

Crafting Job Descriptions

Julianne Evenhus, CVT CFE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Identifying job description frameworks that are HR sound, and fit the needs of the practice
2. How to customize those frameworks to fit your expectations of the role and the culture of your practice.
3. Job descriptions are not stagnant, singular creation documents. They evolve as the individual in the role grows and adapts, improves and changes to accommodate the needs of the practice.

Where to start?

Job Descriptions... yuck. Boring, tedious lists of things that a boss expects an employee to do to earn their wage. No one wakes up and says “Wahoo!! I’m gonna write all new job descriptions for my team members. It’s going to be great; they are going to love this and business is going to boom!!” Or maybe you are just getting started applying a more formal management structure and you want to set your standards. Most individuals believe that creating job descriptions is daunting... What does a hospital administrator do, anyway?! Or a practice manager or office manager? Then there are technicians, technician managers, tech supervisors, CSR, veterinary receptionists, VR leads, and on and on and on. Truth be told, they are daunting to develop.

Listing ALL the different criteria and skills, tasks and expectations, rules and responsibilities is not an easy task. Assuring that all the legal and HR items that need to be included are included. Did you consider an equal opportunity disclosure statement? Is the language appropriate? Do you have the correct disclaimers listed?

I’ve got another question for you... Why reinvent the wheel?

There are TONS of resources out there that provide basic job descriptions, both free and paid resources that will give you templates to build from:

- VMC. Inc
- DVM360
- Veterinary Hospital Manager Association
- State VMA’s
- VIN
- Local management groups
- Facebook managers groups
- Other practices

A job description must possess critical job role guidelines and have detailed calls to action in many categories: clerical duties, customer service, technical skills, core responsibilities, personnel management, and so on. Other things to consider: Are there levels to the position? Is there room for growth?

These documents are necessary tools for the success of every team member in our hospitals. Expectations need to be clear and concise. The cool news is, there are so many resources available that you do not have to be overwhelmed or daunted by development. The basics and most pivotal task descriptions have been completed for you already. You simply need to find the template that contains the core skill sets that you expect of that role for your practice.

How to Make it your own:

You’ve done the research, read through examples and you’ve found the framework of your description.

Great! You’re all set.

Nope, sorry. This where so many leaders stop and miss out on the opportunity to of the job description.

A job description is a living, breathing document that can help guide an employee through their career path. If finishing touches and personalization and crafted thoughtfully, a job description can be a powerful tool to reenergize and get an employee jazzed about personal development and improvement.

Or perhaps, like me, you've come into a position of leadership and inherited an established staff. I have walked into hospitals and been faced with having absolutely no idea what a person does in their current role. No outline or roadmap, there's a checklist but no real direction or detail. Maybe there is just a title and a person holding that title and no real accountability.

A mentor of mine taught me the "Day in the Life" Technique. It is a tool to engage an individual in revising or creating a new job description for their role. I have adopted that technique and tweaked it to suit my process of engaging the individual in customizing their roles.

Let me tell you a story about how I learned the importance of engaging the individual in the development of their role. I have this cute little two doctor practice that I am responsible for. There's a staff of 12 people total, including two managers. Managers without job descriptions. For months, the practice ran smoothly, everyone seemed happy. When I spoke with the managers, they seemed to have a handle on what their roles were. They had settled into routines. But I had made a tragic error. I assumed that the managers of my new practice have the same expectations of their roles as I did. I also assumed that they share the same understanding and expectations of each other's roles. I didn't take the time to really explore, to clarify and set expectations and give my hospital leadership team a clear path to success.

Fast forward a few months, and the undercurrent of drama and toxicity have reared their hideous heads. My two managers are jockeying for position, stepping on each other's toes and behaving badly. The support staff began to feel and see the dysfunction. When I visit the practice, everyone is all smiles, rainbows and sunshine. But when I walk out the door, my phone starts ringing, and the texts start coming in rapid-fire detailing the plot of Mean Girls over and over.

How did it come to this? Why can't they get along and be respectful of each other?

The answer was simple. I had let it happen. I assumed that they knew what was expected of them in their roles. I assumed that my expectations were clear. I was wrong.

So, what is the solution? How do we fix the problem?

In this case, I felt the need to push the RESET button and went with a targeted activity: "A week in the Life" and set to task creating new job descriptions to provide a base for the expectations that I have of their core roles.

Descriptions are created, the individual has bought in, now what?

The development process can take time and effort, patience and follow-through. Check-ins are immensely important.

But it is absolutely time well spent, in my experience.

The benefits do not have to end there! If you have done it well, you won't have to recreate the document moving forward. You can use the document as a tool. Incorporate job description reviews into your performance reviews!

Does your senior tech have hopes to become a VTS? Has she/he recently passed those boards? Engage them in a review of their job description at performance review time and add additional tasks to their JD. Hold them accountable for continued growth. They will thank you for it and be proud of their accomplishments.

Other benefits of a customized approach to JD development:

Your team has created all these neat lists of things they do daily. Don't waste that information. They have already done the first step in a workflow analysis. Use those lists to map out your team and individual checklists.

Each journal entry can be assigned daily, weekly or monthly frequency. There may be some overlap between roles and levels, but all the important stuff is right there waiting to be set to process. The accountability tool is ready to help that team member succeed.

Crafting Job Descriptions Worksheet

Julianne Evenhus, CVT CFE

A WEEK IN THE LIFE

Thank you for committing to this valuable exercise and taking the steps to create a fulfilling roadmap for your career!!

Step 1: Evaluate a current workweek. Create an outline of current duties, tasks, projects that you complete. Make it simple, grab a notebook and jot down your daily activities for a full workweek. It doesn't have to be pretty. These are your notes and general outline. This observation step is designed to help determine the tasks that you are currently completing.

Step 2: Sit down at the completion of the workweek and reread your outline. Cross out any duplicates that may have popped up. Add any tasks that are essential but may not have been documented during the current workweek (i.e. payroll; if it was an off week in your pay cycle, Restocking the crash cart, etc.).

Step 3: Rewrite or type your tasks in a new list. Write a description of each task, explaining what it is and any other pertinent descriptors. Be sure to take a moment to think about your descriptors before you write them. Be candid in your writing, yet unbiased and nonjudgmental. This is key in getting a balanced final draft.

Step 4: Rank the task on a scale of 1 through 5. 1 is least enjoyable; you do not like completing this task. 5 is most enjoyable; this is a really rewarding task to complete. The goal here is to identify the level of satisfaction the tasks provide you.

Remember, this is supposed to be fun and enlightening and help craft your daily work life. Don't overthink it, and don't stress about it.

To complete the process:

Manager/supervisor gathers all completed exercises, reviews and evaluates the core tasks, identifies any duplicate or inefficient tasks. Looks for gaps or absence of core tasks and designates where those should be added. At this point, you can finalize a job description by filling gaps, improving efficiencies and get the added value if identifying areas where an individual can target for growth.

Take this process a step further after your initial run of job descriptions are created. Add it to annual or bi-annual reviews. Shorten the term to 2-3 days, rather than a week and shift focus to accentuate the employee satisfaction level. Engage the individual in the creation or modification of tasks that will create stronger personal satisfaction when completed.

Notes
