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How to Write a Job Description That Delivers High-Performing Candidates

Do You Really Need a Job Description?

Yes, absolutely.

Successful managers in any industry not only [your sector] understand that hiring the right people to work for you can either make or break your business. At the same time, a poor hiring decision could lead to a wasted budget, higher turnover, and an unhappy team.

From an employer perspective, job descriptions provide the benefit of establishing exactly what might be expected from future and current employees. The outline for your job description can double as a performance review, ensuring that your team members continue to excel in their roles consistently.

For applicants, job descriptions provide guidelines to help them determine whether a job is right for them. Applicants reviewing a job description will receive an insight into what might be expected of them, and which tasks they'll need to complete in the workplace. Throughout their career, a job description can also give staff a reminder of the duties they're responsible for.

A great job description:

- Serves as a reference for both employers and employees.
- Communicates the expectations of the role to both employers and candidates.
- Helps with succession planning.
- Assists with employee satisfaction by giving a candidate an idea what to expect.
- Ensures that brands access the skills and talent they need to fill corporate gaps.
- Functions as inspiration for the development of interview questions.
- Offers a basis for salary increases, goal setting, and growth paths.
- Serves as legal documentation in the event of a termination, or lawsuit against the company.

While companies aren't legally required to write job descriptions, the benefits of taking the initiative are hard to argue with. While an effectively developed employee job description can work as a roadmap to

organisational success, contributing to people-planning solutions, training and even maintaining satisfaction, a bad employee description can damage a brand.

A great job description retains and motivates the best talent by aligning business goals with employee expectations. Without the right job description, all you end up with is workplace confusion, problematic internal communication, and a workforce that isn't sure what's expected of them.

Writing the Perfect Job Description: What Does Your Business Need?

Writing job descriptions may seem like an onerous task, but it's not just the time commitment that can lead to avoidance from HR executives. Some companies fail to write effective job descriptions simply because they're not sure exactly what they want from their candidates. With that in mind, it's important to make sure that you fully assess the needs of your business and what your criteria will be before you ever start putting pen to paper.

To begin writing the right job description, make sure you ask yourself the following questions:

What do You Think You Want?

What you think you want, and what a job candidate can realistically deliver are sometimes two different things. For instance, you might think you're looking for a receptionist who can also manage accounting tasks. However, most receptionists simply aren't qualified to address bookkeeping challenges, and most bookkeepers won't have the time to do receptionist chores.

Thinking about what you want, then addressing your needs from a realistic perspective may help you to adjust your hiring strategy.

What Does the Business Need?

Rather than trying to fill the gaps in your business by searching for a specific professional, a good way to refine your search is to think about what your business really needs, both now and in the next 3-5 years to hit your growth objectives.

Consider the different talents or skill sets that you will want to introduce into your company, then think about which roles, or collection of roles that will need both role profiles and job descriptions.



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Sometimes, simply listing off some of the characteristics you're looking for in a new [key role in your sector] hire to a specialist recruitment agency will allow them to suggest a specific role to help you.

How Clear are You on Your Needs?

There's a big difference between deciding you don't have enough help around the office, and hiring to fill the gaps, and determining a few key skills that your company could benefit, and potentially grow from. Think carefully about what you want to achieve with your new hire.

If possible, write a list of the most important tasks that need to be completed in your company, which aren't currently getting the degree of attention they require or are causing delivery issues. Organise that list according to a hierarchy of most, to least important.

Is This an Established Role? Or Something New?

Sometimes, the unique needs of your business will be so niche that you won't be able to describe them using a pre-existing job title. On the other hand, you might need to create a "hybrid" job role that combines skill sets from two inter-connecting areas.

If designing a new role from scratch isn't realistic, then you may have to think about some alternatives. For instance, can you give some of your existing employees extra responsibilities so that you can write a more specific job description for your new staff member? Alternatively, could you consider hiring two people instead of one to fulfil different roles?

The Common Mistakes to Avoid with Job Descriptions

Some hiring managers and business owners can start to feel as though if they've read one job description, then they've read them all. This is because there are a lot of job descriptions that are rushed, vague and generic. Unfortunately, those are the descriptions that will never get you the perfect candidate.

A job description is your number one attraction tool when it comes to reaching the right candidates for your position. If your descriptions are outdated, recycled, or dull, then you won't get many hidden candidates applying for your role.

