Crafting Effective Job Descriptions

By the end of this course you should be able to explain the importance of written, accurate job descriptions, create job descriptions for key roles, and update job descriptions annually (or as needed if roles change).

Overview:

In the book *Twelve: The Elements of Great Managing,* the authors report that one of the employee engagement survey questions most predictive of performance is a simple and straightforward one: "I know what is expected of me at work."

The level of your firm's success is directly proportionate to the quality of the people on your team and their engagement level. Simply put, A+ firms are made up of A+ people. But, how do you find and engage the best possible team members? The foundation of building the best team starts with clear and compelling job descriptions, which can be used for recruitment, selection and development.

The process to create job descriptions involves:

- **Step 1:** Understanding the importance and use of written, accurate job descriptions.
- **Step 2:** Writing job descriptions for the important roles in your firm.
- **Step 3:** Review and update job descriptions annually, or as roles change.

Step 1: Explain the importance of written, accurate job descriptions

Although job descriptions aren't legally required, they provide a framework for the recruitment, selection and development of A+ teams. The process of creating job descriptions helps CEO Advisors and other team members to be deliberate about:

1. Reporting relationships
2. Big picture description of the role
3. Specific job functions
4. Prioritization of those job functions
5. Skills necessary to succeed in the job, and
6. How the firm's culture affects the selection and development of the people in their roles.

Clear, written job descriptions help applicants determine if they are qualified for a role. Once in the role, the job description is the connector between team members and their supervisors. The job description helps with agreement on performance expectations. Because few newly recruited team members possess every skill that is in the job description, it can be used to create a development plan so the person can grow into that perfect team member.

One of our coaching members, whose firm didn't originally have formal job descriptions, decided to create job descriptions for the four-person team. When we started coaching with them, the firm consisted of the CEO/Advisor, a receptionist, a marketing associate, and a case-prep/processing specialist. After going through the process of creating written job descriptions, the CEO/advisor realized a few important things.

First, there was no reporting relationship other than everyone reporting to the advisor. Second, there were an alarming number of activities that didn't have an owner, which explained why things kept falling through the cracks. Third, he realized that one of the people on the team was going to have to develop the ability to be a team leader, or the advisor was going to have to find a replacement for the person. And finally, the advisor needed to be more careful that new team members would need to be chosen with more attention to how they would fit into the ideal firm culture.

The CEO/Advisor pulled template job descriptions from the Carson online coaching resource library, tailored them, and had both team and individual meetings to roll out the job descriptions and how they would be used for role clarification and accountability. The advisor was surprised to find out that the team members had silently been bothered by the lack of clear role definition and boundaries. The team suggested a few small tweaks to the job descriptions and then everyone moved forward with more focus on what everyone was supposed to do.

The coach suggested that the advisor check in with the team and each individual to review progress toward the activities in the job descriptions. The check in allowed the advisor to verify that everyone was accomplishing what was listed on the job descriptions.

The case prep/app processing person embraced the opportunity to eventually develop into a team leader role, which would put a reporting layer between the advisor and the rest of the team. There were, of course, a few tweaks to make here and there, but overall, the job descriptions were working as intended.

Through the process, the CEO/Advisor also realized that the firm needed an Associate Wealth Advisor to take care of B, C, and D clients. The advisor used the Carson job description template, and then created an ad for the position that he sent to the director of the local college's CFP program.

The specifics about the role and the definition of the culture in the firm allowed the CFP Program Director to refer a few students who would be a good fit. The advisor chose one of the students as an intern, who will come on full time after graduation!

Obviously, the conversion to using job descriptions wasn't a magic wand solution, but the process of creating the descriptions and then using them for recruiting, selection, role definition, development, and accountability gave the CEO/advisor and the team the feeling that there was more order and clarity in the firm.

Step 2: Write job descriptions for the roles.

Good job descriptions do three things:

- Describe the main responsibilities of the position
- Outline the required skills and experience

- Share the culture of the organization

Carson has created several sample job descriptions for your use. Feel free to take any one and make it your own. If you're looking to create a position that's unique to your office, use our ***Job Description Questionnaire*** to help guide you through writing your unique position description.

Exercise:

This exercise will force you to think about the day-to-day duties and functions that you envision the person handling. It will help you determine specific, knowledge, skills, and abilities the person in the desired role must have. From there, you can craft an effective job description. ***To use the Job Description Questionnaire,*** **follow these step-by-step the instructions to complete the form.**

First, list the job title. It doesn't need to be the perfect title until you complete the actual job description. As long as the title is basically descriptive of the role, it can serve as a placeholder until the final version.

COACH TIP: *When modifying a job description for job advertisement, we recommend using recognizable job title. An example would be using Receptionist instead of something like Director of First Impressions.*

Second, list the name and title of the person's supervisor and potentially the titles of the roles the person would supervise. This is an opportunity to make sure your organizational structure works outside of a simple org chart. It will also help you clarify the kind of person you need in the role. As an example, if the person would ideally supervise your front desk person, you should consider that the job description should include supervisory experience.

Third, in a few sentences, describe the position. Some examples would include:

> **Associate Wealth Advisor:** The Associate Wealth Advisor will establish new client relationships in addition to providing advisory services and support to a select group of clients. With financial planning responsibility for the firm's small to mid-size clients, the Associate Wealth Advisor has the opportunity to build an excellent business under the leadership and reputation for the firm.
>
> **Director of Marketing:** The Director of Marketing: manages the overall marketing and communications functions within the organization; executes and enforces the company's branding strategy and standardizes company communication across mediums; and acts as the point person for strategic and tactical communications projects. This is a broad-based position that will handle all aspects of marketing, brand integration, and strategy.

