

Need to Hire? Effective Job Descriptions Are Critical to Finding Top Talent

By: Robert Half Legal

When recruiting and managing new legal professionals, effective job descriptions can make all the difference. Written correctly, job descriptions provide a framework for job ads and enable you to evaluate candidates objectively during interviews. In addition, they are also valuable for assessing performance once a new employee joins your legal team.

The basic elements of a legal job description — title of the position, practice group or department (if applicable) and supervisor — provide a snapshot of the position. The other sections — responsibilities, necessary skills and required experience — offer insight into how the role fits within the organization. Here are some tips that can make each section more useful to you and potential employees:

- **Don't look to the past.** Try to avoid creating a job description based on qualities of individuals who used to hold the position. For example, a previous paralegal may have thrived on independent projects. These days, however, your law firm is emphasizing collaboration among its legal support staff so you may need someone who is more team-oriented. Therefore, it's important to draft a legal job description that reflects current requirements and long-term objectives.
- **Prioritize.** Make sure the written description you prepare is more than just a laundry list of job duties and responsibilities. The information should give a sense of the position's focus and place duties in order of importance.
- **Be specific.** Use language that spells out your needs. For instance, "handles administrative assignments" is too vague but "receives, sorts and files legal documents" gives a clear idea of expectations. It's also important to be consistent throughout the document. "Occasionally" shouldn't mean every two weeks in one section and annually in another. When in doubt, provide further details so that you and prospective employees will enter the relationship with the same understanding of the position and its responsibilities.
- **Evaluate whether the job is doable.** While some legal job descriptions may be well written, they might make the position extremely difficult to fill. This isn't necessarily a reflection of the total number of tasks required but rather the compatibility of those assignments. For example, it may be challenging to find a legal marketing specialist who can develop creative ad campaign ideas *and* maintain detailed accounting records for the department. Analyze your expectations to make sure they are appropriate based on the typical skill set of people in the role.
- **Avoid strict credential requirements.** While a college education or professional accreditation are essential for some positions, they aren't always critical in others. So, when developing a job description, make sure the credentials you

seek in applicants have a direct bearing on an individual's ability to become a top performer. You may prefer to hire a receptionist who possesses a bachelor's degree, but someone with relevant experience may be just as qualified. If you aren't flexible, you could overlook talented candidates.

- **Solicit feedback.** Gather input from a variety of sources — the person currently doing the job, if possible, as well as the employee's direct supervisor and other managers in the firm who can provide useful insights. You want to make sure the job description covers all aspects of the role and reflects changing demands in the organization.
- **Keep it updated.** The most effective job descriptions are useful not only during the hiring process, but also down the road when it's time to evaluate job performance. So, take the time to review the document periodically — once a year at minimum — to ensure it doesn't require revision.

For examples of legal job descriptions, visit Robert Half Legal's Glossary of Legal Job Descriptions at <https://www.roberthalf.com/legal/industry-resources/us-glossary-of-legal-job-descriptions>.

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