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Experts suggest writing a job description to make business run smoothly

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No one wants to do extra work, but here's one task that can help make a company run more smoothly. Take the time to write up clear, concise employee job descriptions.

Though this may sound like an onerous task, good job descriptions can actually help a business owner better see how to achieve company goals, determine which candidate would make a better hire and ensure the company is in compliance with government requirements such as the Americans With Disabilities Act and overtime regulations.

"Job descriptions are thinking on paper," said Jim Johns, human resources consultant at **The Johns Group**. "You want to include the purpose of the job, the essential functions of the job, then the secondary functions of the job, which includes the things that you might have them do on an occasional basis. If you take the time and do that, invest the time in writing out job descriptions, then [the business] will do much better."

To begin, analyze all aspects of a job, every task that needs to be completed, how those tasks are accomplished and the benefit of those tasks to the goals of the company. Write the job title, followed by a summary of the position and then include specifically what duties are covered by that job, the qualifications an employee needs to have in that job and any other pertinent points such as who reports to whom.

"Look at each thing," said Bob McKenzie, president of **McKenzieHR**. "Anything that requires more than 5 percent of [the employee's] time and effort would be an essential function and would therefore be included."

McKenzie added that a well-written job description will not limit an employee's scope of work. Any functions not listed in the description would be covered by a caveat usually written as "and other job-related duties as assigned."

A good job description should also include the minimum qualifications needed to do those essential functions of the job, whether it is a certain level of education or a minimum number of years of experience.

This is particularly useful when using that job description for hiring purposes.

"If you're looking for an administrative assistant, and you say they 'must have good skills,' you're going to get everybody," Johns said. "You need to include the knowledge, the skill set and abilities. If it requires a bachelor's degree from a four-year, accredited university; certain certifications; computer skills; and a given amount of experience, include that. Or, for the administrative assistant [example], it might be that the candidate must have at least five years' clerical experience and be able to type 100 words per minute."

Posting clear job descriptions when hiring will also narrow the pool so that only the best-qualified candidates will apply. "One employer posted a job and said [experience] 'preferred' instead of 'required,'" said Kelly Mannel, president and owner of **Image Partners**, an HR consultant. "They got all these really nice people with bachelor's degrees rather than engineering [experience]." It was a waste of time for both the company and the candidates. The better the description, the better the candidates.

A well-thought out job description can also help prevent hiring the wrong person for the job, which will eventually mean the employer must go through the hiring process again.

Written job descriptions also remind employees that odious tasks they often try to ignore actually are part of their job, while ensuring everything gets done to accomplish the goals of the business. This level of detail is especially helpful for new employees.

Johns advised being completely honest about what a job entails, even if that's working in freezing temperatures, lifting a hundred pounds or traveling 75 percent of the time in the employee's personal car. This will ensure applicants know upfront exactly what the job is.

Audrey Lackie, vice president and career counselor at **Watson Realty Corp.**, uses seminars to clearly explain what a job in real estate sales entails.

"A lot of people enjoy looking at houses. They love the decor and the open houses, and that's wonderful," Lackie said. "But that doesn't make you a success in real estate. People are looking for flexible hours and unlimited income potential. They also need to be aware that, as in most areas of real estate, [sales positions] are straight commission. We don't want them to go through the licensing process and the interview process, which can take a few months, if they don't have the income to sustain themselves for the first four to six months before they bring in a steady stream of income."

According to McKenzie, business owners should think of job descriptions not as a one-time document, but as an ever-changing piece of information that needs to be

updated as employees grow in their careers, new technologies come into use and company needs change.