Fourth, list the Job Functions. Each of the following steps is important to the process:

1. Number the job function (the number will be used later in the process)
2. List the general description of the function under "What do you do?" An example included on the template form would be for an Associate Wealth Advisor: "Assess Client Needs"
3. Now, describe "How do you do it?" which provides more depth to the question above. The expanded description for "Assess client needs" is, "Meet with people to determine the best course of action, using knowledge of available services, interpersonal communication skills, persuasion, and negotiation skills."

4. Finally, list how frequently (e.g., twice a day, daily, weekly….) the action needs to be done.

Note that the questionnaire has enough space for up to 12 job functions. You can list more but will have to use more than one page ***(or create your own list***).

The **fifth step** is to answer yes (check) or no (0) next to the following questions in the column that corresponds to the job numbered job functions. As indicated, if you have greater than 12 functions, use more pages or create your own list. The questions for the yes/no exercise are:

- Must this function be done?
- Can other current employees do it if incumbent does not?
- Do all employees in this position perform this function?
- Would taking this function from the job fundamentally change the job?
- Would this job exist without this function?
- Is special expertise of judgement required to do this function?
- Would there be any significant consequences if this is not done?
- Is a license and/or certification required to do this function?

The **sixth step** is to include information about the Job Specification Questions. The questions are on:

- Training and educational qualifications
- Specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal qualifications
- Prior experience

The **seventh step** is to describe the office culture, which includes:

- Attributes that allow team member to excel
- Benefits that the firm provides to clients.

Here's an example of how Carson incorporates our culture in job descriptions:

In an increasingly complex world where people are starving for someone they can trust, we stand for something simple: always put the client first. We do well by doing good for those we serve. It's the ultimate measure. We believe in providing value beyond a doubt and in the notion that time will either expose you or promote you, based on your willingness to embrace change. We all share a common mission to be the most trusted in financial advice.

We're always on the lookout for team members who will make us better – and who share our six core values that drive how we treat our clients and each other:

1. Client First – The client's interest comes first. Always.

2. Third Dimension of Trust – Anticipate needs and deliver.
3. Care Factor – Give it your all, even when it's not convenient to do so.
4. Adaptable – Evolve and improve, every day.
5. Innovative – Push the boundaries. Stretch the standard.
6. Get Stuff Done – Do what you say you will.

Once you've created the job description, you're ready to finalize it with the current team member or find the perfect candidate. To get started with finding your next hire, move on to our ***Recruiting and Hiring Talent*** course. Or if you're specifically looking for an Associate Wealth Advisor, move on to our ***Advisor Team Structure*** course.

Step 3: Update job descriptions annually (or as needed as jobs change)

Once you have the Job Descriptions in place, it is important to review and update them at least annually. If you have just started the process of formalizing your firm's operations plans, it is likely that roles will evolve before then end of the first year, so make sure to update job descriptions as significant changes are made. During normal change/growth periods, you should review and update job descriptions annually.

There is a saying that "how you do anything is how you do everything." If you are deliberate and planful in the process of keeping job descriptions current, team members will see that you are attending to the part of the business that most directly affects them. The result of can be that they take the systemization and professionalization of the rest of the firm more seriously. In other words, firm professionalism starts with how professionally you treat team members.

For the review process, we suggest that you have team members take the first pass at what has evolved in their roles throughout the year. There is nothing wrong with roles changing, but the changes should be deliberate, not due to entropy.

The process may uncover that some team members are overworked, and others are undercompensated. Being deliberate in the review process can help you catch inequities that will become productivity problems if left unaddressed. You may also find that it is time to add a new team member.

Summary:

The process of creating job descriptions for the roles you most need to fill is critical to the planned growth of your firm. Spending the time to get the job descriptions right will help you with the critical steps in building you're A+ team: finding A+ candidates, selecting A+ team members, and developing them to excel in their roles. Take the time to do it right!

FAQs:

- **Do I only focus on the skills the candidates will need to do their jobs?**
    - NO! You need to make sure the descriptions a clear about the firm's value. If you are clear about culture as part of the job description, you will find the recruitment process to be more effective.

- **Should the job description include a salary?**
  - The job description itself doesn't need to include a salary, but we do recommend that you have a target salary range for each position.
- **Should specific software be listed in the job description?**
  - If having experience in a specific software is mandatory and you are using the description to post the job, we recommend mentioning that software. However, if posting an advertisement, make the descriptions more generic, such as: *Client Relationship Management software* vs. *Salesforce, or Redtail*.
- **How long should the job description be?**
  - Generally, job descriptions should be between one and one-and-a-half pages long.
- **What should be added in the culture section?**
  - Describe "*how things are done here"* – think about your company's core values, like "proactive service" or "GSD." This section also includes the benefits that the firm provides to clients and how the team member can excel in the role.

Resources:

Learn more and download the resources referenced in this document from the ***Crafting Effective Job Descriptions*** course in Carson Coaching Online.

- **Job Description Questionnaire**
- **Job Descriptions:**
  - ***Front Office Associate***
  - ***Operations Associate***
  - ***Marketing Associate***
  - ***Team Leader***
  - ***Wealth Plan Specialist***
  - ***Relationship Manager***
  - ***Associate Wealth Advisor***
  - ***Wealth Advisor***
  - ***Senior Wealth Advisor***
  - ***Administrative Intern***
  - ***Marketing Intern***
  - ***Director of Operations***
  - ***Director of Marketing***

- ***Social and Multimedia Design Specialist***
- ***Network Manager***
- ***Infrastructure Engineer***
- ***Junior Equity Analyst***
- ***Senior Equity Analyst***
- ***Chief Compliance Officer***
- ***Chief Financial Officer***
- ***Chief Investment Officer***
- ***Operations Associate***