

Why recruitment needs to ditch the job description shopping list

Making new appointments is a high-risk activity - as hiring managers and business owners across the spectrum from small businesses to large enterprises can attest - and making the wrong hire comes at a high cost.



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But there is one change that those responsible for recruitment in an organisation can make that will massively mitigate the risk while ensuring good candidates don't fall through the net, and that is to stop treating job descriptions like shopping lists, a leadership expert says.

Importance of role profile

“The design of the role profile or job description may sound like a purely transactional activity, but if you consider it the foundation of your hiring process and allocate sufficient time, rigour and creative energy to this, you're likely to have significantly enhanced outcomes,” says Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, CEO of Jack Hammer, independent African executive search firm with offices across the continent as well as Los Angeles.

This is because the role profile is the key reference point for determining the kind of talent you're looking for, as well as for screening and assessing potential candidates, she says.

“Think of it as a steering document. Getting this foundational piece wrong – or just being sloppy or thoughtless about it – can often be what trips up the whole recruitment process.

Make the effort

In her soon-to-be-released second book, *Inside the Interview*, Goodman-Bhyat shares insights and advice based on her decades-long experience as an executive search expert focusing on the sourcing and placement of top talent across the globe. While the book explores all stages of the hiring process related to the filling of senior management roles, she says going back to the drawing board when scoping job specs is a good investment of time and energy for anyone needing to expand their teams - regardless of the level of the role.

“Yes, this will take a bit of time, and require some rigour and discipline. But making the effort to mitigate the risk in this way is minimal in comparison with the agony that one typically endures when you make a bad hire,” she says.

Stop recycling old ads

Goodman-Bhyat says that what often happens when a vacancy needs to be filled, is that an historic job description is pulled out of the archives to advertise a role.

“So way back when, someone at some point drafted a job description, and since then, it has been recycled and recycled, ad infinitum. Each time, with a few extra items added to the list of skills, experience and personal traits required.

“The problem with this is that while there may remain a couple of relevant points that are re-usable for the role you are trying to fill now, chances are good that the document needs a good edit at the very least or, most likely, a complete overhaul.”

She says rehashed role profiles that have limited relevance to the job at hand abound in the marketplace, when clearly they should never have been used ‘as is’.

“The job title may be the same one that your company has used for one, or five, or ten years, but you must revisit the content every time you recruit. Take out the stuff that’s no longer relevant, and add the important parts about the role, your company’s vision, and the kind of person you’re looking to hire.”

Key criteria and outcomes

Most importantly, hiring managers should hone in on the key criteria they’re looking for, as well as the outcomes they expect to achieve with a successful hire - and ditch the rest.

“If you have a list of more than five key, non-negotiable criteria, it’s probably too much.

“Important also to differentiate between the non-negotiables, and the nice-to-have preferences. If you’re struggling to whittle down your list, you need to do a deep dive into each of the criteria and ask whether it is absolutely essential and if so, why.”

Overlooked

Goodman-Bhyat says great candidates are often not even picked up during the initial parts of the search, because they fail to meet key criteria of the job spec which shouldn’t really have been key criteria to start with.

“We often see our clients make a certain type of qualification a key requirement on a job spec, yet when we conduct a search, we encounter excellent candidates who are top of their game, but have achieved success through a number of

other, different routes.

“For example, there are some extraordinarily talented leaders who have been at it for relatively few years, who will be overlooked for consideration because they don’t meet the sometimes arbitrary ‘minimum years in management’ criteria. Conversely, I have interviewed some less-than-stellar executives with very outdated views on how to lead businesses and people, but who nevertheless tick the box on tenure and their seniority track record, and hence make the shortlist.

“So, if you are serious about your talent management strategy for the coming year, rethink your approach to all elements of your hiring process – and in particular the foundations of each talent search. This one change can significantly impact your talent attraction and retention success.”

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