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## 1. Who Are Employees?

Before you can know how to treat payments that you make to workers for services, you must first know the business relationship that exists between you and the person performing the services. The person performing the services may be:

- An independent contractor,
- A common-law employee,
- A statutory employee, or
- A statutory nonemployee.

This discussion explains these four categories. A later discussion, *Employee or Independent Contractor?* (section 2), points out the differences between an independent contractor and an employee and gives examples from various types of occupations.

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If an individual who works for you is not an employee under the common-law rules (see [section 2](#)), you generally do not have to withhold federal income tax from that individual's pay. However, in some cases you may be required to withhold under the backup withholding requirements on these payments. See Publication 15 (Circular E) for information on backup withholding.

## Independent Contractors

People such as lawyers, contractors, subcontractors, and auctioneers who follow an independent trade, business, or profession in which they offer their services to the public, are generally not employees. However, whether such people are employees or independent contractors depends on the facts in each case. The general rule is that an individual is an independent contractor if you, the person for whom the services are performed, have the right to control or direct only the result of the work and not the means and methods of accomplishing the result.

## Common-Law Employees

Under common-law rules, anyone who performs services for you is your employee if you have the right to control what will be done and how it will be done. This is so even when you give the employee freedom of action. What matters is that you have the right to control the details of how the services are performed. For a discussion of facts that indicate whether an individual providing services is an independent contractor or employee, see [section 2](#).

If you have an employer-employee relationship, it makes no difference how it is labeled. The substance of the relationship, not the label, governs the worker's status. It does not matter whether the individual is employed full time or part time.

For employment tax purposes, no distinction is made between classes of employees. Superintendents, managers, and other supervisory personnel are all employees. An **officer of a corporation** is generally an employee; however, an officer who performs no services or only minor services, and neither receives nor is entitled to receive any pay, is not considered an employee. A **director of a corporation** is not an employee with respect to services performed as a director.

You generally have to withhold and pay income, social security, and Medicare taxes on wages that you pay to common-law employees. However, the wages of certain employees may be exempt from one or more of these taxes. See [Employees of Exempt Organizations](#) (section 3) and [Religious Exemptions](#) (section 4).

**Leased employees.** Under certain circumstances, a firm furnishing workers to other firms is the employer of those workers for employment tax purposes. For example, a temporary staffing service may provide the services of secretaries, nurses, and other similarly trained workers to its clients on a temporary basis.

The staffing service enters into contracts with the clients under which the clients specify the services to be provided and a fee is paid to the staffing service for each individual

furnished. The staffing service has the right to control and direct the worker's services for the client, including the right to discharge or reassign the worker. The staffing service hires the workers, controls the payment of their wages, provides them with unemployment insurance and other benefits, and is the employer for employment tax purposes. For information on employee leasing as it relates to pension plan qualification requirements, see *Leased employee* in Publication 560, Retirement Plans for Small Business (SEP, SIMPLE, and Qualified Plans).

**Additional information.** For more information about the treatment of special types of employment, the treatment of special types of payments, and similar subjects, refer to Publication 15 (Circular E) or Publication 51 (Circular A).

## Statutory Employees

If workers are independent contractors under the common law rules, such workers may nevertheless be treated as employees by statute, "statutory employees," for certain employment tax purposes. This would happen if they fall within any one of the following four categories and meet the three conditions described under [Social security and Medicare taxes](#), later.

1. A driver who distributes beverages (other than milk) or meat, vegetable, fruit, or bakery products; or who picks up and delivers laundry or dry cleaning, if the driver is your agent or is paid on commission.
2. A full-time life insurance sales agent whose principal business activity is selling life insurance or annuity contracts, or both, primarily for one life insurance company.
3. An individual who works at home on materials or goods that you supply and that must be returned to you or to a person you name, if you also furnish specifications for the work to be done.
4. A full-time traveling or city salesperson who works on your behalf and turns in orders to you from wholesalers, retailers, contractors, or operators of hotels, restaurants, or other similar establishments. The goods sold must be merchandise for resale or supplies for use in the buyer's business operation. The work performed for you must be the salesperson's principal business activity. See [Salesperson](#) in section 2.

