



Stay Informed: Online Column

Trends in the Job Marketplace: Beyond the Job Description



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You have to write a job description to fill an open position – fun, right? No, it isn't. First you pace. Then you fidget. Then you clean your desk. Just before you tear your hair out, you phone a friend. *Do you have any job descriptions I can copy?* You wing it – and it's finally done. Thank goodness that's over. Another job description finished.

Nobody really likes job descriptions. Nobody likes them because they are very hard to create and because they simply don't get you what you want, no matter how well written they are. Don't get me wrong, they do contain some information that is obviously necessary to understand the job; but in the end they are extremely limiting. No matter how many books you read or workshops you attend on the subject of job descriptions, it's what they don't or can't say that really matters. It is what's beyond the job description that really counts.

Whenever I meet with a prospective client, chances are they will ask, "Why aren't we seeing the kind of people we want?" My answer, "Because your perfectly executed job description is not really defining what it is you want."

Ask people what they want in any category, and you'll usually get a blank stare. Bookstores have rows and rows of self-help books to help you figure out exactly what it is you want. Dating services give you long questionnaires to help you figure out what you want in a mate. They don't give you a blank sheet of paper and tell you to start writing. You wouldn't know what to write. That's because, regardless of the category, we all have a hard time defining what it is we want.

When I work with clients, I consider it my job to help them define what they **really** want. For us, this is the critical first step in filling a position.

What I'd like to do here is take you through some of the things we talk about. Maybe you'll only find one thing useful – or maybe you'll find several – but either way, I promise it will get you closer to finding the person you really want.

1. Why does this position exist? No one really asks that. Knowing and defining what function the position serves will help answer the next seemingly basic question.
2. What is this person expected to actually accomplish? A laundry list is perfectly fine here. Be honest. The longer, the better. Don't skimp.
3. What kinds of things will they be doing? I like to say, "Take me through a day in the life of this person."
4. What do you see as the most difficult part of the job? This will yield all kinds of valuable information.
5. As long as this isn't a new position, using the previous person as a point of reference can be the easiest route to understanding what qualities you really are looking for. What made this person good/bad for the position? Which qualities would you keep? Which would you trade in?
6. This leads directly to the kind of work qualities you are looking for. You really need to be honest here. Listing cliché qualities will get you nowhere. Don't say you want an independent, entrepreneurial go-getter if the person will be presented with a book of systems and procedures already in place. Conversely, don't try to attract a structured, orderly team player to work in your fast-paced, chaotic, exciting environment. They won't find it exciting at all.
7. Now a little bit about the culture, which is largely overlooked but very important. This person needs to operate in your current working environment and he/she needs to gel with everyone that already works in your company. Is the office New York wired or California laid back? What's the dress code like? Do people have little basketball hoops hanging from their cubicles or photos of the CEO? Does everyone socialize outside of the office after work or go straight home?
8. Which brings me to chemistry. Ah, chemistry. If it's going to play a role, just admit it. People hire people they want to spend time with. But, be careful here. You need to define just how much of a role the chemistry will play. One client said, "I won't hire anyone I wouldn't want to have a beer with." Another, "I wouldn't hire anyone I couldn't fly across the country with." You'd be surprised how much that information helps the people who are recruiting for you. I even had one client say, "I want to fall in love." We gave him what he wanted (and then told him to be careful: falling in love is one thing, being married is quite another). He now has the perfect long-term partner running his business.
9. Finally, why would someone want this job? That's always a tough one. Because the answer usually is "to work here, of course." We only want people who **want** to work here, because **here** is good. To you, it is. Because you are there and you know why. But they don't. Don't assume they do. We have to tell them why the job is a good one. We have to tell them what the opportunity is. And we have to do a good job of convincing because, despite what the media is saying, it's getting harder and harder to find good people. Maybe it's the fact that our industry is growing. One to one just isn't the "weak stepsister" it used to be.
10. One last thing, which relates to my previous point: The world is different today. No question. This is something every prospective employer should think about now. People make choices for different reasons than they did just a few years ago. They don't just want a job. They want to do something they enjoy, with people they feel comfortable and at home with. They want to feel like there's a purpose to what they do. They want to know where this job will take them.

Hopefully this will help you. Asking and answering any or all of these hard questions should help yield what we like to call your *job sketch*. But whatever you name it, it will definitely bring you closer to getting what you really want to see sitting across from you in the interview.

And that's a whole other conversation for next month.

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