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What Is a PRN Employee?

by Lisa McQuerrey; Updated March 19, 2018

Pro re nata, frequently abbreviated as, "PRN," is a Latin term that refers to the phrase, "as needed." In the employment world, PRN has become a shortcut to refer to people who work in contracting, freelance or on-call positions in which they are only called into action when their employer requires them. While frequently applied to positions in the health care industry, the PRN work dynamic, often referred to as part of a "gig economy," has both its pros and cons, depending on your perspective.

Examples of PRN Work

Some types of jobs lend themselves to PRN status, such as seasonal work like lifeguarding or holiday-gift wrapping. Typically, employers hire PRN staff when they have fluctuating or unpredictable workloads and are never quite sure how many employees they'll need at one time.

Other types of PRN work can include roles such as :

- Substitute teachers
- Child care workers
- Retail/seasonal staffers
- Restaurant and catering roles
- Security guards
- Administrative assistance professionals

Some companies use PRN staff as on-call or contingent employees, while others require that those they employ in this capacity be available for a certain number of hours per month.

Pros and Cons of Being a PRN Employee

PRN work has its benefits and drawbacks for both workers and the companies that hire them.

Worker pros: As a PRN employee, you have more freedom and flexibility with your schedule than most full time employees. PRN workers also typically get paid more on average, than non-PRN-staffers.

Worker cons: If you don't have a set number of hours, it can be difficult to budget. Additionally, if you are required to work a minimum number of hours, you may find yourself working even more than you might have wanted to maintain your PRN status.

Business pro: Businesses can theoretically save money by not offering benefits for employees. They can also keep operating costs low if they only call in staff as they need them.

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Business cons: If PRN staffers aren't available when called, it can have a negative impact on a business that finds itself understaffed. Longevity and loyalty can also be potentially limited for workers who are only brought in as needed.

Is PRN Work for You?

There are many reasons people take PRN work over part or full-time employment. It can be a supplemental or second income, which can be helpful if you are:

- A parent with young kids.
- A student.
- A retiree.
- Trying to earn extra money.
- Entering a new field slowly to test the waters and see if you like the profession.

Before taking on a PRN role, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does the job pay benefits like health insurance? If not, will I need to find benefits elsewhere?
2. Am I good at budgeting a sporadic income? Can I support my financial needs?
3. Do I mind not having a set schedule?
4. Am I comfortable with frequently working different shifts?

Ask a lot of questions when interviewing or considering becoming a PRN employee.

For example:

1. On average, how many hours a week do your PRN employees get called in for?
2. What shifts or hours am I most likely to work?
3. What is the compensation/benefits structure?
4. Is there a chance that the PRN job could grow into a permanent position?

If you do accept a PRN role, get the terms in writing so you have a firm understanding of both your rights and your obligations.

References (2)

About the Author

Lisa McQuerrey has been a business writer since 1987. In 1994, she launched a full-service marketing and communications firm.

McQuerrey's work has garnered awards from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the International Association of Business Communicators and the Associated Press. She is also the author of several nonfiction trade publications, and, in 2012, had her first young-

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