Why the Job Description Does Not Describe the Job



What candidates say about job descriptions and 5 ways to improve the accuracy of them.

Expectations are funny things. If you have negative expectations about a job, you may be consoled by the accuracy of your expectations if the job turns out to be unpleasant. If you have ever been disappointed by a mediocre job that did not meet your positive expectations, you may feel dissatisfied and misled, even if the job fell only slightly short of your expectations.

Most job descriptions are not designed to be misleading. The problem with many is that they are often outdated and can mislead applicants by omitting key details.

Job descriptions should include:

- Key responsibilities which include essential duties;
- Position requirements such as educational/training qualifications and experience;
- Reporting structure and team/department description;
- Job performance expectations; and,
- Job logistics and structure (hours per week, location, and length of employment).

Within these points, however, there can be a lot of room for flexibility.

Generally poor job descriptions are ones that omit crucial details or deliberately mislead applicants. Somewhere between the job descriptions, the interviews, the employment contract and the actual experience, information is simply not communicated clearly.

Where’s the Dishonesty in Job Descriptions?

According to a survey by Glassdoor, a job and career website where candidates and employees provide feedback on organizations, many people reported that job descriptions often do not represent the reality of the job.

In 2013, Glassdoor commissioned a survey from Harris Interactive and found that 61%

of respondents said that job descriptions had not accurately represented the job they later acquired. How did these differences manifest?

Glassdoor did not lay the blame for the discrepancies solely at the feet of the organizations. Sometimes candidates simply misunderstand job requirements or have different expectations or perceptions about their roles based on previous experiences. Still, sometimes organizations do fail to accurately describe a job for reasons that include a desire to sugar-coat existing problems or a failure to understand the full scope of the job.

To minimize job reality shock and dissatisfaction, it can be useful for HR or hiring managers to take extra steps to ensure that everyone is able to communicate clearly about the requirements and expectations of a job.

Create Accurate Job Descriptions Through the Full Hiring Process

1. Review and update job descriptions. 39% of Glassdoor respondents indicated that job responsibilities were not as advertised. Changes to the job, team, department or company may play a role in changing the nature of the posting. If a job description has not been reviewed in 3 or 6 months, take extra steps to make sure that the duties of a given job have not changed. Clarify technical aspects of the job, verify structure, the hours of work and general expectations. Do not rely on the supervisor alone for these details. As incumbents, conduct exit interviews and ask existing employees to define their duties and responsibilities.

2. Include insights into job/team/personality challenges. 40% of respondents cited a disconnect between the employee morale they had been expecting and what they found. 36% cited misleading expectations about a boss's personality. You do not have to make statements that say the supervisor is demanding and loud, but you can indicate that the environment is a 'high pressure team' or 'a demanding work environment.' Individuals who are turned off by these descriptions will likely not be a good fit for the role.

3. Clarify the scope of the job to everyone involved in the hiring and interview process. All employees involved in interviewing and screening should be on the same page during the full hiring process. It is possible that members of the hiring committee do not have a full understanding of the job or are knowledgable about responsibilities and expectations. Caution those not intimately involved in the job or with the team to refrain from talking about what they do not know.

4. Bring co-workers into the interview process. Whenever possible, involve co-workers or other non-supervisory employees in the hiring process. Co-workers, especially those in the same job, should be given an opportunity to review the job descriptions and participate in creating a scope of work description. It may help to ask co-workers in the same position for which you are hiring to create a list of daily or monthly responsibilities for your new hire. You can include co-workers behind the scenes by asking them to create interview questions or participate in the interview itself. Co-workers are often in the best people to offer a realistic view of the team and role to the new candidate.

5. Ask the candidate to describe their understanding of the job. As you move along in the process and before you narrow down your selection, ask each candidate to express their impression of the job. Ask them to describe the scope of duties they expect, daily requirements of the job, and their needs. Clarify any discrepancies before the offer is signed.

Avoiding Discrimination

It is very important during this process to clarify the difference between an appropriate range of expectations for a job and a job description that would systematically discriminate against individuals classified under law. For example, if you advertise a job that requires an employee to work from 8:30 to 4:30, but you encourage an employee stay later if she really wants to succeed, you may be creating a situation that discriminates on the basis of family status. Be certain that you can justify these details as essential elements of the job.

Realistic Impressions

You may be able to attract more candidates with a job description that offers general information with a positive spin, but it may not keep them at your business in the long run. During the hiring process, everyone is trying to put their best foot forward and create favorable impressions. Beware of false advertising and make sure to be honest when crafting and revising job descriptions, even if it means including unpleasant job responsibilities. You will attract and retain loyal employees when your candidates know what to expect.