Ensure that your profile is marked copyright to your services company, for example 'Blackwood ConsultInvest Ltd © 2002'. Your profile represents you to the world and is your property. It must also contain all 'keywords' from your mindset work, above, as agents will use programmes to electronically search your profile for words contained in client briefings. This is a first selection method for most agents, other than personal relationships mentioned above.
- Ensure that if agents re-format your profile that you review and authorise the agent version before it goes to prospective clients. It should contain your copyright material only, plus perhaps the agent's interview notes. A recent survey by me of agent formatted profiles found over 50% to have major errors. One reviewed profile showed me as 'ACA 2000' (i.e. newly qualified), and another had two Simon Jones' profiles completely mixed up (no, I have never worked for Boo.com!). I traced the cause of many of these errors to junior, often temporary staff, who had busy Receptionist and other office roles, and who had little time for competently representing me to clients. Many agents do

not re-format your profile to avoid this large potential for error.

- Do not sign away your statutory right to be paid within 10 days of undertaking work at a client. Be careful of what you sign, and do not sign anything presented as simply a formality before a client contract is imminent. The worst case I found of this was 'payment 30 days after the submission of a monthly invoice', with a following clause passing all responsibility for client failure to pay to the candidate. Agents need to take some risk for the high markups they earn.
- Increasingly agencies are establishing their own internet presences such as Michaelpage.net, and Russam-GMS.co.uk. There are also internet portals like Executivesontheweb.com, Gaapweb.com, and Jobsfinancial.com, which pool assignment notifications from multiple agencies and alert you by email of potential assignments. This by-passes relationship building, however it is part of the changing recruitment business model, and can be an additional source of assignments, although they are mass marketed so your chances of success can be slim.

The 70% - Your Network

On arrival in the UK from Australia four years ago, I did not have an established network on which to draw for potential assignments, therefore until recently agencies were my main source of assignments. Within two weeks of looking for my next assignment I usually had two or three assignment offerings to choose from, however the downturn of the last six months has necessitated my need to tap into other sources, and I am now very active in belonging to formal and informal networks of peers and potential clients. The mark-ups that agencies charge clients (50-70%) is a high psychological barrier for clients to get over in an increasingly cost conscious market, although as my 'Permanent to Senior Interim Rate' calculations show (see Appendix One), there are substantial savings in using Senior Interim Managers for short-to medium-term projects, even when paying agency commissions.

My main avenues for networking are previous client contacts, new client prospects, peer networks like TopInterim.com and Interimconnect.co.uk, and the Institute of Directors which you can join as you

are a Director of your own company. The main drawback of obtaining assignments through your own network is that it takes a long time to establish, so do not expect instant results. You need to build relationships, get to know your peers and potential clients. The main benefits are that you can have a lot of fun meeting like-minded people and talking about the market, others' practices, industry news, etc., and the opportunity of setting your own rates for work with claw back of some or all of the agent margin you otherwise do not get.

Being new to networking I have found it is definitely an acquired skill, especially for an Accountant, and to help with this the peer networks regularly hold networking skills events. Both TopInterim and Interimconnect recently put on excellent seminars, and the better Interim Agencies also regularly have networking events and training sessions, such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and Russams.

Referrals are the basis of networking. With whomever you generate new energy (mentally, physically, emotionally) is a good contact, based perhaps on similar needs, values, experiences, service offerings, etc., from which develops trust. With referrals to and from new contacts comes a connection to a potential client or another contact with similar energy and a 'quality rating' already attached from your referrer. The trick is to give more of yourself than you receive; referrals are a two way process. People remember the help you gave them, and with continued networking they will gladly help you in return. Don't be backward in coming forward.

Conclusions

To summarise, 'know yourself', and if you are risk averse, DO NOT become a Senior Interim Manager by choice. If you are a risk taker, then do consider Senior Interim Management as a career choice, especially if you are looking for a lifestyle which provides experiences beyond work, and at the same time demanding, challenging and business changing assignments.

Appendix One

Comparison of Senior Interim Manager and Permanent Staff Costs

A spreadsheet showing a illustrative comparison between Senior Interim Management and Permanent Staff Costs is available from www.abcol.co.uk/news&info/articles/interim.xls

Please note, this spreadsheet is intended to be a **guide only to illustrate** the calculation of a Senior Interim Manager 'daily rate equivalent' based on a permanent employee salary package. It is not a substitute for professional advise obtained from your Public Accountant or other advisor.

The calculations illustrate: a true cost of permanent staff (often much under-calculated by employers), a comparable Senior Interim Manager daily rate, and the cost / benefit of using Senior Interim Managers for assignments. Please see my Rate Calc page for a softcopy, where you can change all key parameters.

This article was published in the March / April, 2002 edition of 'Effective Consulting' magazine, edited by Carol Harris.