

Whose job description is it?

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Your phone is ringing. Should you pick it up or not? You know it's HR, and you know what they want. "We need a job description for that new position in your group." You sigh and start typing into the company's job description template.

Too often job descriptions are seen as *just something else human resources requires*. As a consequence, the document is assembled in a hurry, "cut and pasted" from other job descriptions, downloaded off the internet, or left to human resources to divine from just bits of information received during a brief hallway conversation. Not a good start to creating a quality document!

So what are job descriptions used for anyway?

Job descriptions at their best should be vibrant, descriptive documents. Job descriptions can help establish the design of the organization and paint a picture for managers and employees to clearly understand roles and relationships within the organization. Well-written job descriptions provide managers with the tools required to interview and select the best candidates, successfully on-board new hires, and design meaningful career paths.

Accurate job descriptions are also necessary to determine the true market value of positions while ensuring internal equity. Using just job titles to determine market or internal equity can be misleading, and can result in either overpaying or underpaying. It is all about content.

Lawyers agree that solid well written job descriptions are often an important component in the defense of any third party actions.

Sounds good but why should I do this and how do I start?

The first step in writing a job description is to ask the question ... "why does this position exist in my department?" "What exactly will the individual do for the company?" YOU, the hiring manager know the answer to these questions better than anyone else. Sorry but you do!

You plan on hiring smart people. You need smart job descriptions. You don't need to tell people the steps they should take to make a sale or that they need to learn your products. You do need to describe the action that creates the desired output: make, sell, create, coordinate, analyze, etc.

Once you have described the outputs of the position it is time to turn to the inputs, i.e., the skills, training, knowledge, education and experience the person needs to have in order to produce those outputs. With a general framework in hand it is now time to reach out and collaborate with an HR professional in your company.

The result of this collaborative process will be a job description that's substantive, clear, and concise. It's a tool you can use to ensure your organization is designed to produce outputs – not just do tasks; a tool to use for interviewing and selecting the best candidates; a tool for training and evaluating performance; and a tool to engage your employees in meaningful discussions regarding development needs, career paths, and succession planning.

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