On the other hand, a well-crafted job description calls out to great candidates like a beacon, discouraging the unqualified at the same time.

Of course, to create an incredible job description, you'll first need to know what mistakes to avoid, and which slip-ups could damage your chances of the perfect hire.

Mistake 1: A Confusing Job Title

Because you know what you mean when you say you want a "Growth hacking expert", doesn't mean your candidates understand you. A lot of brands feel the need to rebrand job descriptions to make them sound more appealing. However, making your job titles as simple and clear as possible will go a long way towards making sure you recruit the right candidate for the job who then goes on to perform well in the role.

Mistake 2: Too Much Jargon

A lot of businesses find that, after enough time in the industry, their company begins to create a language all its own. While this might be fine for people inside your "inner circle", be careful not to use corporate jargon when writing a job description. Too many technical terms will create confusion, and send your candidates scrambling for a dictionary rather than their C.V.

Mistake 3: Missing or Inaccurate Information

No matter how you choose to make your job description stand out from the crowd, it's important to ensure that you're always informative. The last thing you want to hear from a new candidate is "That's not in my job description".

Before you begin writing, think about which specific skill sets or job functions are critical to your new role. Let your recruitment consultant know which skills are a must have (in other words don't send me a CV if they haven't got this skill) and which are nice to have, (if they have that too, it's great though I will still see them anyway).

Make sure that you include all vital responsibilities in the description, and remember to keep your language clear and concise so that you don't end up confusing your applicants.

Mistake 4: Setting Unrealistic Expectations

While most organisations will be looking for a candidate that surpasses all their expectations, that doesn't mean that you should be unrealistic. Looking for someone too specific is likely to lead to disappointment, as the chances are that you'll have to make a few compromises when it comes to finding your dream candidate. Prioritise the requirements that you're looking for, and make sure that you only focus on those that are most crucial to the job.



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Mistake 5: Going Too Long, or Too Short

There's a fine line to walk between an informative, interesting, and helpful job description, and one that contains far too much information. "Brevity is the soul of wit", but you also need to make sure that you're not missing out any essential information while you're trying to keep your description concise.

The easiest way to make sure that your description is neither too long nor too short, is to edit it when you're done writing. Cut out anything that's unnecessary, and keep all the vital parts. Where possible, using bullet points could be your saving grace. This is where an experienced recruiting partner can help. They will have viewed potentially thousands of job descriptions and importantly be aware of the ones that worked when it came to being clear and attracting the ideal candidate for the role.

Mistake 6: Make It Attractive, Representative of Your Brand and Informative

Writing a great job description isn't only your opportunity to seek out the best possible talent for your organisation, it's also your opportunity to showcase your corporate culture to potential new employees. Remember, you want to attract professional skilled people, but you'll struggle to do that if you don't look professional yourself. Follow the current style guidelines surrounding your job descriptions. At the same time, avoid offending anyone with terms that are sexist or ageist. For instance, use "energetic" instead of "young".

Mistake 7: Being Too Outdated

While re-posting the same description from last year might seem like a useful way to save time, the truth is that it's not the best way to get your hands on the right candidate. Update the language you used, inject some personality that better represents your brand, and refine the requirements and responsibilities section.

Starting with a template is fine, but it's important to make sure that you keep up-to-date, and let your voice come through in your post. Showing your personality and staying modern will help to reflect a more appealing company culture.

In today's busy recruitment landscape, most candidates will consider reading a well-written job description to be like a breath of fresh air.

Remember, a great job description is literally a talent magnet; it's therefore worth putting in the extra effort. Of course, nothing beats a fresh pair of eyes, so before you publish, ask other members of your team to offer their input.

The Ideal Job Description: Sections to Cover

Ultimately, a job description is a critical document and a guideline for every position in your company. A good description can:

- Outline the competencies and skills required for a role.
- Define the position of the role within the business hierarchy.
- Act as the basis for an employment contract.
- Provide a valuable tool for performance management.

