

BEWARE OF THE SIGNS!

Question: *I interviewed with a company after applying for a position for which I had qualifications superior to those required. The hiring manager was unavailable and sent one of his direct reports to meet me. She recommended me for a second interview that I had with the hiring manager a week later. I believe both events went well. He offered me the job on the spot. However, during our discussion, he seemed determined to find flaws. After two hours, his only objection was my employment gap. This had occurred through no fault of my own. I don't hide it, and I don't excuse it; it merely is. He used this fact to stipulate a 90-day, 1099 probationary arrangement as a prerequisite for hire. Because I'd gone a long time without an income, and because this was the only opportunity I'd had since being downsized, I accepted the terms. I soon discovered that this man micromanaged, criticized, and verbally abused the staff; I became a target as well. I endured his ill behavior for 2-12 months, as I needed the job. I didn't go to HR. My status was technically that of a consultant, and none of my co-workers had ever reported him. Finally, he denigrated me in front of the entire department. Staying meant that I gave him permission to continue treating me this way, so I quit the next day. Comments?*

Answer: I am going to get spiritual for a moment. There is a saying I like that goes, "This is God doing for you what you could not do for yourself." You were given a job to provide income, but you were given it on a temporary basis, which made it much easier to leave. Let's talk about some of the signs that are indicators here. You talked about the fact that he was focused on flaws, especially on your employment gap. It sounds like you are pretty matter-of-fact about the employment gap. The fact that he kept focusing on it would be an indicator that all along he wanted to bring you in for a temporary assignment. There are a couple of reasons why companies will do this. The first is "positive." They do not have the funds available to hire a full-time employee, so they will bring someone in on a temporary or contract basis so they don't "lose" them.

Temporary/contract jobs are typically paid from a different pot than salaries are. The second reason for bringing you in on a contract basis is "negative." A hiring manager could have a legitimate concern about your employment gap, but if he did, he would typically offer you the contract arrangement without all this build-up. It sounds like he was trying to beat you into submission (I won't even call it negotiating) so that you would agree to his terms. I have seen companies (though in this case, I tend to believe it is more the hiring manager) do things like this to get "something for nothing." As a contract employee, they can let you go at any time without repercussions such as unemployment compensation and other claims. As a recruiter, I have seen companies use a 90- or 120-day guarantee to use someone for a couple of months without paying the recruiter fee. That is why my contract is worded very tightly. To close this part, I would say that temporary or contract positions, in general, are usually a good interim step. In fact, I recommend that job seekers use temporary positions at times to get in through the door as you did. But be careful of how they do the build-up. Now, let's talk for a minute about this guy's (using the term "gentleman" would mean giving him too much credit) poor potty training. There are micromanagers, and then there are abusers. This guy is an abuser. I, like everyone else, have worked for micromanagers. That is a whole different discussion. But to publicly criticize and verbally abuse people is beyond micromanagement. Most micromanagers I have seen would not do this. A micromanager typically has problems with simply trusting that other people can do the job to his or her standards. This guy's behavior, on the other hand, indicates major control issues. By treating people the way he does, he maintains total and absolute control, at least until it eventually blows up, which it will. Any psychological comments beyond this would not only be non-germane to this column but out of my area of expertise as well, at least until I get my PhD in psychology. You mention that no one has gone to HR. My bet is that someone has, whether it's a current or former employee. This blatant behavior is indicative of a particular company culture, one that condones, or at least ignores, the behavior because they are totally focused on results and are missing the fact that in the long run these kinds of situations actually lower results. People like this don't typically operate in a vacuum. It sounds like this person is so blatant that he and his group would have to be totally isolated for **senior management** not to see his poor behavior. Albert Einstein once commented, "A problem can only be solved at a level higher than which it was created." In this case, and others like it, I hold senior management responsible. Any of us can make bad hiring decisions, have a subordinate "go off the deep end," etc. Usually, it does take a short time to see such problems. But allowing them to continue is very poor management. Nine times out of ten, problems I have seen with managers are directly attributable to the folks up above. That is why I focus there and not on the manager with the problems. I would make one final suggestion, and this is my social conscience talking. Send a nicely worded, non-accusatory letter to both HR and senior management about your experience. My guess is nothing will happen, but you might get a free hamburger (sorry, that is the other letter I am sending to Wendy's). There is an outside chance that your letter might prompt some action on their part that would spare current and future employees from a manager behaving badly. Thanks again for the letter, and best of luck in your career. Here's wishing you terrific hunting, **Bill About the Author** Bill Gaffney has 17 years experience as an executive recruiter and career coach. He is bringing down one bad manager at a time. Bill can be reached at 937-567-5267 or wmgaffney@prodigy.net. For questions to be considered for this column, please email askamaxa@yahoo.com.

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