

# Tips from an IT Staffing Expert: How Companies Find Short-Term SAP Talent

ASUG's Vice President of Content, Ann Marie Gray, sat down with Mark Koenig to talk about the state of SAP contract talent, what trends he's seeing, and how hiring companies can overcome some of the challenges they face when staffing critical projects.



## Mark Koenig

Managing Partner,  
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A seasoned professional serving the SAP ecosystem, Mark is a leader and architect who has successfully launched multiple companies and business units. He's been responsible for end-to-end software development, creating and managing complex human capital delivery strategies, and leading cross-functional teams. Mark thinks jumping out a perfectly good airplane is an absurd idea, mostly because he's spent hours of his time learning how to land them as a pilot.

### What advice do you have for companies looking for SAP contract workers? How can they make sure they're hiring the best person for the job?

It's simple, thankfully: We need good information and realistic expectations. Information from the hiring company is absolute gold for us. If you increase the quality of the information you give about a role by 5 percent or 10 percent, that could increase the efficacy of the candidates by 50 percent or 100 percent. There's the basic info like, "Hey, I need an ABAP person who's adept and well-versed in the financial modules. They're going to work on a code migration." Great, we can find those people all day long. What could

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amplify your success? Little anecdotes like, "We've found that people coming from large organizations don't tend to fit in well with our team." Then we can go look for ABAP people from smaller organizations. Or, "The consultant may be placed on a team with 20 other developers and needs to work independently because there's no time for micromanagement." We're more likely to find someone who's motivated to work in this environment—and that leads to a better experience for both the consultant and the hiring company. A good partner will pick up on the softer factors, which helps make the process exponentially better. No information is too much to help us find the best-fit candidates.

### Which SAP skill sets are currently in highest demand?

We see a lot of demand around data, so SAP Business Warehouse is big. We also see major demand around supply chain, specifically SAP Extended Warehouse Management (EWM). And of course, SAP Finance and Controlling (FICO). Any kind of data work that contractors can do is in high demand.

### Do you see this resulting from the data revolution going on within organizations that have realized they need to get their data in order?

No question. You don't know what you don't know. You may wake up one day and think, "Gosh, I wish we had this data. It would make this decision so much easier," and then you realize, by the time you think that, you're two years behind the ball because it could take that long to build that kind of data infrastructure. I think of organizations like Coca-Cola with billions of dollars in revenue, how important data is to a company like that, and how many moving pieces there are to keep that data flowing. So "data revolution" is a really good term.

### What should hiring companies expect from a high-quality SAP contract worker?

Someone who is well-versed in reading between the lines, problem-solving efficiently, and who can anticipate needs. A great contractor arrives on-site with sharp skills, good communication practices, and can fall right into any team or situation. That's what we expect out of our consultants. Our clients have hired

them because they want a superstar, and they should get one.

### When you're talking to independent contractors, how do you tell the difference between someone who will walk on coals versus someone who's just going to clock in and out?

I like to say that in staffing, it's a kinetic product. There's a lot you can do to sort out the best candidates if you're a good investigative recruiter, which thankfully our staff is full of. We have some of the longest tenure in the industry. On average, our recruiters have been eating and breathing and sleeping and living SAP for the last seven years. This is in an industry where you'll find turnovers of six or seven weeks, not six or seven years.

### How do hiring needs differ when IT is doing the hiring versus another department? To what extent does the HR team tend to get involved?

It's generally the business unit, IT, or both. And, of course, procurement. Procurement tends to manage the earmarked dollars for contingent

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labor. It also depends on the role. Is this a functional analyst where there's no technical vetting necessary? Well then, IT may not get involved. The business unit might meet with the CFO to create specs for the role. If it's a heavy technical individual, the CFO may not care at all. The company just needs the code done. Usually when you talk about work inside of any ERP system, it's a collaboration. You can't have the business without the technology and the technology can't exist without the business, so it requires a harmonious relationship.



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HR does not usually get involved unless we enter into an agreement where the company may want to make this individual a full-time offer down the road. They'll come to us and say, "Hey, we really want to add to our ABAP team. We've got six great guys and gals. We need a seventh. We need the work done now but, gee, it would be great if we could hire that person if they're a good fit." In the less-common cases like this where it's contract-to-hire, HR may vet these individuals.

### What are the biggest challenges that hiring companies are having with staffing vendors? What are some of the biggest complaints you hear?

Large staffing programs, or managed service providers (MSPs), simply aren't built to serve the niche needs within the SAP ecosystem. Their business is built to handle the other 98 percent of staffing needs: financial analysts, accountants, marketers, administrative assistants, network engineers, security guards, janitors, you name it. It's actually unfair to expect these businesses could satisfy the needs of the SAP community. So, we find the hiring companies that work with these big vendors to save the work of managing relationships are set up to fail when hiring SAP talent.

That's all well and good, but the SAP manager doesn't care about any of that—that person just needs resources to staff their projects. Let's say 5 percent of hiring in any organization in any given year is SAP-related. It's a low number, comparatively speaking. But that 5 percent of hires runs your entire company globally. They can have an impact, both positive and negative, on the entire organization. So why don't we build an efficient program that gets the right people in

to do this critical work?

**The big staffing programs have to be all things to all people. It's a classic case of "jack of all trades, master of none."**

Exactly. What's not efficient about the current model is that now hiring companies need to work with pockets of independent firms to hire for niche roles. Now they have these disparate

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organizations floating around. You have Sally managing one relationship and you have Jimmy managing another, and neither knows what the other is doing. Wouldn't it be great if this was all centralized? Because a centralized program works, we know that. The big managed service providers have thrived for a reason.

Wouldn't it be great if we could do this for the SAP market? We'd be able to efficiently and effectively manage the hiring process for clients. This would also create what I call in-kind competition. Because if I'm competing against another SAP staffing firm, I know I'm going to need to bring my A game to beat them every single time. The large staffing vendors do what they do and do it well, so they're not really our competitors. But when you do see this type of in-kind competition among SAP staffing companies, it raises the bar for the quality of the service.

**Mark, thank you for your time.**

Yes, thank you. This has been fun.



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