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NEWS

Innovations - Initiative that lets jobless sell their time

Ben Willis, Regeneration & Renewal - 03 March 2006

Slivers of Time is an internet-based job initiative that allows the un- or under-employed to sell chunks of their time to employers requiring flexible labour. The government-funded programme operates as a market place, matching employees - or 'sellers' - wanting to work irregular hours with employers - or 'buyers' - requiring casual staff for a few hours at a time. Sellers have to sign up with an employment agency and their details are entered into the system and matched up with local employers looking for casual staff. Slivers of Time also aims to help specific groups, such as lone parents, who are only able to work at particular times of the day. Richard Manby, head of public sector at Slivers of Time, answers our panel's questions.

Q: WHAT MAKES Slivers of Time different to existing employment schemes, such as the New Deal?

A: Unlike other schemes, it enables people to engage with the local labour market around their own availability and commitments. And it enables employers to top up their workforce as and when they require. This is the only way employees can become involved with an employer for a few hours when it suits them.

Q: WHAT OPPORTUNITY is there for employees to build up new skills through Slivers of Time?

A: The scheme opens up employees to a range of employers. A 'seller' may be working for Royal Mail for a few hours one week, then Tesco for a few hours the next week - so they're able to build up a range of skills. They can print out from the website all the work they've done through Slivers of Time and take that to their personal adviser or a future employer.

Sellers are also incentivised to work well: employers can assign them a star rating if they do a good job. The site also allows workers to build up a personal rating, enabling them to command higher wages.

Q: LOCAL RECRUITMENT agencies have an important role in this system. Are they paid to provide this service?

A: Slivers of Time provides agencies with a new revenue stream. Currently it's not possible for agencies to offer this kind of service - where an employee works for a few hours at a time - because they make a loss due to the amount of cold calling and work involved in matching people with jobs. But Slivers of Time removes this work and so the costs for an agency are greatly reduced.

Q: WHAT KIND of protection and support are employees offered?

A: Sellers have the ability to control their bookings - for example, by specifying that they only want offers from an employer who has had, say, 20 problem-free bookings. We're not trying to replace job agencies - we are trying to cut their core costs - but we ask agencies to offer proper support for employees.

Q: WHO GETS the most value out of Slivers of Time: the worker, the employer or the agency?

A: All three. For employers, it offers a pool of motivated workers to top up their workforce when they require. For agencies, it offers a new revenue stream because once a seller is registered, they don't have the cost of managing the pool: the website does it for them. And for sellers, Slivers of Time helps them cross the bridge from inactivity to some kind of activity.

THE PANEL

Questions were compiled with help from Drew Thomas, chief executive of the Manchester-based Employment and Regeneration partnership, and Judy Ling Tsang, online marketing manager at charity Time Bank

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