

## CORPORATE ART

new Agency Workers Regulations came into effect on 1 October, meaning that after a 12-week period workers will be entitled to some of the benefits enjoyed by permanent staff.

Jonathan Exten-Wright, a partner at law firm DLA Piper, explains that the entitlements relate to basic working conditions such as overtime, working hours, holidays, access to training and facilities such as childcare. They do not include pension provision and occupational sick pay, though.

There is a way that companies can still hire seasonal workers without spending time and resources getting to grips with the regulations. Conduit uses agencies to fill the gaps, putting the onus on them to keep up to speed with relevant legislation.

Creighton states, 'First of all you need to know that they have a healthy network of pre-screened individuals, and then the most important thing for us is building up good long-standing relationships with agencies. You must get them to understand your mode of operation and have regular meetings with them so that they can fully understand your culture and any previous concerns.'

Other companies prefer to recruit their own temporary staff, such as direct marketing agency Granby Marketing Services. Managing director Joanne Varey explains, 'We recruit directly, so we know exactly who we are going to get.'

Over the past six years Granby has built up a database of about 300 people it can call on when contracts come up. However, Varey warns that if companies do go down this route then they must have a capable HR department. 'Our HR team must be conscious of rules and regulations, as well as keeping track of contracts, inductions and health and safety training for anyone who will work here.' ■



## THE BIGGER PICTURE

Art can improve more than just the office ambience

**E**arlier this year, London-based firm The Antique Wine Company commissioned an artist to create works for its new office and wine academy. Managing director Stephen Williams says he wanted to get away from the po-faced, elitist atmosphere that sometimes surrounds fine wine, so he approached artist Chris Burke, a 'quintessential English illustrator' with a 'witty, clever' take on the subject.

One of Burke's works for the company depicts a row of Lafite wine bottles marching over the Great Wall of China, while another (pictured above) illustrates five drinkers pondering the qualities of the wine they are quaffing. Another series of works is more abstract, incorporating the company's logo.

Williams explains that the art creates a great backdrop for clients visiting the company. He

adds, 'You cannot help but engage in them – everyone stops to look at the works and investigate the detail further.'

It would appear that corporate art goes further than simply decorating a space. Pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline decided to make an investment in a diverse art collection and its employees were at the heart

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of its choice. Director of operations Richard Collis remarks, 'The collection was chosen with the people who will live with the art firmly in mind.'

In addition to reinforcing company culture, enhancing staff satisfaction and facilitating relationships with clients, some believe that art can do even more. James Thorneley, group communications manager at Aberdeen Asset Management, who invested in paintings for its office, says well-chosen art creates 'an atmosphere conducive to reflection and contemplation' that is 'helpful in arriving at sensible decisions'. ▶

HR

The majority of British companies that invest in corporate art tend to buy, while American firms more frequently rent, according to Virginia Grub, managing director of Art Contact. She adds, 'Renting is great if you don't fully know what you want. You can rent a piece for 18 months and then change it or buy it at a discounted rate. Another obvious benefit is that in many cases art can prove to be a good investment and become a major asset for the company.'

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Tastes in corporate art are changing, according to Alex Heath, director at International Art Consultants. The firm's research shows that oils and watercolours are still most popular, with sculpture and mixed media works taking second and third places. But Heath adds that companies are becoming more receptive to new forms of digital and light-based art. It is not just the content of art, but also the format, genre and style that speak volumes about a company, he adds.

Naturally, the cost of purchasing or renting art will be a major factor in companies' decisions on what to hang on their walls. Prices will differ widely depending on whether firms decide on original pieces or prints, and whether they are by well-known artists or relative unknowns. Williams of The Antique Wine Company stands by his company's investment proudly, stating, 'As we commissioned such a well-known artist, we paid contemporary art market prices, but I'd say it was definitely a worthy investment.' ■

## KEEPING STAFF ON TRACK

### Technology can help you monitor staff, but how much tracking is healthy?

**T**here are various ways of making sure your employees are at their most productive, but while some managers favour close monitoring of their staff, others feel it can be avoided.

Communications company Powwownow uses measurement tools to track its staff, logging conversion rates, customer service metrics and other stats such as number of calls answered. Managing director Andrew Pearce says such technology is 'both a blessing and a curse'.

'It is important to give your managers specific measurement tools for each of their

teams, as metrics are different for each department,' says Pearce. But he adds, 'It is actually detrimental to be over-prying as staff work better when they feel trusted and in charge of their own workload. Micromanaging or being overscrupulous about how they do their work is just paranoid.'

#### TIGHTENING THE NET

Nigel Pushman, managing director of restaurant and bar chain Game Bird Inns, says that although he wouldn't use intrusive measures to keep tabs on staff, it is necessary to restrict employees' internet usage.

'Undoubtedly, social media can be a great source for improving knowledge and therefore productivity in areas such as sales, marketing and HR, but if you allow unlimited access without being able to control it then it is likely that the productivity gains could be outweighed by losses in other areas,' he says.

Many companies feel it is best to give staff freedom in their roles without scrupulous analysis of their performance. David Crabb, managing director of IT services business Cambridge Online, believes that honesty and transparency from managers is the key to making sure staff pull their weight. He says, 'Many years ago, I phoned up one member of staff, and there was background noise, as if he was out shopping. He said he was just coming out of a meeting but he clearly wasn't. I told him that, within reason, I had no problem with staff coming out of a customer meeting and going out to buy something for themselves.

'As long as you still hold them accountable for the end result, you can give staff as much freedom as they want. The use of tracking tools engenders a feeling of lack of trust and insecurity. If you feel that you can't trust your people, you've got the wrong people.' ■



Over-monitoring can suggest that staff are not trusted