

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Personnel Notes

Purpose of Job Descriptions by Dorice Regan

The job description is one of the important tools used in the hiring process. They are also the most common method of job documentation. Job descriptions document a job's major duties or functions, responsibilities, skill level and working conditions. Their content may be detailed and specific, or general and generic depending on the employer's purpose for developing them. In order for any hiring professional to recruit for a position, they must start the process with a job description that accurately captures all the essential duties and responsibilities of the job.

BENEFITS OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS

There are a number of benefits that a company derives from creating job descriptions. Depending on the content, job descriptions can be used to:

- Serve as a basis for hiring criteria.
- Ensure that job candidates clearly understand what is expected of them if they are hired.
- Reference during the performance evaluation process.
- Establish performance requirements.
- Assign tasks and document those assignments.
- Train employees.
- Make decisions on job restructuring.

JOB DESCRIPTION DESIGN

There are a number of job description models. Years ago, many companies had to start from scratch when they decided to take on the task of creating job descriptions. Today, there is software available that practically does the work for you. Regardless of how it is done, a standard job description should contain the following categories:

- Job Title
- Department
- Direct Report
- General Purpose of Job—a brief description of the job's primary purpose
- Essential Duties and Responsibilities—the job's essentials or most important responsibilities and functions
- Supervisory Responsibilities
- Education and/or Experience—the level of education or experience needed to successfully accomplish the essential duties of the job

JOB DESCRIPTION DESIGN

Some additional categories that are also recommended when considering the abilities needed to successfully accomplish the essential duties of the job are:

- Language Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- Reasoning Ability
- Certificates, Licenses and Registrations
- Physical Demand—define on-the-job time spent performing physical activities (standing, walking, lifting and vision requirements)
- Working Environment—define exposure to environmental conditions the job requires, such as exposure to fumes, outdoor weather, vibration, extreme heat, extreme cold, noise level, etc.

CREATING THE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Once the design or template of the job description has been established, a decision must be made as to how the information will be gathered and who will create the final document. If a company has the resources to devote a person to this project, s/he works with managers, supervisors and individual employees to document and gather the information needed to create the job descriptions on a one-on-one basis.

The other option is to have the human resource department spearhead the project by distributing the job description template to managers, who in turn distribute it to subordinates. These subordinates then use the template to document their job duties and responsibilities. The managers review and complete the template and forward it back to the human resource department for final revisions and approval.

THE LAW & JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require employers to have job descriptions. There are some exceptions, however, like when employees are handling hazardous waste. Employers that choose to have job descriptions must be concise in defining essential functions.

DISCLAIMERS

A disclaimer is recommended so the reader understands that the job description is not all-inclusive and the job is subject to change.

KEEPING JOB DESCRIPTIONS CURRENT

Once job descriptions have been created it is very important to keep them current. Job descriptions do have the potential to become the subject of contention, which may include litigation. Therefore, accuracy must be maintained. The employer should designate someone like a human resources representative, supervisor or manager as having this primary responsibility. A

plan must then be established for reviewing and updating the descriptions regularly.

SUMMARY

Job descriptions can be very useful tools. They can benefit the employer, the employee and the job applicant. However, there are pitfalls. In order to avoid them an employer must:

- Use careful consideration when determining the degree of detail and the format to be used.
- Ensure that job descriptions are prepared clearly and accurately.
- Review them regularly and keep them current.

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[SBC HOME PAGE](#)

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