

19.18: Job Descriptions in Small Business

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the importance of job descriptions in small business



In a small business, the employees often wear a lot of hats. That's just how it is! Angela in marketing might hire a new part-time employee, and she might put on her HR hat and collect and file all the paperwork herself. Zane in operations might go out to install a product, then see an opportunity to temporarily be a salesperson and convince an onlooker that he, too, needs that product.

Employees often find it enjoyable to step out of their regular roles and try something new, but when small businesses don't draft job descriptions, when they don't think through the position and what will constitute their employee's eight-hour day, it can sometimes spell disaster. Let's talk about the ways that job descriptions provide a safety net for small business employers.

- **Hiring the right employee.** First and foremost, a small business wants to hire a new employee with skills that fit business needs. Job descriptions should include a thoughtful list of tasks that the small business owner expects to be completed. The list can be researched and cross-checked against similar job descriptions to ensure that the HR professional isn't out there looking for a "unicorn," and that employees fitting the description actually exist.
- **Set clear expectations for the new employee.** This may seem obvious, as it's the major purpose of a job description. Put an employee wearing many hats with a newbie who's eager to please, and pretty soon the new person is working 80 hours a week and isn't sure what they're really supposed to be doing. A job description that sets clear expectations for an employee can help them make choices about the many tasks that come their way.
- **Defend the business against discrimination charges.** The small business owner needs to keep the ADA and discrimination laws in mind when drafting a job description for new employees. The job description can be used to outline "essential functions" for the role, like how much time the employee will spend on her feet or how much weight she needs to be able to lift. Thinking about these qualifications up front can aid a small business employer in making sure a rejection letter isn't misinterpreted as discrimination, and the job description can provide reference in a court of law to prove that an employee didn't have skills to perform the job should a discrimination charge be leveled.
- **Classifying employees as exempt or non-exempt.** Job duties should be aligned with FLSA exemptions of the overtime rule. The job description and job title should match the reality of the job. If a high school degree is all that's necessary for a position, a master's shouldn't be required in the description. Putting the job description in writing and offering it up to public consumption allows for an additional level of honesty. This is another way that the HR professional can protect the small business from discrimination suits and overtime claims from employees that shouldn't be classified as exempt.
- **Protect the small business from overpayment.** Job descriptions allow an HR professional to do salary analysis, matching skills and job duties to their worth in the local job market. Compensation analysis not only saves the small business from overpaying to bring on an employee with the necessary skills, it ensures they don't undervalue those skills, either. A quality employee comes at market price.
- **Evaluate employees and help them improve.** A job description that sets clear expectations about the tasks to be performed is the basis for employee performance evaluation. When sitting down to talk with an employee about his or her performance, the job description is a reminder of the initial expectations and can be the foundation of that discussion.

Job descriptions are important for legal reasons as much as they are important for the happiness and overall success of the employee brought into the small business. They can be easily overlooked or dismissed as unnecessary work, but documenting the

needs and requirements of a position can help save a small business owner time and money as much as it helps her find a great employee.

? Practice Question

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