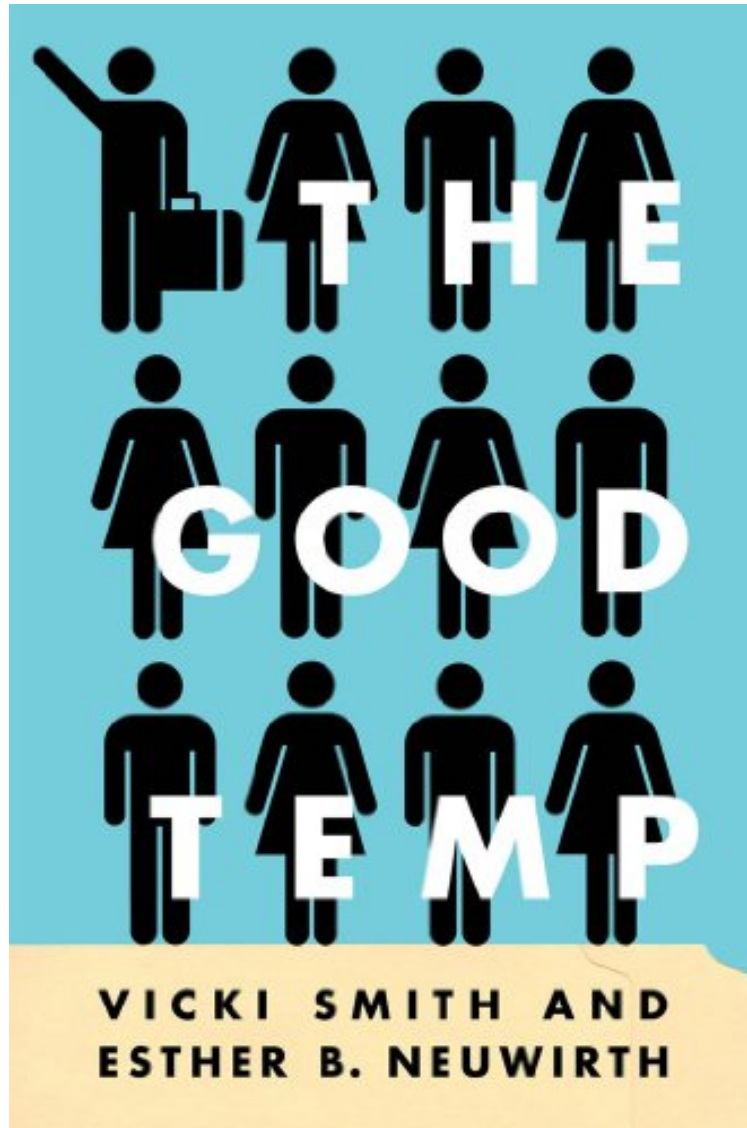


The Good Temp

Vicki Smith, Esther B. Neuwirth
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Vicki Smith, Esther B. Neuwirth : The Good Temp before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Good Temp:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Anoushka Asgarirequired for class. arrived on time and as described

Temporary agencies place approximately two and a half million people in jobs each day in the United States. Every year, about twelve million people use these placement agencies to find temporary work. Many Americans, even those

who desire permanent jobs, decide to enter the labor market through the portal of temporary agencies. Compared with the post-World War II era, when it was a marginal labor practice, temporary employment is today an entrenched feature of jobs and labor markets. How have temporary employment relationships become so widespread and normalized? In *The Good Temp*, Vicki Smith and Esther B. Neuwirth provide some novel answers to this question. Their provocative analysis is based on an insider's view of the interior dynamics of a temporary help agency in Silicon Valley. It incorporates a historical perspective on the rise of the temporary help service industry. Smith and Neuwirth document how this powerful industry not only created a new market for temporary labor but also played a fundamental role in the erosion of the permanent employment model. They analyze how agencies themselves came to manufacture and market this reinvented product—the good temp, an employee who is effective and efficient, committed, and sometimes preferable to a permanent staff member. Joining extensive participant observation data with historical analysis, *The Good Temp* contains some surprising findings about temporary employment today and fills a significant gap in our understanding of this important labor relationship.

