

# SO YOU WANT TO BECOME AN INTERIM MANAGER?

BY JOHN LAYCOCK

Often, when someone finds themselves at the end of their career but still has a lot of energy and experience to offer and isn't interested in retirement, they find their way into the interim market.

The best advice I can give someone in this scenario is that they have to be really clear about what they're offering the market. What sets you apart? Particularly when entering a well-defined market full of very qualified candidates, such as HR or estates, it can be very competitive.

I spend a lot of time speaking with candidates on how to define their USP and how they can best portray that through their CVs. When they say they want to become an interim we push back and say well, what is it that you've got for the market? Have you done any research? Is there a market for your skill set?

So, how can you set yourself apart and land that role? It is all about your achievements—no one else has your achievements—and how you are able to convey that. The candidates who truly stand out are the ones who can say, "This is what the situation was, this is what I achieved, and this is why the organisation is now in a better place for it," the ones who can showcase the results of their impact.

It's all around your key skills and your ability to take your experience of excellence somewhere, and transfer it into another place while simultaneously picking up the different cultures and nuances, and politics of that particular environment but not getting sucked into any of it and remaining objective and independent.

The best interims are the self starters who have a swift and noticeable impact and do what they are hired to do - transform the organisation. They have a 30, 60, 100 day plan. They're always looking to the future and planning their exit strategy almost as soon as they arrive. They know they won't be there for an extended time, so they're focussed on the legacy they will leave behind.

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Sometimes, clients will say they want an interim to do a big change transformation programme but don't want feathers ruffled or anybody upset on the way. Truthfully, those two statements aren't compatible. Inevitably, when making changes, you are going to have to ruffle feathers.

Interims are often there to do things that other people might find harder because they don't have a long-term future in the organisation. They can do things a bit easier knowing that it won't affect their long-term relationships or promotions. However, there is still the need for thick skin and, of course, a need for balance: the fortitude to blaze ahead and the ability to do that with tact and people skills.

It isn't as easy of a transition as some might think. A successful career doesn't necessarily translate into a successful interim career. While you may have been very good in your role as a Director of Finance, for example, do you have the skills to turn around an organisation that is financially failing in six months? Being an interim can be a hugely rewarding career, but it isn't a fallback option—it isn't for everyone.



*As the UK's most established interim management consultant in higher education, John has worked with over 80 universities, drawing on his unrivalled pool of interim leaders to support universities on a range of academic leadership and professional services interim appointments.*

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