**Social security and Medicare taxes.** Withhold social security and Medicare taxes from the wages of statutory employees if all three of the following conditions apply.

- The service contract states or implies that substantially all the services are to be performed personally by them.
- They do not have a substantial investment in the equipment and property used to perform the services (other than an investment in transportation facilities).
- The services are performed on a continuing basis for the same payer.

**Federal unemployment (FUTA) tax.** For FUTA tax, the term “employee” means the same as it does for social security and Medicare taxes, except that it does not include statutory employees in *categories 2 and 3*, earlier. Any individual who is a statutory employee under *category 1 or 4*, earlier, is also an employee for FUTA tax purposes and subject to FUTA tax.

**Income tax.** Do not withhold federal income tax from the wages of statutory employees.

**Reporting payments to statutory employees.** Furnish Form W-2 to a statutory employee, and check “Statutory employee” in box 13. Show your payments to the employee as “other compensation” in box 1. Also, show social security wages in box 3, social security tax withheld in box 4, Medicare wages in box 5, and Medicare tax withheld in box 6. The statutory employee can deduct his or her trade or business expenses from the payments shown on Form W-2. He or she reports earnings as a statutory employee on line 1 of Schedule C (Form 1040), Profit or Loss From Business, or Schedule C-EZ (Form 1040), Net Profit From Business. A statutory employee’s business expenses are deductible on Schedule C (Form 1040) or C-EZ (Form 1040) and are not subject to the reduction by 2% of his or her adjusted gross income that applies to common-law employees.

## Statutory Nonemployees

There are three categories of statutory nonemployees: direct sellers, licensed real estate agents, and certain companion sitters. Direct sellers and licensed real estate agents are treated as self-employed for all federal tax purposes, including income and employment taxes, if:

- Substantially all payments for their services as direct sellers or real estate agents are directly related to sales or other output, rather than to the number of hours worked and
- Their services are performed under a written contract providing that they will not be treated as employees for federal tax purposes.

**Direct sellers.** Direct sellers include persons falling within any of the following three groups.

1. Persons engaged in selling (or soliciting the sale of) consumer products in the home or place of business other than in a permanent retail establishment.
2. Persons engaged in selling (or soliciting the sale of) consumer products to any buyer on a buy-sell basis, a deposit-commission basis, or any similar basis prescribed by regulations, for resale in the home or at a place of business other than in a permanent retail establishment.
3. Persons engaged in the trade or business of delivering or distributing newspapers or shopping news (including any services directly related to such delivery or distribution).

Direct selling includes activities of individuals who attempt to increase direct sales activities of their direct sellers and who earn income based on the productivity of their direct sellers. Such activities include providing motivation and encouragement; imparting skills, knowledge, or experience; and recruiting.

**Licensed real estate agents.** This category includes individuals engaged in appraisal activities for real estate sales if they earn income based on sales or other output.

**Companion sitters.** Companion sitters are individuals who furnish personal attendance, companionship, or household care services to children or to individuals who are elderly or disabled. A person engaged in the trade or business of putting the sitters in touch with individuals who wish to employ them (that is, a companion sitting placement service) will not be treated as the employer of the sitters if that person does not receive or pay the salary or wages of the sitters and is compensated by the sitters or the persons who employ them on a fee basis. Companion sitters who are not employees of a companion sitting placement service are generally treated as self-employed for all federal tax purposes.

## Misclassification of Employees

**Consequences of treating an employee as an independent contractor.** If you classify an employee as an independent contractor and you have no reasonable basis for doing so, you may be held liable for employment taxes for that worker (the relief provisions, discussed below, will not apply). See section 2 in Publication 15 (Circular E) for more information.

**Relief provisions.** If you have a reasonable basis for not treating a worker as an employee, you may be relieved from having to pay employment taxes for that worker. To get this relief, you must file all required federal information returns on a basis consistent with your treatment of the worker. You (or your predecessor) must not have treated any worker holding a substantially similar position as an employee for any periods beginning after 1977.

**Technical service specialists.** This relief provision does not apply for a technical services specialist you provide to another business under an arrangement between you and the other business. A technical service specialist is an engineer, designer, drafter, computer programmer, systems analyst, or other similarly skilled worker engaged in a similar line of work.

