

Writing Job Descriptions

Writing an effective job description is vital to the success of any new hiring action. Managers often find this an arduous task.

Placing the wrong candidate into a job can be disastrous. It can cost your operation a ton of money – not to mention the frustration of having to do it all again.

A key factor in ensuring you get the right person lies with defining exactly what the job is, before you even start to look.

If you work in a rather large corporation, you may have standard job descriptions, but if you have to write it yourself, where do you start?

Start at the End...

The best place to start is to ask yourself:

What is the end result of this job?

You must clearly define what the person in this position is supposed to **produce**. You then have a valid starting point from which you can write a job description that will be effective.

To do this, you have to look at how the position fits with related functions and how it contributes to the overall goals and purposes of the operation.

Questions that will help here are:-

- **Why does this post exist?**
- **What should it produce?**
- **What's missing if it's left unfilled?**

Get this down to a very simple, net statement of "end result". In many cases this will be a single factor, but in some it can be multiple.

To give you a feel for what is needed at this step, here are some examples:

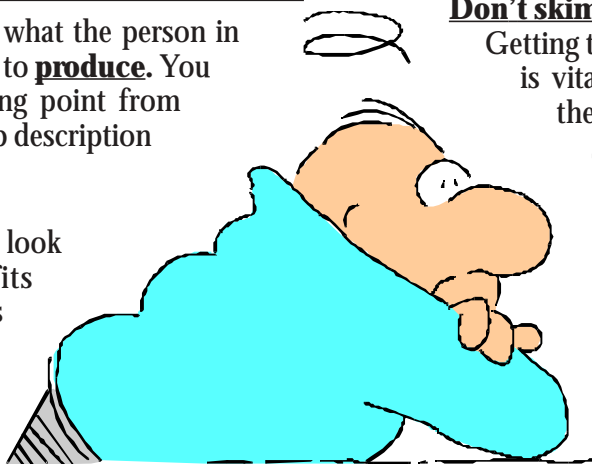
1. For an Executive PA, the end result might be expressed as: "Time saved for the executive".
2. For a Sales Rep, it could be: "Total sales revenue".
3. For a Collections Clerk it's probably: "Owed money collected on time".
4. For a Marketing Manager it might be: "Increased market share".
5. For a Managing Director or CEO it could be: "A viable and expanding company".

Don't skimp on this part of the process.

Getting the actual end result nailed down is vital to the success of the rest of the exercise. It is the foundation stone upon which everything else will stand.

Get other related functions involved. Seek their input on how the job in question relates to their areas. Ask them what **they** expect in the way of end results coming out of that job into their areas.

You can look at this on the basis of "customer" and "supplier". If the function of the job you are to fill is one which supplies something to another function or department, what does that "customer" department require?



Writing Job Descriptions

A final test of the validity of the end result lies in 3 areas:

- **Does it contribute to the overall company goals?**
- **Does it supply that which related functions need?**
- **Is it expressed in terms that are measurable?**

This third point ensures you have finished up with an actual “result”, as opposed to an “action” or a “concept”. **Results are measurable.**

The Perfect World...

The next major step in the process is to imagine what things would be like if the person in this post was **doing everything right**. How would it look if everything ran exactly as it should?



This perfection may never be achieved, of course, but you need to document what that perfection would look like.

In this way, you make the overall goals and targets of the post very clear to the new person. They can not only make a more certain decision about the job before it is offered to them, they have a

very clearly defined roadmap to follow when they start.

In many ways, this “perfect world” description is an extension of the end result you have defined. If the person is able to achieve the end result to a very high degree, this is a description of what things would look like.

In actual fact, it is a combination of the sub-results and activities involved with the job. And it is expressed in a way you would want it to run in the absolute ultimate.

For an Executive PA, for instance, the perfect world might include:

1. The diary is kept under control, ensuring the more important activities get priority.
2. Details of travel arrangements are fully handled, so the executive doesn't have to think about them.
3. Routine reports are done on time and presented when needed.

The perfect world for a Sales Rep might look like this:

1. Sales targets are exceeded every month.
2. Customers are reordering because of the excellent sales support provided.
3. Referral sales are occurring on a regular basis.
4. All paperwork is accurately completed on time.

You can see that each of the above factors contributes to the overall end result which has been defined for the job.

The perfect world statement can be much longer than is illustrated in the above examples. It needs to paint the picture of what things should look

Writing Job Descriptions

like when everything runs at peak efficiency and effectiveness.

It sets the scene in terms of what the new person should strive for.

What else is needed?

If you have done a good job at nailing down the explicitly defined end result of the job, that's the most important factor, by far.

Expanding this, by describing what things would be like in a "perfect world", sets the scene for, and facilitates, a much broader understanding.

The next step is to list the specific tasks and areas of responsibility. This is more along the lines of a traditional job description, and should be relatively easy to do after completing the above steps of the process.

As appropriate, include such factors as:

- **Reporting structure.**
- **Financial authority.**
- **A specific list of duties.**
- **Number of staff to manage.**

The Final Touch

To cap it all off, you now need to define the way in which the performance on this post will be measured.

This should be very self-evident by now.

1. If the end result is "increased market share", that's also the measure (expressed, maybe, as a percentage of market share).

2. If it's "time saved for the executive", then it could be the number of hours saved each week.

3. If the end result is "owed money collected on time", the measure could be percentage of money collected on time each week.



Note that if you find it difficult to establish a valid measure, you may need to go back and re-look at the end result you established. If it's not easily measurable, it may not be right on the button.

Double Benefit

This process will not only help you get the right person for the position, it will also ensure that the new person will have a clear path to take when they first begin.

They can get going immediately, in perfect step with the functions around them.

