

Writing Effective Job Descriptions



By Patrick Healey

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EmployeeAttraction.com

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WORKSHEET

Do A 360 On Your Hiring Practices

In the first column, note three to five things that are working well for you with regard to hiring effective employees. In the second column write three to five things that are not working. For example, you might write: My help wanted ads are very targeted and always deliver qualified candidates.

What's Working

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What's Not Working

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What did doing this tell you about your hiring practices? What areas can you see that you need to address?

First you need to know what you need

So you have a job opening... I bet you think you know what the position requires. But do you really know? Have you updated your job descriptions in the last few years? Do you even have written job descriptions on file?

To be proactive, it's a great habit to keep written records of each position and update them during regular employee evaluations. No one knows better what the job is comprised of than the person actually doing it. Having this up-to-date averts big headaches if someone

leaves suddenly, or worse, under strained circumstances—good luck getting any useful information out of them then.

If you have an office manager who is on the ball, she probably knows what each position entails, but she's got her own job to worry about, so I still urge you to keep track of it all in writing. If you take more time to analyze the role that needs to be filled and its function within the organizational structure of your agency—*before* you write your help wanted ad or start interviewing, you'll get a much better result.

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Writing Better Job Descriptions

Another aspect of understanding what you need is to list what **success factors** you can quantify. For example: these could include:

- technical skills with certain software, experience selling similar products, training or certifications relevant to your agency.
- performance skills, such as taking initiative, cold calling, patience and tact in dealing with customers.
- Finally, though these qualities are more difficult to quantify, think about the level of motivation that will be needed by the new hire to effectively do his or her job. Is this primarily a clerical job and will she be heavily supervised and thus not need as much motivation? Or does this position entail a lot of inside sales and a strong desire to succeed?

The best way to gather all this information is to consult your office manager (or if you're a captive agent, your management team) and any team members familiar with the requirements of the position. Ask them what qualities would distinguish a high achiever in this position. (Worksheet continued on the next page.)

Position title

Position purpose

Duties and responsibilities

Technical skills

Performance skills

Level of motivation needed

Other key items to consider

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Job Competency Chart

COMPETENCY CATEGORY	COMPETENCY NAME	TOP PERFORMANCE ACTIONS/ PROFICIENCY REQUIRED
SKILLS		
Technical knowledge and skills		
Behaviors (performance skills)		
MOTIVATIONS		
Job fit		
Company fit		

Exactly what do good employees want today and are you offering it?

Countless surveys have been done on this topic over the years, and I've distilled the results of many of them here. Some are obvious, others not so much.

- Employees want work that is engaging and that challenges them—but not to the point of over-stressing them.
- Employees want to feel valued and appreciated for their efforts—often that is even more important to them than pay increases. They also want to be encouraged to grow their skills.
- Employees want to feel they are also valued as people—beyond just warm bodies who can do tasks.
- Employees want to be led by someone who inspires them and has a Big Vision for the business.
- Employees want great communication with their bosses and to feel listened to and understood.
- Employees want to work with other talented and high caliber peers—people they can call their friends.
- Employees want to be able to utilize their greatest assets and talents.

Engage your own team in a discussion on this and add any more items to the list.

What Employees Want

Creating effective employment ads

I urge you to start a file of good employment ads. Study them in your Sunday newspaper (and not just insurance ads). Also check out online career sites for good examples. In general, ads that stand out from the rest are more likely to catch someone's eye. Pay close attention to the other ads in your category in your local paper (or wherever you advertise). Which ones grab you?

- If most of the ads are of a certain **length**, make yours considerably different. Spring for the extra bolded lines, color highlights or larger font headlines.
- Try adding a logo or some other **graphic element**—anything that will draw someone to your ad.
- Instead of just placing your ad in the insurance **category**, consider duplicating it in other appropriate categories, such as sales or administrative positions.
- You might even consider **formatting** part of your ad a bit differently to make it stand out from the surrounding ads. How about a list? You might use: the Top Ten Reasons Why Working Here Is Rewarding.