This limit on the application of the rule does not affect the determination of whether such workers are employees under the common-law rules. The common-law rules control whether the specialist is treated as an employee or an independent contractor. However, if you directly contract with a technical service specialist to provide services for your business and not for another business, you may still be entitled to the relief provision.

**Test proctors and room supervisors.** The consistent treatment requirement does not apply to services performed after December 31, 2006, by an individual as a test

proctor or room supervisor assisting in the administration of college entrance or placement examinations if the individual:

- Is performing the services for a section 501(c) organization exempt from tax under section 501(a) of the code, and
- Is not otherwise treated as an employee of the organization for employment taxes.

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## 2. Employee or Independent Contractor?

An employer must generally withhold federal income taxes, withhold and pay social security and Medicare taxes, and pay unemployment tax on wages paid to an employee. An employer does not generally have to withhold or pay any taxes on payments to independent contractors.

### Common-Law Rules

To determine whether an individual is an employee or an independent contractor under the common law, the relationship of the worker and the business must be examined. In any employee-independent contractor determination, all information that provides evidence of the degree of control and the degree of independence must be considered.

Facts that provide evidence of the degree of control and independence fall into three categories: behavioral control, financial control, and the type of relationship of the parties. These facts are discussed below.

**Behavioral control.** Facts that show whether the business has a right to direct and control how the worker does the task for which the worker is hired include the type and degree of:

***Instructions that the business gives to the worker.***

An employee is generally subject to the business' instructions about when, where, and how to work. All of the following are examples of types of instructions about how to do work.

- When and where to do the work.
- What tools or equipment to use.
- What workers to hire or to assist with the work.
- Where to purchase supplies and services.
- What work must be performed by a specified individual.
- What order or sequence to follow.

The amount of instruction needed varies among different jobs. Even if no instructions are given, sufficient behavioral control may exist if the employer has the right to control how the work results are achieved. A business may lack the knowledge to instruct some highly specialized

professionals; in other cases, the task may require little or no instruction. The key consideration is whether the business has retained the right to control the details of a worker's performance or instead has given up that right.

***Training that the business gives to the worker.*** An employee may be trained to perform services in a particular manner. Independent contractors ordinarily use their own methods.

**Financial control.** Facts that show whether the business has a right to control the business aspects of the worker's job include:

***The extent to which the worker has unreimbursed business expenses.*** Independent contractors are more likely to have unreimbursed expenses than are employees. Fixed ongoing costs that are incurred regardless of whether work is currently being performed are especially important. However, employees may also incur unreimbursed expenses in connection with the services that they perform for their business.

***The extent of the worker's investment.*** An independent contractor often has a significant investment in the facilities he or she uses in performing services for someone else. However, a significant investment is not necessary for independent contractor status.

***The extent to which the worker makes his or her services available to the relevant market.*** An independent contractor is generally free to seek out business opportunities. Independent contractors often advertise, maintain a visible business location, and are available to work in the relevant market.

***How the business pays the worker.*** An employee is generally guaranteed a regular wage amount for an hourly, weekly, or other period of time. This usually indicates that a worker is an employee, even when the wage or salary is supplemented by a commission. An independent contractor is usually paid by a flat fee for the job. However, it is common in some professions, such as law, to pay independent contractors hourly.

***The extent to which the worker can realize a profit or loss.*** An independent contractor can make a profit or loss.

**Type of relationship.** Facts that show the parties' type of relationship include:

- ***Written contracts describing the relationship the parties intended to create.***
- ***Whether or not the business provides the worker with employee-type benefits, such as insurance, a pension plan, vacation pay, or sick pay.***
- ***The permanency of the relationship.*** If you engage a worker with the expectation that the relationship will continue indefinitely, rather than for a specific project or period, this is generally considered evidence that your intent was to create an employer-employee relationship.
- ***The extent to which services performed by the worker are a key aspect of the regular business***

**of the company.** If a worker provides services that are a key aspect of your regular business activity, it is more likely that you will have the right to direct and control his or her activities. For example, if a law firm hires an attorney, it is likely that it will present the attorney's work as its own and would have the right to control or direct that work. This would indicate an employer-employee relationship.