"In *The Good Temp*, Vicki Smith and Esther Neuwirth examine the process of market-making in the segment of the temporary help industry in which agencies place workers with relatively limited skills into temporary, entry-level clerical, administrative, and light manufacturing positions. The strength of this book is that it does not conclude with the content analysis, as a typical journal might. Rather, it uses data from participant observation to show how temporary help agencies attempt to make the promise of 'the good temp' a reality. The book argues that the temporary help industry did not simply argue that it was possible for firms to employ good temps; rather, they implemented operating practices that created 'good temps.'"—*Administrative Science Quarterly* "This clearly argued, readable, and perceptive book is laudable for its refusal to accept the functionalist logic that temporary work and workers arise unproblematically out of market 'necessity,' and for its corresponding analysis of how particular employment relations are culturally legitimated and organizationally embedded. I especially appreciate the innovative use of ethnography to study practices and connections among individual and institutional actors in a labor market, rather than the internal workings of a single organization."—*American Journal of Sociology* "The argument made throughout the book is that the increased use of temporary employment over time was not simply a result of an increase in demand for that kind of work, but rather was the result of the wide-spread adoption of attitudes and beliefs within the corporate world regarding the supposed benefits of temporary labor; attitudes and beliefs which had been carefully constructed by the THS industry itself. . . . Smith and Neuwirth's book is an extremely balanced account of temp agencies and temporary employment. . . . It will make compelling reading for anyone interested in this particular subject matter, and it provides a fascinating window into the world of temporary employment and the THS industry."—James Skinner, *Qualitative Sociology* "The *Good Temp* opens wide the doors to a hitherto hidden employment world that has grown so explosively over the last few decades. But even more consequential than the sheer size of this industry is its ideological impact, which has emboldened many American managers to see all labor, and not just their 'temps,' as contingent, episodically employed workers. Vicki Smith and Esther B. Neuwirth tell this story with insight and brio."—Nelson Lichtenstein, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara "The *Good Temp* is an authoritative study of the interactions among temporary help agencies, temp workers, and their employers. These contractual relationships are also social processes in which all parties sustain the image of the 'good temp.' Vicki Smith and Esther B. Neuwirth offer fascinating historical and ethnographic material on the role of the temp industry in creating and promoting this new category. They also provide new ideas on how to improve the economic status of this fast-growing segment of the labor force. The *Good Temp* is an important book not only for the information it contains but also for the original way it synthesizes the labor market's social, economic, and political dynamics."—Sanford M. Jacoby, UCLA "The *Good Temp* provides a textured and convincing portrait of the Temporary Help Services industry. Through deep fieldwork the authors bring to light features of the industry that are poorly understood and underappreciated. They show how temporary help firms shape the demand for their product, how they upgrade the quality of jobs in which they place people, and how they attract and retain their workforce. Vicki Smith and Esther B. Neuwirth fully recognize and demonstrate the downsides of temporary employment, but their portrait of the industry is sophisticated and useful in ways that go well beyond most previous research and popular discussion."—Paul Osterman, NTU Professor of Human Resources and Management, Sloan School, MIT "How agencies have defined, stabilized, and expanded 'temporary work' is a big story. By serving as the intermediary between this new type of employee and the organizations that hire them, they have played a crucial role in helping to frame how we experience employment today."—Paul M. Hirsch, James Allen Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Organization and Chair, Department of Management and Organization, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University "From the Back Cover" "How agencies have defined, stabilized, and expanded 'temporary work' is a big story. By serving as the intermediary between this new type of employee and the organizations that hire them, they have played a crucial role in helping to frame how we experience employment today."—Paul M. Hirsch, James Allen Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Organization and Chair, Department of Management and Organization, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University About the Author Vicki Smith is Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of

California, Davis. She is the author of *Crossing the Great Divide* and *Managing in the Corporate Interest* and coauthor of *The Good Temp*. Esther B. Neuwirth is an applied researcher at the Care Management Institute, Kaiser Permanente, in Oakland, California.