

Ahead of the game

Students shouldn't dismiss temping, says Vicki Frost. It could give them a head start if a full-time job comes up for grabs

SO that shiny new degree hasn't landed you a corner office and a team of minions? Not even a golden hello and a business card with your direct line on, at least you're in good company. Every summer, thousands of graduates weep gently into their bank statements, wondering why they were promised the world and only left with an enormous overdraft.

But just because you didn't get on a graduate training scheme doesn't mean you should abandon your ambitions or sit around moping. It might not be quite what you envisaged, but temping will not only bring in some cash, it could help you bag the job you have always wanted. Once you're inside a company, not only do you have the opportunity to impress, but you will also stumble upon that holy grail of job-seeking: internal positions that other people don't know exist.

Vincent Desbois graduated last summer and landed himself temp work for Barclays as a data analyst through Reed Employment. After his three month contract was extended twice, he applied for an internal position as a profitability analyst and begins his new job next month.

"The temping wasn't necessarily exactly what I wanted to do, but it was a good foot in the door and a good opportunity to get into Barclays," says Desbois.

"It definitely gave me a head start. When you're temping in a company, if you show motivation and commitment, then you make yourself known. When you apply for internal positions, people know who you are, and before applying for a position you gain experience and confidence."

But internal positions are only up for grabs if you've been an effective temp. You might think you're hotter than Dermot O'Leary in his calvins,

but you need to show it, rather than shout about it. It doesn't matter how impressive your degree, you need to ditch the attitude. And not just in front of the boss – office politics can be difficult to fathom and unexpected people can wield a massive amount of influence. The chances of you being offered a job if you think you are Alan Sugar and that the rest of the office are automatons with no talent? You will be lucky to get through to the end of your contract.

"Even though the jobs you are given to do may be pretty junior, attitude is all – and if you do complete your tasks well, offer to help out wherever and are generally bright, bubbly and enthusiastic, you will be remembered," says Narelle Lester from Regan and Dean Recruitment.

Sometimes, it's the boring things that count: turning up on time, looking presentable, and not spending all day on Hotmail are all important.

Getting yourself noticed (in all the right ways) might mean bringing a collection of ideas to work that won't threaten other staff, but show that you're switched on and interested in the company.

It's fine to find out what opportunities there might be, but don't rush at it like a galumphing great wildebeest.

Having a chat with HR near the end of your contract – and asking for feedback and advice – will show you are ambitious, but not a complete egomaniac.

A stint of general office temping after graduation won Karen Hamblen-Cartagena a 12-month contract as a European public relations assistant for Nintendo.

But things looked bleak initially. "I had my degree, but little experience, and it was a bit of a nightmare getting a job – you're either overqualified or you have no experience." She recalls.

But instead of whingeing, Hamblen-Cartagena turned her months in Tempworld into plus points for her CV.

"The experience helped me when I applied for this job with Nintendo: even the basic admin skills like getting on with other people, answering phones, dealing with queries helped me, as well as working in a team," she says.

Transferable skills – and how you sell them – can help you land a job even if the company you're working for doesn't have any vacancies. And to bridge the gap between temping and full-time employment, a contract job can further enhance your worth in the marketplace. Talk to your agency to see what they would advise you to apply for, and remember that many of them can get you permanent jobs as well as temporary posts, taking the hard work out of searching.

So be patient and creative about the kind of temping you do – building up a bank of skills and interesting projects could give you the killer interview answer that gets you a job. While your peers might be lolling around under a cloud of doom, you have built up a raft of examples of negotiation, teamwork and delivering under pressure.

"I maybe expected to get into a company on a graduate training scheme and work up through a company," says Hamblen-Cartagena. "But it doesn't always work like that. Whichever way you get in, you do have to go in as a graduate and then work your way up. Temping is a great way to get on the ladder and it's been quicker for me doing it this way."