While the specific nature of the role you're hiring for will determine some of the key elements of your job description, some of the universal features to include in any job description include:

1. The Job Title

A job title is the first thing that your prospective candidates will look at when it comes to deciding whether a job is right for them or not. Without a good job title, you'll struggle to attract the right attention for your chosen position. Remember, your title should be:

- Self-explanatory, and accurate enough for your candidates to understand.
- Capable of accurately reflecting the nature of the position and the duties to be performed.
- Non-exaggerative, and free of any age or gender implications.
- Connected with the overall hierarchy of the business.

2. Duties

The job description you write should also contain a comprehensive list of all the responsibilities and duties associated with the role, as well as how much skill is required to complete each task. You can represent the time taken to each task with a percentage (such as data entry 40%). Remember, descriptions of duties should only be a couple of sentences long and based on specific outcomes. For instance: "You will compile monthly financial reports to allow for department budget monitoring". [or add something relevant for a specific role your sector clients recruit for]



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How long your list of duties is will depend on the role in question, and the nature of your business. However, you should keep the outline as short as possible. This will stop you from scaring off your potential applicants, or provide them with more information than they can handle.

3. Competencies and Skills

Competencies and skills within your chosen job role should be listed in separate areas from each other, as they're different things. While skills are activities that the candidate can perform according to what they might have learned in the past, competencies are the attributes or traits that you expect the candidates to show in their role. For instance, a skill might be the ability to offer exceptional presentations.

On the other hand, a competency might be a welcoming personality. While you can teach someone to improve their presentation skills, a winning personality is more of an inherent part of what makes someone unique. Today, competency-based job interviews are becoming increasingly common in the search for the ideal role applicants.

4. Relationships

This is an area that's frequently forgotten in many job descriptions, but one that shouldn't be taken for granted. Outlining the working relationships and reporting lines that are associated with a specific role will help your candidate to understand who they will be reporting to, and who will report to them. This isn't only essential from a compliance perspective, but it will also give your candidate an insight into the hierarchal structure of your business.

Working relationships represent the people and departments your ideal candidate will need to work with. You could consider using an organisational chart to represent the relationships most essential to a specific role. Talk to your recruitment partner if you need help with this.

5. Salary

Finally, all job candidates want to know exactly what they can expect to receive in terms of compensation for their work. Instead of giving a specific salary to your chosen position, you'll need to choose a salary "range" that you can add to the description that's competitive regarding similar positions. This range will allow for variations based on experience and education.

There's a good chance that your salary range will need to be updated with time, as pay scales and preferences continue to change in your industry.

In today's economy additional benefits and perks like gym memberships, work at home days, compassionate leave, the ability to be given time off to carry out work in a favourite charity, can all swing a candidate's decision.

What Candidates Look for in Your Job Description

Often, writing the perfect job description isn't only about knowing which sections you "should" cover, but also recognising the things that your candidates will be most keen to hear about.

Studies from the Journal of Business and Psychology outline that the information included in a job description ultimately makes a huge difference to the types of applicants that you attract. The study found that describing exactly what benefits the employer can offer its employees, rather than simply addressing the things that employers need from their applicants, can help to increase the number of applicants that apply, while enhancing the quality of those candidates at the same time.

Unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to the perfect job description/posting. However, if you're dipping your feet into [add your specific sector here] a very specific talent pool, then you're going to have to compete against a range of other companies looking for the same skills as you. With that in mind, it's worth making sure that your job description is attractive enough to make you competitive in the eyes of applicants. Some of the key things that most candidates look for include:

1. Attention to Detail

You know exactly what you want from a new candidate, but it's important to make sure that your applicants know what you're looking for too. It's all-too-easy to assume that your would-be employees know what you mean when you say a certain thing, but being clear and detailed is crucial.

Start your search by writing a detailed list of all the things you need from your new candidate, then dedicate yourself to finding the right person to fill those gaps. Remember to outline your minimum requirements for things like certifications, years of experience, skills, and more. This will help to save you hours of sorting through inappropriate applicants.

2. Plenty of Perks

When it comes to making your role stand out, remember that no benefit is too small to brag about. Look for ways to demonstrate to new candidates



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that you value your employees. For instance, mention the different team building events that you take part in, or any free meals that might be provided when employees are on shift. Consider whether you can offer schedules that are flexible enough to suit mothers and students, and outline any opportunities that you offer in terms of training and development.