**IRS help.** If you want the IRS to determine whether or not a worker is an employee, file Form SS-8, Determination of Worker Status for Purposes of Federal Employment Taxes and Income Tax Withholding, with the IRS.

## Industry Examples

The following examples may help you properly classify your workers:

### Building and Construction Industry

**Example 1.** Jerry Jones has an agreement with Wilma White to supervise the remodeling of her house. She did not advance funds to help him carry on the work. She makes direct payments to the suppliers for all necessary materials. She carries liability and workers' compensation insurance covering Jerry and others that he engaged to assist him. She pays them an hourly rate and exercises almost constant supervision over the work. Jerry is not free to transfer his assistants to other jobs. He may not work on other jobs while working for Wilma. He assumes no responsibility to complete the work and will incur no contractual liability if he fails to do so. He and his assistants perform personal services for hourly wages. Jerry Jones and his assistants are employees of Wilma White.

**Example 2.** Milton Manning, an experienced tile setter, orally agreed with a corporation to perform full-time services at construction sites. He uses his own tools and performs services in the order designated by the corporation and according to its specifications. The corporation supplies all materials, makes frequent inspections of his work, pays him on a piecework basis, and carries workers' compensation insurance on him. He does not have a place of business or hold himself out to perform similar services for others. Either party can end the services at any time. Milton Manning is an employee of the corporation.

**Example 3.** Wallace Black agreed with the Sawdust Co. to supply the construction labor for a group of houses. The company agreed to pay all construction costs. However, he supplies all the tools and equipment. He performs personal services as a carpenter and mechanic for an hourly wage. He also acts as superintendent and foreman and engages other individuals to assist him. The company has the right to select, approve, or discharge any helper. A company representative makes frequent inspections of the construction site. When a house is finished, Wallace is paid a certain percentage of its costs. He is not responsible for faults, defects of construction, or wasteful operation. At

the end of each week, he presents the company with a statement of the amount that he has spent, including the payroll. The company gives him a check for that amount from which he pays the assistants, although he is not personally liable for their wages. Wallace Black and his assistants are employees of the Sawdust Co.

**Example 4.** Bill Plum contracted with Elm Corporation to complete the roofing on a housing complex. A signed contract established a flat amount for the services rendered by Bill Plum. Bill is a licensed roofer and carries workers' compensation and liability insurance under the business name, Plum Roofing. He hires his own roofers who are treated as employees for federal employment tax purposes. If there is a problem with the roofing work, Plum Roofing is responsible for paying for any repairs. Bill Plum, doing business as Plum Roofing, is an independent contractor.

**Example 5.** Vera Elm, an electrician, submitted a job estimate to a housing complex for electrical work at \$16 per hour for 400 hours. She is to receive \$1,280 every 2 weeks for the next 10 weeks. This is not considered payment by the hour. Even if she works more or less than 400 hours to complete the work, Vera Elm will receive \$6,400. She also performs additional electrical installations under contracts with other companies, that she obtained through advertisements. Vera is an independent contractor.

### Trucking Industry

**Example.** Rose Trucking contracts to deliver material for Forest, Inc., at \$140 per ton. Rose Trucking is not paid for any articles that are not delivered. At times, Jan Rose, who operates as Rose Trucking, may also lease another truck and engage a driver to complete the contract. All operating expenses, including insurance coverage, are paid by Jan Rose. All equipment is owned or rented by Jan and she is responsible for all maintenance. None of the drivers are provided by Forest, Inc. Jan Rose, operating as Rose Trucking, is an independent contractor.

### Computer Industry

**Example.** Steve Smith, a computer programmer, is laid off when Megabyte, Inc., downsizes. Megabyte agrees to pay Steve a flat amount to complete a one-time project to create a certain product. It is not clear how long that it will take to complete the project, and Steve is not guaranteed any minimum payment for the hours spent on the program. Megabyte provides Steve with no instructions beyond the specifications for the product itself. Steve and Megabyte have a written contract, which provides that Steve is considered to be an independent contractor, is required to pay federal and state taxes, and receives no benefits from Megabyte. Megabyte will file Form 1099-MISC, Miscellaneous Income, to report the amount paid to Steve. Steve works at home and is not expected or allowed to attend

meetings of the software development group. Steve is an independent contractor.

