

6 Steps to Writing
Effective
Job Descriptions

A White Paper for
Buyers of Temporary
Labor Services

INTRODUCTION

Identifying the most qualified candidate pool for your open positions hinges on well-written job descriptions that accurately depict all aspects of the job. Poorly constructed descriptions — those put together quickly without consulting all internal parties — produce a second-rate candidate pool, often consisting of unqualified or inappropriate candidates.

Effective job descriptions should meet the following objectives:

- **Provide** specifics on required skill sets and day-to-day activities
- **Address** the necessary soft skills and interpersonal requirements
- **Describe** the work environment, including company culture
- **Be specific**, with limited jargon
- **Communicate** the role of the position within the overall organization
- **Sell** the job

1. PROVIDE SPECIFICS ON SKILL SETS AND DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

Rework all generic or outdated job descriptions to provide more detailed information. A description requiring “lead application work across many product lines” is not clear — it can mean engineering, architecture or software expertise. This may cause the candidate to prepare poorly for the interview, or cause you to waste valuable interview time explaining the position again. Remember to describe the core skills needed as well as the value-added ones. For example, although a Unix Administrator must possess specific technical skills, additional desired skills will distinguish the better candidates - remember to identify any additional desired skills in the description.

For example, will he/she be involved in the decision-making process and be required to attend functional, inter-departmental or departmental meetings? Will he/she be handed projects that have already been clearly defined and documented, or given assignments verbally and be expected to run with them? If there is a person currently doing this job, sit down with him/her and ask what percentage of their time is spent on various activities. The position may have changed significantly since the previous job description was developed.

Positions tend to adapt to fit each employee’s specific strengths and experience. For example, the requirements for a project manager position might include specialized project software expertise and management experience, however, if the most recent employee had strong communications skills, this might be an important requirement as well.

2. ADDRESS THE NECESSARY SOFT SKILLS AND INTERPERSONAL REQUIREMENTS

Terms like “good team player” or “leader” are overused. Take the time to determine the specific attributes that will deliver a stellar candidate. Recognize that performance and productivity are as much influenced by who a person is as by the technical skills they possess. Establish the soft skills or personality traits that are essential for the position.

3. DESCRIBE THE WORK ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING COMPANY CULTURE

A candidate with an excellent skill set match may perform better in one environment than another. Is your work environment corporate or entrepreneurial? Is it fast paced or relaxed? Are rules regarding dress, time off, office hours stringently followed, or are they lenient? Are work hours flexible, or are they limited to 8 to 5? Communication of a detailed, realistic environment may initially reduce your slate of candidates, however, it will ultimately provide you with candidates who are experienced in such settings and prepared for the related requirements.

4. BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE, WITH LIMITED JARGON

Individuals within an industry may use different abbreviations and terminology, which may lead to misunderstandings about the position's requirements. The manager, HR professional, recruiter and candidate may all interpret the jargon differently resulting in a poor fit. Avoid such situations by limiting the use of non-specific phrases. The process works most efficiently when everyone is reading from the same page.

Provide an abbreviated organization chart or flow chart that illustrates the role of the position within the organization

5. COMMUNICATE THE ROLE OF THE POSITION

If a candidate sees a description that uses the word "management" 16 times, and he/she demonstrates leadership ability, the candidate will be confused when the position goes to someone with no managerial background. Provide an abbreviated organization chart or flow chart that illustrates the role of the position within the organization, and how projects get completed. This will reduce confusion about role responsibilities and compel a candidate to illustrate if he/she has taken a project from idea to completion, or has only championed particular pieces of a project. If the position is for a project lead, ask the candidate to provide documentation from previous projects that they have completed. This should enable you to judge the role that the candidate held during the project.

6. SELL THE JOB

Discuss the job opportunity. Is the industry changing? Is the company growing? Is the company becoming more competitive? Has it won awards, or is it in the news? What work is being done in the group? Does the company utilize the latest technology? Are there new product applications in place? Is the position in a new department reporting directly to corporate management? Has the company brought a new life-saving drug to market early? Is the company developing software that will change the way people communicate? You will increase your candidate pool by selling the positives about the position and the company; candidates want to be excited about the opportunity, and their possible role in the organization.

SUMMARY

To prepare for interviewing candidates, please review Yoh's White Paper "4 Things Every Hiring Manager Needs to Know About Interviewing" White Paper. To recap, effective job descriptions should meet the following objectives:

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About Yoh

Yoh is one of the largest providers of talent and outsourcing services to customers in the United States. With over 374 million USD in total sales, Yoh operates from more than 75 locations and provides long- and short-term temporary and direct placement of technology and professional personnel, as well as managed staffing services, for the information technology, scientific, engineering, health care and telecommunications communities. For more information, visit yoh.com. Yoh is part of Yoh Services LLC, a Day & Zimmermann Company.

About Day & Zimmermann

Day & Zimmermann accelerates customer success by delivering reliable managed services. Operating from more than 150 worldwide locations with 2.2 billion USD in revenues, the Day & Zimmermann family of companies employs 24,000 professionals and is currently ranked in the top one percent of private companies in America by *Forbes*. Founded in 1901 and headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, Day & Zimmermann is a former winner of the U.S. National Family Business of the Year award. For more information, visit dayzim.com.