While it is of course important to state what you require of your new employee, **the majority of the ad should be focused on selling the job hunter on why your agency is a great place to work.** You may be used to thinking of employment ads as you being the *buyer* of something, namely a new employee. Instead, you need to think of it as *selling* yourself as an **Employer of First Choice™**. Think of this as writing sales copy, and you'll be on the right track.

As with any good sales copy, the headline needs to be a grabber. Aim for a hook, something that intrigues and keeps them reading. For a sales position, you could try this:

**Don't read this ad. Seriously!
Stop reading this ad right now. I mean it! This ad does not apply to you.** Okay, I guess if you are still reading this ad, you might be the kind of person who isn't easily dissuaded, who doesn't take No for an answer. If so, then I want to talk to you about an **Outside Sales Opportunity** with my insurance agency.

A classic mistake is using a job title in an ad that misleads applicants or is too vague. A case in point: an agent placed an ad for “Sales and Service” and was distracted from his intention by the responses he received. What he was actually looking for was an inside customer service rep who also does some sales work. What he got were sales hounds who saw the word SALES in the job title and discounted the rest of the ad. When this agent started getting resumes from guys who made big claims, including one who boasted he had upped sales by 800%, he was distracted from his goal and tempted to hire the guy. That’s when he consulted me.

On the right, is the ad this agent ran, and below is the resume he received in reply.

Job Title: Sales & Service

Description:

We want to hear from you! You will really enjoy working in our agency! We’re offering flex or full time opportunity to a P&C licensed CSR with minimum 2 years insurance sales and service experience. A great team spirit and a can-do-attitude are the qualities we’re looking for!

~Compensation: Higher than average salary, includes full benefits, incentive bonus also available.

I HAVE A PROVEN TRACK RECORD IN PROFESSIONAL SALES. MY EXPERIENCE WILL BE EXTREMELY BENEFICIAL TO YOU AND YOUR COMPANY BY REDUCING TRAINING TIME, WHICH WILL ALLOW ME TO HIT THE STREET RUNNING AND EXCEED YOUR GOALS.

I DELIVERED AN 800 % INCREASE OVER 14 YEARS!!!

THIS 800 % INCREASE WAS THE RESULT OF PROFITABLY OPERATING MY OWN BUSINESS FOR 14 YEARS. I SOLD MY BUSINESS AND RETIRED. BUT RETIREMENT IS NOT FOR ME.

SIMPLY PUT..... I MISS THE ACTION!!!

I OFFER YOU THE BENEFITS OF SUCCESSFUL SELLING, ADVERTISING, MARKETING, MANAGEMENT, AND OWNERSHIP.

- OWNED AND OPERATED MY OWN PROFITABLE BUSINESS

- SUCCESSFULLY SOLD RADIO, TV, AND NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING

- RAPIDLY WORKED MY WAY FROM SALEPERSON TO NATIONAL SALES MANAGER WITH A LARGE CORPORATION

NOW, I AM READY TO GO TO WORK FOR YOU.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Here's what I pointed out in my email to him:

"In the old days I would have said **HELL YES** hire the sales dog today. But now I need to ask, is this what you need, right now? This is the kind of guy who will cause you pain because he is just like you: independent, confident and perhaps a baby boomer who wants and needs lots of flexibility, and is certainly not accustomed to being accountable to anyone. Do you really have the time to manage a guy like this if you don't have your inside sales/support team in place? My experience tells me that if you don't have an exceptional office manager who you absolutely trust, who manages your inside team to the point that you have no messes to clean up or fires to put out after your **WOW** days, then you may be barking up the wrong tree with this candidate. If everything is in order inside the office, then this may be a guy you want to pursue. Only you know your situation."

The moral of this story: Know exactly what kind of person you want to hire and describe **THAT** job really well. **Here are some other tips for effective ads:**

- List absolute minimum requirements, which will weed out people who are not qualified. If you list optional requirements, describe them that way, or you risk eliminating some good candidates.
- Be realistic in your requirements and be sure they match the experience level of the position.
- Describe any training that you will provide; motivated employees appreciate opportunities to learn new skills, and those who are not ambitious, will not respond to situations where they feel too much may be asked of them.
- Do mention important benefits and highlight any that are unusual or special. For example, do you offer free bus passes or gas cards to offset commute costs?
- Be sure to describe in glowing color your office culture—the tone you set, the attitude of your team, the overall vibe of the place. Is it extra casual, or more professional in tone? What do you as the business owner value in setting the mood of your workplace?
- Don't forget to include aspects of your workplace experience that set you apart as an **Employer of First Choice™**. What is your workplace brand?