## Automobile Industry

**Example 1.** Donna Lee is a salesperson employed on a full-time basis by Bob Blue, an auto dealer. She works six days a week and is on duty in Bob's showroom on certain assigned days and times. She appraises trade-ins, but her appraisals are subject to the sales manager's approval. Lists of prospective customers belong to the dealer. She is required to develop leads and report results to the sales manager. Because of her experience, she requires only minimal assistance in closing and financing sales and in other phases of her work. She is paid a commission and is eligible for prizes and bonuses offered by Bob. Bob also pays the cost of health insurance and group-term life insurance for Donna. Donna is an employee of Bob Blue.

**Example 2.** Sam Sparks performs auto repair services in the repair department of an auto sales company. He works regular hours and is paid on a percentage basis. He has no investment in the repair department. The sales company supplies all facilities, repair parts, and supplies; issues instructions on the amounts to be charged, parts to be used, and the time for completion of each job; and checks all estimates and repair orders. Sam is an employee of the sales company.

**Example 3.** An auto sales agency furnishes space for Helen Bach to perform auto repair services. She provides her own tools, equipment, and supplies. She seeks out business from insurance adjusters and other individuals and does all of the body and paint work that comes to the agency. She hires and discharges her own helpers, determines her own and her helpers' working hours, quotes prices for repair work, makes all necessary adjustments, assumes all losses from uncollectible accounts, and receives, as compensation for her services, a large percentage of the gross collections from the auto repair shop. Helen is an independent contractor and the helpers are her employees.

## Attorney

**Example.** Donna Yuma is a sole practitioner who rents office space and pays for the following items: telephone, computer, on-line legal research linkup, fax machine, and photocopier. Donna buys office supplies and pays bar dues and membership dues for three other professional organizations. Donna has a part-time receptionist who also does the bookkeeping. She pays the receptionist, withholds and pays federal and state employment taxes, and files a Form W-2 each year. For the past 2 years, Donna has had only three clients, corporations with which there have been long-standing relationships. Donna charges the corporations an hourly rate for her services, sending monthly bills detailing the work performed for the prior month. The bills include charges for long distance calls,

on-line research time, fax charges, photocopies, postage, and travel, costs for which the corporations have agreed to reimburse her. Donna is an independent contractor.

## Taxicab Driver

**Example.** Tom Spruce rents a cab from Taft Cab Co. for \$150 per day. He pays the costs of maintaining and operating the cab. Tom Spruce keeps all fares that he receives from customers. Although he receives the benefit of Taft's two-way radio communication equipment, dispatcher, and advertising, these items benefit both Taft and Tom Spruce. Tom Spruce is an independent contractor.

## Salesperson

To determine whether salespersons are employees under the usual **common-law** rules, you must evaluate each individual case. If a salesperson who works for you does not meet the tests for a common-law employee, discussed earlier, you do not have to withhold federal income tax from his or her pay (see *Statutory Employees* in section 1). However, even if a salesperson is not an employee under the usual common-law rules, his or her pay may still be subject to social security, Medicare, and FUTA taxes.

To determine whether a salesperson is an employee for social security, Medicare, and FUTA tax purposes, the salesperson must meet **all eight** elements of the statutory employee test. A salesperson is a statutory employee for social security, Medicare, and FUTA tax purposes if he or she:

1. Works full time for one person or company except, possibly, for sideline sales activities on behalf of some other person,
2. Sells on behalf of, and turns his or her orders over to, the person or company for which he or she works,
3. Sells to wholesalers, retailers, contractors, or operators of hotels, restaurants, or similar establishments,
4. Sells merchandise for resale, or supplies for use in the customer's business,
5. Agrees to do substantially all of this work personally,
6. Has no substantial investment in the facilities used to do the work, other than in facilities for transportation,
7. Maintains a continuing relationship with the person or company for which he or she works, and
8. Is **not** an employee under common-law rules.