

The Anatomy of a Job Description

Job Description Definition (or, as we call it in [career.place](#), the Job Profile):

A one-pager (more or less) that conveys to potential employees the nature of a job. In the span of just a few hundred words, candidates learn about the job, the company, and what is expected of the role. Often, from this one document, they decide if they are interested in you, or not.

So why, in this market that is described as “a war on talent” are job descriptions some of the most boring documents available on the internet? No company would ever describe their product with such dry, obvious, and non-compelling language. And yet, so many companies are doing just that for something as important as attracting the people who build, sell, market, and support those products.

My Job Description Sucks – So What?

Okay, so the job description is boring but so what? Your brand is great, your culture compelling, your glassdoor rating is fantastic, or maybe you pay well. That is all great – but only if you can get the candidate to pay attention to you.

Bad job descriptions are an excellent way to launch a bad, disengaging candidate experience. First, you are stemming your candidate flow by turning off great talent or encouraging the lack-luster ‘apply blasting’ (i.e. candidates who just hit apply one hundred times over, not bothering to know anything about the job behind the button). Candidates who do engage don’t have a clear vision or understanding of exactly what they are engaging in, and therefore are at a disadvantage in the interview process, and if they are hired, a bad job description could lead to expectation mis-alignment and attrition.

So, how do you turn your painfully boring and ignore-worthy job description into a piece of compelling marketing to attract and engage talent?

The Anatomy of Success

Like the proverbial elephant, eating it all in one bite is daunting. Instead, let’s tackle this one section at a time.

1. Job title

In job descriptions, titles are meant to be informative, communicating role & rank. They do not have to exactly align with your internal organizational chart, especially if that chart has titles that no one outside of your company will recognize. When creating a job title:

Tips:

- Use common language your applicants will recognize and will find easily in a search.
- Be as prescriptive as possible without being constrictive so the job stands out.
- If you really must use those creative titles like “Guru of Finance” or “Chief Ideation Officer”, give your job sub-titles that translate the role, so an applicant can recognize and find it.

Example:

Bad	Better	Good	Best
<i>Engineer III</i> Role unclear: engineer of what Rank unclear: what is III	<i>Mobile App Engineer III</i> Role clear Rank unclear: what is III	<i>Sr. Mobile App Engineer</i> Clear role and rank	<i>Sr. Mobile App Engineer, Consumer Products Team</i> Clear role, rank, and focus

The Anatomy of a Job Description

2. Salary Range

Communicating salary range allows both you and your applicants to avoid wasting a lot of time. If applicants aren't interested in your salary range, that will most likely not change from the beginning to the end of the process (especially if the gap is big).

Tips:

- If possible, clearly communicate the salary range. Give general guidelines on how the range is applied (i.e. what applicants need to be at the top vs. the bottom of the range).
- If you can't (or are uncomfortable with) providing salary ranges in the job description, check for salary alignment early in the process.

Career.Place checks salary alignment anonymously by comparing the employer salary range against the applicant minimum salary requirements without informing either party of the other's answers. Only applicants within the 'negotiation range' pass through so neither employer or applicant is wasting time.

3. Benefits

List your benefits on the job description right up front. Benefits are a valuable part of your total compensation package and can give you a competitive edge. They can also be make-or-break for applicants – so you can avoid wasting time on applicants that require benefits you don't provide.

Tips:

- For common benefits, use recognizable terminology (i.e. don't give standard benefits creative names that applicants may not recognize).
- Not all benefits are insurance, sick leave, and paid time off. Do you have bagel Friday, volunteer days, or a robust mentor program? List all those unique and quirky perks that your employees love and give an applicant a sense of your company's culture.
- When possible, be specific and descriptive. If you give an employee discounts on products, specify 'x% discount' so that applicants can translate the benefits to monetary value.

4. Job Summary

Do not confuse 'job summary' with 'generic boring job description' that tells applicants what they do for a living and not about your job. Software engineers know that they code and debug, Sales Reps know that they sell products, and Customer Service Reps know that they handle customer issues. What they need to know is what they will be doing for you and if your job is a good fit for them.

A great job summary answers these questions:

- As a <fill in job title here>, what am I going to do for you?
- What kind of <fill in job title here> do I need to be to be successful in this role?
- What will it be like to do <fill in job title here> for you?

Tips:

- Be honest. Don't load up the description with rosy misleading language. If you set the wrong expectation up front to get applicants through the door, they will just walk right back out once they discover the truth.

Being honest does not mean be pessimistic. Is your environment chaotic, great – there are people that love the excitement of chaos. Is this role by-the-book? Great – there are people that thrive when having clear rules to follow. Describe the job accurately and it will resonate with the right applicants.

The Anatomy of a Job Description

To increase the accuracy of the description, talk with those who have the job (preferably on the same team) about what they do, how they do it, and why they love (or don't love) their job.

- Be as specific as possible. For example, describe what products the person is going to build, maintain, sell, support.

If it isn't possible to provide details of what the role, consider pointing to what the team has accomplished in the past. It can be very compelling to say, "you will be joining the team that accomplished this!"

- Clearly explain what a successful person would be like: hard skills, soft skills, knowledge, and other requirements. However, make sure that what you are asking for is what truly matters.

This is a large topic within itself – go to www.career.place to check out content dedicated to this subject.

- Be engaging. Nothing will make an applicant's eyes glaze over faster than a boring text-book like job summary (or company summary for that matter – that is boring too).

