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the importance of job DESCRIPTIONS

JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE essential for employers and employees,
explains John Hackett.

They define an employee's role and accountability and without one it is not possible for someone to properly commit to, or be held accountable for their role. Job descriptions are also required when recruiting a new employee so that you, as the employer, and your applicants have a clear understanding of the role. A job description is more than just a duty statement but should be seen as a vital and multi-purpose management tool. At the same time it doesn't need to be a complicated document. In fact, the best job descriptions are simple and designed to illuminate and enhance understanding of what activities a particular person undertakes to achieve certain outcomes for business owners, management and the employee themselves. After all, it is the outcome of the tasks and duties that matters.

Job descriptions will vary in the way they look and their content, however they should always contain:

- Job title
- Business unit, section - if applicable
- Position reports to
- Job purpose summary (ideally one sentence)
- Key responsibilities and accountabilities – ideally 8-15 numbered points
- Dimensions/territory/scope/scale indicators (the areas to which responsibilities extend and the scale of responsibilities with respect to staff, clients, territory, products, equipment, premises, etc.)
- Date and other relevant internal references

The following tips will assist when compiling a job description:

- You will find that you can cluster certain tasks into a smaller list of broader (but still specific) responsibilities.
- Job descriptions are not operating manuals so keep the descriptions of duties concise and free of detailed operating instructions.
- Don't include "Any other ad-hoc duties as directed by management". This isn't fair and no-one will ever be committed to or accountable for this.
- Do not put targets into a job description. These are an output and do not describe the job. You must describe the activities required to ensure that certain targets are met.
- Be careful to adhere to relevant employment and discrimination law.

If you are recruiting to fill a role it is also important to formulate a personal profile to assist in the advertising, search and selection process. This section should include:

- Qualifications and experience sought (including specific skills, computer aptitude, literacy and numeracy, commercial skills, management ability, etc).
- Personal and cultural qualities sought

The job description should go some way beyond the listing of a series of tasks or duties and really requires management (and if possible the employee's) input to decide just why the job is needed, what precisely is expected of the employee, their internal reporting lines and relationships, and against what performance criteria they will be periodically assessed. As well, the culture of a successful business should be woven into a job description resulting in a document that can be effectively utilised by both management and staff.

The problem with many job descriptions is that they fail to simply and succinctly describe what it is that the organisation expects from the employee, how this will be measured and how these things link to the organisation's vision and objectives.

A job description should also be a specific and dynamic document that is updated when duties or other requirements change. Of course, when an employee leaves, the job description can again be used as the basis for their replacement and altered accordingly to reflect any organisational restructuring, changed market conditions, etc.

In summary, clear and concise job descriptions can greatly assist organisations in many ways. They can help management in HR planning – recruitment and appraisals and determining pay levels and staff recognition schemes. They can help supervisors and individuals in understanding their roles and their interrelationships, the organisation's performance expectations, and they can provide direction in identifying training needs. Once properly written, job descriptions offer a solid foundation to the organisational structure, but remember, they will need regular review and refreshing to reflect changing business needs and circumstances.

For further information contact Event Recruitment on (02) 9279 2019 or email info@eventrecruitment.com.au.