



The Do's and Don'ts of Creating Great Job Descriptions

By Kate Matsudaira

As someone who is a technology professional — and has hired tech staff and built teams at the senior level — I know first-hand that with any good job description, you first want to get inside the minds of your potential candidates. You want to zero in on the factors that matter most to those that are a perfect fit for the position. What elements are important to them in a job and company? Do they care about growth opportunities? Exciting new challenges? Working with a phenomenal team? You need to focus on what they care most about (which may not be the things you like best).

Do's and Don'ts

As an HR professional or recruiter, you already know the basic elements that are required in a job description, like including an attention-grabbing title, details on what sets your company apart and a clear call-to-action. But for every good description you read, there are 10 awful ones. Here are some guidelines from a technologist's perspective to make sure your posting is one of the greats.



DO provide some specifics.

You want to give your candidate details about the role, particularly what makes this position in this company different from every other company. Let the candidate know if they're qualified up front and what tools they will be using.

Also, don't be afraid to get specific or friendly. For example, instead of just mentioning a "fully-stocked snack area," why not tell what the office's favorite treat

is? Sharing details lets candidates begin to know your company, which makes them care about working for you. The job description should reflect the personality of your organization.



DON'T fill your job description with requirements that are really desires.

I can't stress enough how important this is to tech professionals. You'll save yourself a lot of time and energy by giving serious consideration to the must-haves of a position. Make a list of everything you think is absolutely required, then consider how many are absolute requirements, and which are just desired qualifications.

The reason for asking this is that listing something as a "requirement" may cause some viewers to skip over the posting, even if they are only missing one of the items. This can cause you to miss out on candidates you might otherwise have considered.

So for example, if extensive experience deploying the cloud is essential for the job, then list it as a requirement. But, if you'd be willing to consider an applicant who instead has five years of coding experience and hosts their own website, consider making that cloud experience a desired qualification instead.

Also, make sure the years of experience you're requiring is reasonable. Too often employers make themselves look foolish by asking for five years of experience with a brand new technology and it exceeds the time the skill has actually existed.

(Hint: Make sure you also list the tech skills you desire in the "Required Skills field" on Dice, so your job posting is easily found by search engines.)



DON'T forget the details of the day-to-day role.

Whether you're hiring for one specific role, or growing a team with a number of available positions, candidates need to see what kinds of tasks will be filling their days. This is easier for some, but it needs to be a priority when you're hoping to attract the best and brightest.

While you want to let them know that they'll have "challenges" and "opportunities" and other vague-but-important "responsibilities," people want to know what kind of duties their position actually entails. It may not be the most glamorous section of the post, but it's important to break down what this position will involve day-to-day. For example: writing code, collaborating on designs, managing releases and deployments, or writing technical specifications.



DO get insights from recent hires.

Here are some questions you can ask new staff members to determine what you should emphasize in the description:

What did they like most about the company?

What convinced them to take this role versus others?

What are the best parts of their current role?

What would they say to their friends if they were trying to get them to join the team?

What makes this company special compared to other places they have worked?

Has the job lived up to the promise that was offered in the original posting?

Once you have these details, weave them into each of the requisite parts.



DO have the team review your job description.

When we write job descriptions, we're frequently in a hurry to get them posted and start the flow of candidates. However, it's always worthwhile to have the team review it. Does it accurately reflect the needs and the role? Did you miss specifics that should have been included? Is there something else that would entice them to apply?



DO add some character, but don't get too friendly.

This tip sounds so simple, but it's amazing how often the person drafting the job description doesn't think about it. Every time you write a posting, imagine you are the candidate reading it. Are you going to apply to — or even finish reading — a post that's vague or lacking personality? (No.)

However, in an effort to be engaging some companies swing too far in the "fun job posting" direction and focus too much on their wild workplace or how hard

their team partied after the last launch. While it's good to share your culture, you don't want that to be the only thing they learn about you. If you put too much emphasis on your fun side, office perks or even salaries, you'll attract people who are interested in other things first, before the job itself.

Putting the do's and don'ts into practice

Of course, writing an amazing job description is less about following every single rule, and more about picking and choosing the ones that are most important for the role and the candidates you're hoping to attract. Just make sure to include the details that make tech candidates tick:

What problems will they be solving?

What tools will they use to solve those challenges?

What are their opportunities for professional growth?



Find example job postings that you can use as inspiration and boost the quantity and quality of your applicants.