Example:

Bad	Good
<p>Customer Service Representative Company is a national provider of scalable, networking and managed services solutions. Solutions include Internet access, Ethernet and Managed Network Services, Voice solutions, TV solutions and Managed Application, Cloud Infrastructure and Managed Hosting Services. We work closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing these solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. For more information, visit <<our website>>.</p> <p>The Highlights The Enterprise Client Services Representative provides client support related to products and services, including the handling of administrative audit and billing functions. In this role, you will be responsible for establishing and maintaining professional and positive relationships with clients on behalf of the company and ensuring issues are addressed in a timely manner consistent with company policies and values.</p> <p>This is bad because...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is boring. • Upfront summary is dry list of company functions rather than reasons to work there. • Job 'highlights' are generic – no explanation on what the candidate will do or what they need to be successful. 	<p>Customer Service Representative Company is a national provider of scalable network and management services solutions. We are on the forefront of excellent products and services, which would not be possible without our incredible customer experience. Join the team that is critical to our success; maintaining a happy, loyal customer base by engaging and delighting our customers every day.</p> <p>We are looking for an engaging, friendly, diligent person who is detailed oriented, driven to help people and make them feel important, and is not afraid to stand up for the benefit of others. Our customer representatives engage with customers through phone, email, and chat interfaces, are extremely responsive, and consistently get some of the highest customer satisfaction scores in the industry.</p> <p>If you are the type of person who thrives helping others, loves working in large teams collaboratively but also enjoys a little competition, can manage multiple communications simultaneously, and always brings tasks to conclusion, this will be a great job for you!</p> <p>This is good because...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sells the company and the job: empowering, engaging, selling the why. • Introduces type of person that will be successful. • Gives a few specifics about the job.

5. Corporate Culture

Describing the corporate culture in a job description will provide potential applicants the information necessary to determine if your organization is a place they will enjoy and thrive. Applicants that are drawn to your culture are not just excited to do the job, they become excited to do that job for you.

The Anatomy of a Job Description

However, effectively describing corporate culture begins with understanding what it is. Corporate culture is a combination of the organization's values, personality, and practices and it can be tricky to define.

Let's start with some common mistakes **to avoid**:

- Corporate culture is **NOT** a specific personality. Not wanting to spend your free time with someone (i.e. want to go out to get a beer or coffee 'test'), does not mean they are not a 'good culture fit'.
- Corporate culture is **NOT** an idealized version of the company. You want to be a high energy, fast-paced, start-up-like \$3B company... that is great – except when that is not actually what you are. Be honest, otherwise the culture description will attract the wrong type of candidates.
- Corporate culture is **NOT** picnics and holiday parties. That can be a part of it, but culture is much more than that. Culture is what drives your company to have picnics or holiday parties – not the parties themselves. And no, it is not the ping-pong table in the corner either.

When defining a corporate culture for a job description focus on:

- **Corporate mission:** the why of the organization's existence. This is the mission statement, the battle cry, the reason everyone is there. Simple, concise, and compelling, answer the fundamental question "why are we here".
- **Corporate values:** what drives every employee from the c-suite down to the newest hire. This can be as simple as 'treat everyone with respect' to those large lofty missions 'feed the world'. The important thing is that they are real and effect the decisions and behavior of everyone in the company (i.e. they are not just talk or words on a poster).
- **Corporate personality:** not to be confused with individual personality, the corporate personality is the universal. Is the company more conservative with business casual attire, or jeans and tees? Is there always a buzz around the break areas or is the environment quiet? And that ping-pong table in the corner – do people use it?

Tips:

- Be honest. Just like the description of the job, don't load up the corporate culture with rosy misleading content. If you set the wrong expectation up front to get applicants through the door, they will just walk right back out again once they discover the truth.

Validate the culture with employees of every level. If you are getting very different messages from the c-suite and upper management than from single contributors – well, perhaps you are focusing on experience and not culture.

- Be proud of what you are!

You may not have a huge sliding board or a free gourmet coffee bar like your neighbors down the street, but that doesn't mean your culture is second best. Why do your employees love working for you? What mission, values, and quirky personality make your company great (and seriously... a sliding board?)

6. Requirements

Job requirements are an important part of the description because they clearly communicate expectations of what the applicants must be able to do (and/or have) in order to qualify for the job. Clear, complete job requirements that allow applicants to self-select if the job is a good fit can save you and your applicants a lot of time.

The Anatomy of a Job Description

However, requirements lose value when they are vague, too demanding or describing something that is not differentiating. Bad requirements lead to great applicants skipping your job or the dreaded 'apply blast' (unqualified applicants hitting the quick-apply button over and over).

Tips:

- Call out 'must have' vs. should or nice to have – where only 'must haves' are required to apply for the job. Make sure all the 'must haves' are measurable, or you won't be able to qualify candidates against them.

Careful with this list – too long and you will find yourself looking for the purple squirrel or unicorn. Too short and you will end up with unqualified candidates.

Pre-define how you are going to measure each requirement and what it means to "meet the requirement" (i.e. to pass) so that all candidates are measured the same way against the same criteria.

Need help? Check out our materials at www.career.place on identifying and measuring requirements.

- Save the soft skills for the job description and assessments, not the requirements. Have you ever heard someone say "I would have applied for that job, but I didn't qualify because I am not a 'go getter' and I'm not reliable."
- Make sure the 'why' is clear. If you have a requirement that does not align with meeting the objectives and responsibilities of the job description, something is misaligned.

Pulling it all together:

Let's be honest, very few people would list 'writing job descriptions' (or as we call it, the Job Profile) as a favorite task – rather, they are often considered a "necessary evil" to be rushed through or copy/pasted with a few word tweaks. Unfortunately, that that is why so many job descriptions/profiles suck.

However, putting upfront effort in a good Job Profile, will make a big difference in the hiring process. A good Job Profile will attract the right talent, get them excited and engaged, and set expectations for the rest of the process, which saves you time and money.

Happy hiring! And visit www.career.place to see how we are changing the landscape of hiring.