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BY JERRY BERNHART

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### Wanted: Direct Marketing Manager

Must have at least five years' experience, must have a college degree, must have good communication skills, must be a team player, must have this, must have that. You must have everything we're looking for or you must not apply for this job.

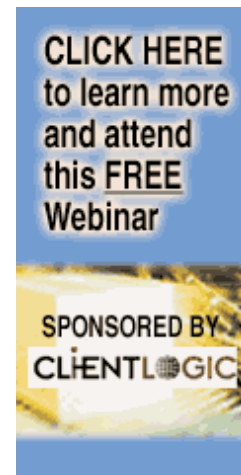
Look familiar?

Go online and you'll find thousands of job descriptions. Some are long, some are short, some are written better than others, but most follow the same formula: They list required skills, experience and academics, as well as duties and responsibilities. To filter out resumes that don't conform to the listed requirements, many companies use fancy filtering and tracking software. Unless your resume contains all the right key words there's a good chance it will end up in an online black hole.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of job descriptions are rarely effective for finding, evaluating and attracting top talent. I've never known a hiring manager who didn't want to hire a top achiever. What they often fail to think about is how they define such a candidate. Experience levels, skills and academic credentials are important, but they can't substitute for what a person needs to do to be successful in the job. In most cases, people get ahead because they have many of the required skills, loads of potential and are motivated to learn and grow. They don't get ahead because they "have a minimum five years' experience."

The first thing to do is get away from the practice of writing a traditional job description that presents only a laundry list of "must-haves" defining required skills, duties, responsibilities and experience. One of the best books on this subject is "Hire With Your Head" by Lou Adler. In it Adler discusses the concept that traditional job descriptions define only the person and fail to state what constitutes successful performance. Many human resources professionals are slow to come around to this idea because old hiring habits are hard to break.

A job description that defines the criteria for success can look more or less like a performance review. Think: When you were last promoted, was your promotion based on the number of years' experience you had, or the specific skills you brought to the job, or your credentialed learning? Not likely. Most promotions are based on past performance and whether or



**Mail Stream: A Report on Incoming Direct Mail**

British fashion designer Johnnie Boden introduces his menswear collection to the U.S. in his summer catalog. After a half-year flirtation

not an individual has met or exceeded the position's goals and objectives.

When your boss promoted you, he or she already knew your strengths, weaknesses, work habits and leadership skills. For an external hire these are all unknowns, so outside candidates are assessed differently. They are judged based on experience, skills, academics and personality — but those are all poor predictors of whether the individual will succeed or fail. When writing a job description you should employ the same criteria you'd use for internal promotions.

Most direct marketing jobs have anywhere from six to 12 mission-critical position objectives against which successful performance can be measured. Most of those objectives fall into similar categories. Start by asking yourself, "What does the person taking this job need to accomplish to be successful?" Write down the performance objectives. Do this, and you'll find yourself thinking less about requirements and must-haves and more about accomplishments and deliverables.

By focusing your job description only on experience and skills, you risk filtering out superior candidates who are capable of producing desired results. You also risk eliminating those who may not have the ideal required experience but may have the motivation and the smarts to meet or exceed your expectations. Top candidates may not even apply to job postings emphasizing only required skills.

Think of the last candidate you interviewed and decided not to hire. Did you make that decision because the candidate lacked the minimum required skills or experience? Probably not. Most likely you made the decision because you had concerns about the candidate's past performance and ability to deliver. If you were a candidate reading job postings on the Internet, what would interest you most — a job description with a bunch of "must-haves" or one that describes the factors that are necessary for success?

The best way to begin is with a timeline. When I meet with an employer I literally put a sheet of paper in front of him on which I've drawn a one-year timeline divided up into 90-day segments. I then ask the employer to list performance objectives at each interval. Usually they'll have a general idea what they want done, but when the timeline is right there in front of them they really have to think it through. In most cases no one has asked them this question: "What does this person need to accomplish to be successful in this job, and in what time frame?"

As an example, in a recent search for a vice president of sales I asked the CEO to name the critical job factors, the specific areas of accomplishment that define successful performance in the position.

Like many sales management positions at DM firms, these typically fall into a half-dozen major categories, including the main objective, organizational issues, the other changes or improvements needed, human resource issues, and technical and longer-term strategic objectives. I guided him through each of the categories by asking deposition-like questions. He said the major objective was to increase sales. Normally he would have stopped there, but when I probed further I learned that the specific, measurable goal was to increase top-line revenue through direct selling by 20%, plus develop new alliances and partnerships.

Rukeyser's Wall Street has once again turned to the magalog format.  
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The primary organizational objective was to reassess the sales staff, but he had no timeline. When I pressed for a time frame I learned he wanted a top-rate sales force staffed and ramped up within six months. The most important change needed was to completely revamp an antiquated and inefficient sales process. The main technical goal was to introduce a new sales force automation tool. The primary HR objective was to improve coordination between sales and marketing. In addition to short-term goals there were several longer-term ones, which included establishing a new key accounts group and developing an international sales strategy.

The result: For the first time, the CEO had a true and detailed blueprint for exactly what constituted success in the position. Critical job factors for other DM functions include many of the same categories used in this example.

As you think about major performance-related objectives, other categories will emerge. Within each category identify specific and measurable success factors, within a time frame where appropriate, and then add those success factors to your job description.

Let's look at a couple of ways you can modify your job description to make it a template for success. A traditional description might state, "Must have at least five years' direct marketing operations experience." The problem with this requirement is that you can't measure someone's past performance based on years of experience. Better to say, "Use your operations experience to reduce operating overhead by 5%." This defines the deliverable and the candidate clearly understands what he or she must accomplish to be successful in the position.

As another example, a traditional job description might state, "Must be a team player." What does that mean? At one company being a team player might mean simply showing up for a meeting once a week, while at another the position might involve daily interaction with department heads. Better to say, "Coordinate new product launch with research and marketing."

This performance-based approach more than benefits the candidate. You have thought out and documented the position's key requirements against which subsequent performance can be measured, and as a result you now have a template for assessing future accomplishment.

Nothing will contribute more to your company's good fortune than the quality of the people you hire. Start by resolving to improve your successful hire quotient by writing job descriptions that focus more on performance objectives. Using this approach, you will cut down on employee turnover, increase productivity and build a stronger team.

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