

Step 6

DESCRIBE REVISIONS TO THE ROLE(S) AND USES OF TIME

THE JOB DESCRIPTION: A Blueprint for Success

American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration

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When building a house, few people would begin without an idea of what they wanted the finished product to look like. Most often, this means that a pretty detailed blueprint of the project is created and this blueprint becomes the document against which progress is compared and the final product measured. Likewise, the job description is the blueprint of an organization's employees. One of the most important documents in a workplace setting today, it not only describes what a particular job is, it also satisfies a number of legal requirements and sets the stage for the alignment of work within the larger framework of an organizational setting.

In health care, job descriptions have become increasingly similar from one hospital to another. The job descriptions of today are much more sophisticated documents than in years past, having evolved as the federal government continues to define and interpret the laws passed by Congress regulating the employment arena. An example is the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. The physical demands of the job section in a job description had to significantly broaden in scope to be in compliance with the new law. The recently enacted ADA Amendments Act, or ADAAA, will certainly cause a new round of scrutiny in how a job description lays out the physical requirements of a job.

THE JOB DESCRIPTION: ONE DOCUMENT?

In general, a well written job description is comprised of a job summary, job specifications, physical demands, and the primary duties and responsibilities. In many cases, the job description process has become so complex that separate documents are created to address key components like the clinical competencies and physical demands of the job. The 'job description' then becomes the sum total of those documents.

JOB SUMMARY

The job summary is typically a high-level description of the position that is often used verbatim in position postings or employment ads. It is designed to give a casual reader a solid understanding of what an employee would 'do' if they had this job, to provide a quick read on whether or not the job appeals to an individual, and whether or not they have the qualifications to do the job.

JOB SPECIFICATIONS

The job specifications portion is a critical piece of the job description that carefully positions the job within the context of the corporate structure and external benchmarks. These specifications are instrumental in establishing the job within the company's wage structure and also serve as a basis of establishing minimum standards that a qualified candidate would have to possess. Typically, the specifications include minimum educational requirements, necessary previous experience and any requisite special training, skills, licensures, certifications or competencies. The specifications often include information about whether or not the position is supervisory and if so, the number and type of employees supervised.

The critical importance of this section cannot be understated. Whatever specifications are laid out, the employer must be able to defend and justify those requirements. For example, if the position requires a bachelor's degree an immediate question is why? In this case, while it's not necessary or even desirable to spell out the "why" on the actual job description, there needs to be someone ready, willing and able to defend that requirement if challenged.

The education requirement is only one of several important questions that have to be answered. Other questions might include:

- What is the minimum experience required?
- Is the required experience industry-specific?
- Is education required or preferred?
- Can experience be substituted in lieu of education?
- If licensure or certifications are listed, are those absolute or preferred? If someone doesn't have the requisite or preferred certification or licensure upon hire, will they be required to obtain same within a specified period?
- Likewise, for any special training or competency, what is required when they walk in the door versus obtainable once hired?

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THE JOB DESCRIPTION: A Blueprint for Success *continued*

CLINICAL COMPETENCIES

This section also often addresses work competencies. In a health care setting, this is sometimes confused with clinical competencies. Work competencies typically address proficiency ratings or skill levels of workplace duties. An example would be proficiency required with software programs like Word, Excel, or Powerpoint. Clinical competencies are much more comprehensive, and are often listed and detailed in a separate document from the basic job description. The Joint Commission standards focus intensely on clinical competency lists. The Joint Commission wants to see a blended document that details how the competencies are chosen, the identification of the age-specific patient population being served, and how the competency mastery is demonstrated and recorded.

Having a stand-alone clinical competency document allows for variations on a theme and minimizes the need for dozens of specific job descriptions. For example, there may be a standard job description for staff nurse. That document describes what it means, and takes, to be a *nurse* in a particular hospital. Coupled with that standard nursing job description would be a specific clinical competency checklist, say, for a *pediatric* nurse. These two documents together begin to paint the picture of what it means, and takes, to be a pediatric nurse in that hospital.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

For similar reasons to the clinical competency checklists, another stand-alone document that augments the job description itself is a physical demands form. Because of the ADA and the complexities of the health care workplace setting, defining and listing the physical demands of a job has risen to become a much more comprehensive list than the brief 'walking, talking, sitting, standing, hearing' statements from before. One approach taken by many today addresses the major physical activity requirements and analyzes the percentage of time that's required to perform the job. For example, a nurse's job might be described as walking nearly constantly (85% of the time), lifting frequently (15% of the time, up to 50 lbs), etc.

This type of more careful analysis becomes the basis of the post-offer, pre-employment health screening. This health screening determines 'fitness for duty'. If an accommodation request occurs between the new employee and the medical review officer, the hiring manager, and/or human resources, the physical requirements form becomes an important legal basis against which decisions are made.

KEY JOB OR POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES

The final portion of most job descriptions is the list of primary duties, sometimes called key, and sometimes simply job or position responsibilities. The best job descriptions use objective, measurable criteria when listing a key responsibility. For example, instead of 'answers telephone', another method would state: "answers telephone within three rings, using appropriate professional responses in accordance with the company-defined customer service philosophy."

The significant advantage of defining job responsibilities this way is the easy transference of the job description to an evaluation tool. This approach provides an easy and dramatic alignment of measuring and evaluating the same performance criteria under which one was hired.

THE "JOB DESCRIPTION"—A COMBINATION OF SEVERAL DOCUMENTS

The job description, the clinical competency checklist and the physical demands form all come together to paint a total picture of the job requirements. While it may seem having disparate parts of a job description is counter-productive, the reverse is often true. The physical demands form (or information) resides in or with the employee or occupational health department. The clinical competency form or information resides in or with the clinical units on which the employee works. This arrangement provides more ready access to disparate, but important, parts of the whole. Like a blueprint, these documents provide a template against which an organization measures its success through its hiring practices.