

VALIDATING THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Yesterday, I received a call from an experienced Recruiter who had a problem. He was working on a search for an Industrial Engineer. The Client's requirements included at least five years of experience in plant layout and design. Also required was a degree in Industrial Engineering. Although the Recruiter was able to locate several interested Engineers with at least five years of applicable experience, none of them had an Industrial Engineering degree. Because of this, all were rejected by the Client before the first interview.

Obviously, the Recruiter was frustrated and asked me what he should do. I asked him whether or not he had validated the job description with the Client. He wasn't certain how to answer my question because he was not familiar with the term "validating the job description". This did not surprise me, as over the years, I have met thousands of Recruiters who were not familiar with the term or its application. As a result, they frequently ended up working searches/job orders that were unrealistic at best and nearly impossible to fill at their worst.

Most Recruiters are familiar with the term "qualifying" the search/job order. However, validating the job description is an important part of that process and many times the Recruiter only completes this crucial task in a superficial manner.

First of all, don't confuse the job description with the search/job order. The job description is a very important component of search/job/order because it is composed of two essential elements:

One: Job Specifications – These define what constitutes successful performance on the job. Specifically what outcomes must be achieved through the position within what time frame and against what performance standards. Also included should be the critical functions (duties, responsibilities) that must be properly performed in order for the employee to produce the desired results.

Two: Candidate Selection Criteria – These are the performance based, job-related skills, talents, abilities, education and experience a qualified candidate must possess in order to perform successfully on the job.

The operative words are "**performance based, job-related ...**"

Unfortunately for many Recruiters, they automatically accept the client's job description as being valid. Whether they receive it in written form or over the phone, they do not validate the candidate selection criteria against the job description.

In validating the job description it is important to separate the two components described above. Too often the Client mixes the job specifications with the candidate selection criteria and in doing so, creates a situation that will frustrate both parties and potentially results in a poor hire.

To prevent this from happening, the Recruiter should carefully explain the importance of validating the job description in a structured manner to insure that everything is correct at this critical first stage of the hiring process.



In reference to the job specifications, at a minimum, the following questions should be asked:

“How do you define and measure successful performance in this position?”

“What outcomes must be achieved through this position and within what time frame?”

“Against what specific performance standards will these be measured?”

Since your Client may not have experienced this line of questioning previously, be patient and work them through it.

Remember

The objective is not just to fill the position. Rather it is to fill the position with an individual who can meet or surpass the performance standards for the position. The objective is to have your Client look back after three to six months and say, “If I had to do it all over again I’d hire the same person because they are flat out getting the job done.”

At this point, if your client cannot answer these questions, do not proceed further. The proper answers to these questions serve as the foundation for a successful search. Working without them is doing a disservice to your Client and creates a no win situation for you.

Additional questions that should be asked when validating the job specifications include:

“In specific terms, what functions must be properly performed by this employee in order for them to produce the desired results?”

“Which of these functions are critical or essential and which are supportive?”

“In what manner do these functions, when properly performed, produce the desired results?”

“As the manager, how do you measure whether or not these critical functions are being properly performed?”

“As the manager, how do you communicate performance measurement to the employee? How will they know whether or not they are properly performing the critical functions?”

You may not need to ask all these questions, or to ask them in this specific format if your Client is experienced with validating job descriptions. Nevertheless, without the information the answers to these questions provide, both you and your Client would be working under a tremendous handicap where a successful hire will depend on guesswork and luck. Not a good circumstance for either of you.

Once you have successfully validated the job specifications, you are ready to validate the candidate selection criteria. Asking a question similar to the following will generally provide the key information you need to accomplish this.

“In order to achieve the outcomes while performing at or above the standards for this position, what specific skills, talents, abilities, and experience must a qualified candidate possess?”

The answer to this question, as well as the potential follow-up questions must be stated in performance based, job related terms. That is why it's so important to validate the job specifications before the candidate selection criteria. This must be done in proper order if the validation process is to be credible.

After covering this process with the Recruiter referenced at the beginning of the article, he called his Client and reviewed the job description while using the validation process. As it turned out, the Client welcomed this well ordered approach and subsequently modified both the job specifications and the selection criteria. Amongst several changes, the educational requirement was properly adjusted. As a result the Client agreed to interview three of the Recruiter's candidates. Time will tell whether or not a placement will result, but at this point it appears far more likely than it did yesterday.

Properly validating the job description in a structured, step-by-step fashion will allow you to better qualify your searches/job orders. Additionally, your Client should be impressed with your professional approach while gaining confidence in your ability to fully understand and meet his/her needs.

However, validating job descriptions takes patience, confidence and skill. Don't get discouraged if your Clients initially appear to be hesitant in answering your questions. After all, this approach may be new to them. In fact, it could be an educational experience, one with direct practical application. Soon they should begin to realize the positive impact it could have on their capability to attract and hire individuals who are properly matched to meet the challenges of the job.

Keep in mind that by validating their job descriptions as part of your process for taking the search/job order you provide a much needed reality check without which a compromised outcome would be more than likely.



*Terry Petra is available for one-on-one coaching, consulting and group training through “**Petra On Call**”, a cost effective approach to receiving the full benefit of his expertise. For details on Terry’s products and services, including “**Business Appraisals**”, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. As always, if you have questions or comments about this article or wish to receive Terry’s input on any other topic related to this business, your calls and e-mails are most welcome. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at Terry@tpetra.com.*