3. Simple Applications

From a job-seeker's perspective, searching for the perfect new job is tough enough without having to tackle the added frustrations of a time-consuming and overwhelming application process. According to surveys, about 51% of workers are now searching for a new job, and these people don't have time to struggle through difficult online forms.

While you want to make sure that you're only getting the best possible applicants for your role, that shouldn't mean that applying for your position feels like a test. Ask your specialist recruitment agency how you can simplify the process.

4. Accessibility

Today, people are browsing the internet from more devices than ever before. If you're going to be posting your job description online, then make sure that applicants are free to send their details anytime, anywhere. About 27% of people expect to be able to apply for a job from a mobile device. If your strategy isn't optimised, then you could be missing out on a significant portion of candidates, including Millennials. Make sure that at the very least, candidates can read your job description from their mobile devices.

5. Personality

Finally, just as hiring managers are more likely to skip past an unoriginal or boring CV or Resume, job seekers are likely to avoid bland job descriptions. Think about what sets your position apart from the other opportunities out there, and ask yourself why your candidate might want to work for you above anyone else.

Where possible, break away from the boring and traditional language of older job postings, and seek out new ways to capture your job seeker's attention. Crafting informative and unique descriptions might take more time, but it's worth it to attract top talent.

What If...

Successful businesses today understand the value of making the right decisions for their hiring needs. Whatever the reason might be for offering a job to the wrong person, you will find that incorrect hires can be an expensive error.

Without the right job description, you can't hire the right people, and a wrong hire leads to astronomical costs for companies. The Harvard Business Review currently estimates that 80% of all employee turnover comes down to bad hiring decisions. On top of that, the cost of replacing employees is one-fifth of their average salary. The costs quickly add up; don't they.

At the end of the day, writing the best job description, and making the right hire is crucial to keeping a company successful. Failing to dedicate enough time and effort to your descriptions can result in:

Productivity Costs

While you and other executives in your business are wasting time trying to train a new hire or manage conflicts between your new hire and your existing staff, your business starts to suffer. All that time spent managing an incorrect hire drains productivity. In fact, 39% of the chief financial officers surveyed in one study found that bad hires cost them productivity, while 11% said that poor hires cost them sales.

Financial Costs

When you hire the wrong person, you're not only paying a salary to someone who isn't performing according to your expectations, but you're also paying for the cost of additional training too. If you end up firing your new employee after all your hard work, you might also have to manage severance pay, alongside the expenses incurred when you start searching for their replacement. Today, most HR professionals consider a bad hire to be the equivalent to a loss of thousands of pounds/dollars.

Employee Satisfaction Costs

When you're spending all your time and budget on correcting the mistakes that come with hiring the wrong person, or failing to attract the right one, the remainder of your team might become disengaged and dissatisfied. It's difficult to stay upbeat and happy in your role when one specific team member is getting all the help and attention. 95% of the financial executives surveyed in the study we mentioned above said that a bad hire damaged the morale of the team. If your corporate culture suffers, your entire business suffers along with it.



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Reputation Costs

Finally, in today's highly-digital and transparent world, job seekers are constantly connected to a stream of information. In other words, they can easily see when something isn't working in your company. If they notice that your employee culture is suffering, or that you're not getting things done correctly because of a bad hire, they'll be able to link that back to your unwillingness to write the correct job description in the first place.

Rather than losing all the money and time associated with hiring the wrong person, the next time you need to recruit, make sure that you take your time to write a description that attracts the right people.

The Power of the Humble Job Description

The humble job description is easy to overlook. For some hiring managers and executives, it's easy to consider this document to be nothing more than a shopping list when it comes to finding the right hire for a new organisation. Although writing a job description might not be the most appealing part of any job, and it can often take up valuable time in an executive's day, that doesn't make it any less important.

The first mistake leading to a bad hire for any business is often a bad job description. Companies make the mistake of posting a job advertisement that doesn't fully outline what they need from a new candidate or isn't appealing enough to find the right people. However, simply taking more time to sit and think about what you want to accomplish with your job description can help you to avoid the various disasters that come with an inappropriate hire.

If you struggle to write a job description on your own, then go to your specialist recruitment agency for help, or bring different members of your corporate team together to brainstorm ideas. While a great job description will always be a significant investment in time and effort, it's one that easily, and quickly pays off. After all, hiring the wrong person is costly, and a great job description is the first step to finding that perfect candidate.

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