(Review Strategy Two.) Now is the time to use it!

- How about including testimonials from your current employees? For example:

Here's what Gina, a current team member has to say about working at the Acme Agency: "This is the best job I've ever had...I've made so many great friends here, and I love spending my days knowing I'm making a real difference in our clients' lives. Call and ask for me, and we'll talk!"

- Make sure your contact information is clear and complete. Don't be afraid to name your business; some people hate replying to blind ads. If you have started a blog or website, by all means give the address.
- If you didn't start a team blog for recruitment purposes (Page 79) then at least consider putting up one web page that gives more detail about the opening, as well as a look inside your agency—complete with photos, audio files and perhaps even video. In this highly wired age, job applicants are apt to be searching online at all hours of the day and night. If you can grab them with your online appeal, you'll have the edge over other companies that they will have to call to learn more about.

The actual wording of your ad is an art unto itself, but I can make it somewhat easier. There are certain word choices that will have a somewhat subliminal meaning to job seekers. For example, describing your successful candidate as *poised* or *competent* sends a message that you're looking for an older, more mature applicant, and is likely to repel someone right out of school. (It will also eliminate those with low self-confidence, which is also a good thing.) Of course, if you have an entry-level position and are happy to hire someone who is younger with little or no experience, you'd want to use words like *energetic*, *enthusiastic*, *eager to learn*, etc.

Also, **experiment with the point of view you decide to use:**

- Perhaps the whole ad is supposed to be written by

your team members, who say: “Come join us at a great place to work,” etc.

- Or maybe the ad is addressed directly to the job seeker: “You may be a good fit for our agency if you love solving problems for people in crises.” This could be a bullet list of attributes.
- Or try writing it in the first person as the business owner: “Hi, I’m Andy Acme, let me share a few things with you that are special about the Acme Agency as a place to work and thrive.”

Below, are some examples of keywords you could use in your ads for different types of positions.

Administrative and customer service people

- practical
- specific
- orderly
- systematic
- methodical
- efficient

Office managers

- experience
- detailed
- thorough
- documents
- objective
- sequence
- coordinate
- design
- meticulous

Inside sales, financial services

- bottom-line
- flexible
- fluent
- intuitive
- open-ended
- experience
- realistic
- specific
- objective

Outside sales person

- visionary
- risk-taking
- ad lib

- ambiguity
- spontaneous
- unknowns
- originates
- intuitive

In addition, here are some fragments of ads that utilize keywords to attract certain kinds of applicants.

Small, fast-paced insurance agency now has a position available for the right person with abilities to organize systems and execute procedures, which allows workflow to move quickly and efficiently. Prior work experience in insurance is required. Must have strong organizational skills, attention to detail, flexibility and ability to multi-task.

Must possess outstanding talent for efficiency in a rapidly changing environment, organizing and coordinating a series of diverse projects.

Need the right person with a successful background in financial services/life sales. Ability to manage detail in a fast paced work environment is a must.



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Writing An Effective Help Wanted Ad

Start drafting some ads that reflect your new thinking. This is NOT something to delegate, nor should you just “use the ad we ran last time.” Nor is it something to dash off in ten minutes. Gather your job descriptions and job competency charts to use as references, then make copies of this worksheet so you can construct a possible ad for each position at your agency. **Write several ideas for each portion of your ad in the space provided.**

JOB TITLE

HEADLINE

REQUIREMENTS

TRAINING OFFERED

BENEFITS

OFFICE CULTURE

APPLY YOUR WORKPLACE BRAND

TESTIMONIALS?

TIMELINE

YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

CONTACT

Now review your ideas, select the best ones and assemble a complete ad here.