

HR Clinic

January 31, 2019

Things to Consider When Creating Job Descriptions

Though it is not a requirement that a company has written job descriptions for each position, there are many reasons why creating them is a good business practice. Job descriptions can be useful during the recruiting and selection process, providing a clear picture to candidates of what the position entails, while serving as a reference point for managers explaining what skills ideal candidates should possess. They also play a big part in determining reasonable accommodations regarding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues, where employers must determine the essential job functions that an employee should be able to perform with or without an accommodation.

Since it is a good business practice for a company to have job descriptions for each organizational role, knowing how to prepare a good one is key. Below are some things to keep in mind.

It is a good idea to learn about the position from employees currently in that role, as well as supervisors and managers who deal with the employee and have a clear understanding of exactly what the job entails. This type of job “analysis” will also help to ensure that the title selected for the position is appropriate. As noted, job descriptions are a valuable recruiting tool, so it is important that the title accurately reflects what the company is recruiting for.

A well-developed job description includes information on the qualifications, skills and experience needed. However, these should include instances where some wiggle room is acceptable. For example, if a job typically requires that an incumbent hold a Bachelor’s degree, the company may allow for a combination of education and experience to meet the requirement. This should be mentioned in the job description where the Bachelor’s degree requirement is noted. The job description should list the most important things the employee should bring to the job, not a laundry list of skills and qualifications the employer wants.

A list of essential job functions should be a big part of the job description. It may be helpful to outline how much time will be spent on specific functions and may even note that other duties may be assigned outside of the specifics listed.

It is critical that there is not anything in the job description that could be considered discriminatory. Job descriptions should be gender neutral. Unfortunately, too many are written with a subtle suggestion that the company prefers a person of a particular sex, age, national origin or other protected characteristic. This type of language should be avoided. It is also important to note in the job description that the company is an equal opportunity employer.

A company may also consider adding some information about the culture and environment that can be expected. Some things to consider might be whether a person in that position works mainly alone, with a team or directly with customers. It could indicate what types of physical challenges might be experienced. Exposure to different elements could also be included. This type of information can help a candidate make an informed decision about whether they are suited for the role.

Compensation and benefits information can also be included in a job description to help a candidate make decision as to whether the position is a good fit. Knowing how the position is structured, for example, as an exempt or non-exempt position and when benefits would become available is valuable information to a candidate.

A job description should always include a disclaimer which will explain the company's right to change or modify the job description at any time or to assign duties other than those specifically listed in the section describing essential functions.