

Overcoming Hiring Mistake #1: Inadequate Job Descriptions

What's the most common hiring mistake?

According to Vistage speakers Barry Deutsch and Brad Remillard, it's using inadequate job descriptions to guide the hiring process.

In fact, after conducting a survey of 225 executive level hires in 134 different companies, the two partners found that a staggering 93 percent of searches that resulted in new executive failure made this critical mistake at the outset of the process.

“The first thing most companies do in a job search is throw together a very generic job description,” notes Deutsch. “Or worse, they pull an old, outdated job description off the shelf, dust it off and pronounce it fit for hiring the new executive. Nine out of ten times, that's a sure recipe for failure.”

Why?

Because most traditional job descriptions consist of vague, nebulous terms that lump together a mishmash of skills, knowledge, abilities, attributes, responsibilities, experience, education and behavioral adjectives -- none of which are consistent predictors of on-the-job-success.

“Traditional job descriptions don't help to align organizational goals with individual or departmental goals,” adds Remillard, “and they don't help to clarify expectations or create a roadmap for the hiring process.

“Worse, when you define a job in mediocre terms, as most traditional job descriptions do, you tend to attract mediocre candidates. When all you have to interview is mediocre candidates, you end up hiring mediocre people.”

Success Factor Snapshot

The solution to this quagmire, suggest Deutsch and Remillard, is the Success Factor Snapshot™, a powerful hiring tool that breaks down a position's requirements in terms of specific, measurable deliverables, benchmarks and timetables.

The Success Factor Snapshot™ (or SFS) serves as the cornerstone of the Success Factor Methodology™ (Deutsch's and Remillard's trademarked hiring system) and offers several advantages over traditional job descriptions. The SFS:

- Makes it easier to define a position in terms of the candidate you need rather than the skills and experience someone has gained over the years.

- Serves as the foundation for the compelling marketing statement, a description of the job designed to attract top candidates.
- Provides the basis for a scorecard with which to evaluate and compare different candidates.
- Leads to a final, specific set of verification questions to ensure that the candidate being offered the position can actually accomplish the established goals.
- Allows a new hire to start the job knowing *exactly* what is expected of him or her.
- Provides a vehicle for managing the performance of individual employees and retaining top performers.

In addition, the process of putting together a SFS assists with the recruiting process by prompting hiring managers to think about where to look for top talent. The SFS shapes the structure of the job interview and helps the hiring team focus on what needs to be done. Finally, the SFS provides the substance for core interview questions that ensure a high-quality interview.

“Perhaps most important, the SFS serves as a unifying tool throughout the hiring process,” states Deutsch. “It directly ties the individual goals of the position to the company’s strategic goals, so that you can hire to the specific results and outcomes the position needs to achieve.”

Creating the Success Factor Snapshot™

To create a Success Factor Snapshot™ for a specific position, suggest Deutsch and Remillard, first toss the outdated, generic job description out the window. Then use the SOAR technique to define success for the position:

- **Substantial goals.** Identify the substantial goals you are trying to achieve in the position.
- **Obstacles.** Identify the obstacles standing in the way of accomplishing each substantial goal.
- **Action.** Identify the quantifiable, measurable action items that the person needs to take to accomplish each substantial goal.
- **Results.** Identify the metrics you will use to measure success in the position. In other words, what results are you looking for?

Next, create a Success Factor Snapshot™ (using the SOAR methodology) with four basic steps:

1. **Identify the top departmental goals.** Assemble the entire hiring team and, beginning with the annual operating plan, identify the three or four substantial departmental goals (**S**) that must be accomplished over the next 12 to 18 months in order for the department to achieve its portion of the operating plan.
2. **Identify the obstacles.** For each of these goals, define two or three short-term obstacles (**O**) that must be overcome in order to achieve the goals. Identify specific actions (**A**) that will be taken to surmount the obstacles, and define measurable, time-based results (**R**).
3. **Clarify the Success Factor.** The **OARs** represent the individual Success Factors that, when achieved, ensure the department meets its goals. For each departmental goal, consolidate the **OARs** into one coherent statement, which becomes the Success Factor.
4. **Compile the Success Factors.** Create a different Success Factor for each key departmental goal and compile them into one Success Factor Snapshot. You now have a clear description of success for the position.

A Picture of Success

What does a Success Factor Snapshot™ look like? Consider the following example for a vice president of operations:

- **Success Factor 1: Within 12 months, improve on-time deliveries from 90 to 95 percent.**
 - Within six months, develop and implement a vendor qualifications program that will achieve zero defects and 100 percent on-time deliveries.
 - Within three months, improve machine utilization to 98 percent.
 - Within three months, implement quality controls and procedures to ensure less than two percent defects.
- **Success Factor 2: Consolidate plant operations within 18 months.**
 - Within three months, develop and present to the CEO a plan to consolidate two plants with no down time.
 - Within four months, complete a new plant layout that includes work cells for all manufacturing processes.
 - Within nine months, have the first cells up and running and producing at levels prior to the move.
- **Success Factor 3: Reduce manufacturing costs by 10 percent.**
 - Conduct a SWOT analysis in the first three months and present a plan of action to reduce costs by 10 percent based on this analysis.
 - Within six months, reduce machine setup time by 30 percent.
 - Identify main drivers of overtime and within six months present a plan that will address these issues and a timeframe to eliminate them.

“Clearly, this looks very different than your typical job description,” notes Deutsch. “With the Success Factor Snapshot™, both you and the candidate know exactly what results are required from the position and what actions must be taken to achieve them. More important, because those results are closely aligned with the company’s most important objectives, achieving them means that everybody wins.”

Ultimately, the Success Factor Snapshot not only paints a clear picture of success, it also helps to attract a higher caliber of candidate.

“The underlying principle here is that you get what you define,” concludes Remillard. “If your job descriptions focus on minimum performance (as most do), you will attract people who can only achieve that minimum. In contrast, a compelling Success Factor Snapshot™ will attract those who are driven to achieve clear and challenging descriptions of success.

“In the long run, the number one action you can take to improve your hiring process is to use a Success Factor Snapshot™ to align all of your company’s cascading goals and attract top talent to come work for you.”

Examples of Success Factor Snapshots™ can be found in Deutsch and Remillard’s book, You’re Not the Person I Hired, and on their website, www.impacthiringsolutions.com. In addition to the Success Factor Snapshot™ examples, you can also download a template to help create your Success Factors.