

Writing the Perfect Job Description

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WANTED: SENIOR PASTOR

Handsome pastor needed to preach 10 minutes each Sunday. You will be working daily from 8 a.m. until midnight. The perfect candidate will have a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he will spend most of this time with the senior citizens. He will smile all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. He will condemn sin but never hurt anyone's feelings. Attendance at all church meetings is required. The perfect candidate will make at least fifteen home visits per day and will always be in his office to be available should an emergency arise. Preference will be given to a young pastor with 15-20 years of experience. Some light janitorial duties required.

This 'perfect pastor' job description that has been circulating around on the internet for some time pokes fun at the expectations people have of church staff. But in reality, hiring your next pastor or church staff member is serious business.

It is amazing how many churches operate on a daily basis without written job descriptions. Some view them as a waste of time. But if you have ever had to deal with a personnel conflict, you will know that every minute you spend developing your job description is time well spent.

Why do church staffs need job descriptions?

There are some very good reasons that every church and every church staff member should have some type of written job description. The main reason is that it will make sure that the staff member, the personnel committee and the congregation are all on the same page. Let's face it... every person brings a different set of skills and personality to his/her job; and that means that left unguided, everyone will carry out their job title differently. The staff member thinks a priority should be in one area, the personnel committee thinks it should be in another area, and the congregation has a different idea altogether. All three have explicit expectations for the job and how performance will be evaluated. A job description simply sets out the priorities and expectations on paper, allowing the staff person, personnel committee and congregation know, in advance, the priorities and expectations of the job. A well-written job description will actually reduce the risk of conflict because the priorities and goals of the job are already spelled out. When and if any conflict arises, the job description can be utilized to find out if the conflict is justified or not.

Job descriptions can also be used effectively in the annual staff evaluation process. The employee's job performance can be measured against a specific standard (the job description) to determine areas of strength and weakness.

What is the goal of a great job description?

Since most job descriptions are written when positions are being created or hired, we'll start from this vantage point in our discussion. When you are writing the job description from a hiring standpoint, you really want to achieve one purpose:

Anyone who reads your job description should know immediately what the perfect person for the job looks like.

The key to writing a good job description has nothing to do with length. Great job descriptions can be very short and to the point, or more detailed. The important thing to remember when writing your job description is that you want whoever reads the description to know exactly what your expectations are for the position and the type of person you're looking for. These expectations should be evident to all three groups of people we previously talked about: the potential staff member; the personnel committee; and the congregation.

This is specifically why taking the time to write a job description is so important. Everyone must be on the same page. Prospective pastors who are not on the same page as the personnel committee get fired. Congregation members who are not on the same page as the personnel committee leave the church. The written job description helps eliminate these potential problems. It's hard to be united and on the same page when there is no page (job description) to look at!

What should be in the job description?

Job Title. The job title is the first thing that a potential applicant will see about your church. Be sure to take a little time and think about your job title. Make certain that it truly captures the essence of the job you're offering. Be sure to include in the job description if this is a part-time position. (This will be a deciding factor for many who will apply). The 'status' words you use are also important in your job title: think through your use of words like 'pastor' or 'director'; and 'associate' or 'assistant'.

The Summary. Every good job description should start out with a short three to five sentence summary. This is important for the potential job applicant because they want a quick way of determining whether or not this is a job they would be interested in. Your summary should tell a compelling story about your church, the job, and the type of challenges and rewards the applicant can expect. Don't go in to much detail at this point... just paint broad strokes of what this job and your church look like. You'll also want to include in this section a brief description of your church hierarchy (for example, how your structure is set up and who this position will report to and be responsible to).

Background. You may want to include some of the reasons your church is hiring this position. Maybe you want to hire a new children's minister because you are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of families with young children in your

church. Spell that out. This section is also a great place to paint a picture of your church, its structure, worship style, staff relationships, etc. You can also include your church's vision, value and mission statements in this area. Anything that can give the prospective employee a glimpse into the type of church and atmosphere they would be working in would work well in this area.

Job Responsibilities. This is the main section that you'll use to tell specific details about what this job will include. If you want to receive a qualified pool of candidates, then it is imperative that you take the time to write out some of your specific job requirements. This can be tricky. There will be a tendency to try to write out every skill you're looking for as a 'required experience'. For example, you might want an experienced person for your children's minister; but stating that the applicant 'must have 5 years experience in children's ministry at a large, multi-staff church' will cut out a large group of applicants that may have great experience in the child-care and/or ministry area. Ask your self tough questions about your stated job responsibilities. Do your requirements really help you find the type of person you're looking for? Are there other, less restrictive ways to find the type of person you're looking for without disqualifying some great candidates? The bottom line here is to not lock yourself into strict requirements that may prevent you from considering qualified candidates. Remember, one of the main purposes of the job description at this point is to attract potential candidates. The job description can always be refined during the interview process and before the contract is offered to the new employee.

Get a helping hand with writing your job description

If you need some help getting started you might want to look and see what some other churches are using for job descriptions similar to the position you're hiring for. At ChurchStaffing.com, we offer a library of free downloadable job descriptions that you can look at and use as a starting point. Just click on the "Search Job Descriptions" link. You'll find all kinds of helpful job descriptions for all different type of church staff positions.

Evaluating your applicants and hiring the right person

After you publish and advertise your job description, you may find that you might need to do some tweaking here or there. For example, you may be receiving resumes from too diverse a group of theological backgrounds. If that's the case, you'll probably want to go back and re-write some additional information in your background section about your theological background and style. Maybe, after a prolonged period of time, you're not happy with the number of applicants you're receiving. It may then be time to re-work your job requirements section of the job description. As you find qualified candidates, you may want to use additional assessment tools such as one we've just introduced at ChurchStaffing.com. MinistryKeys allows you to further match up your applicants through the use of a biblical DISC assessment to pinpoint the candidate that best fits your church's specific DNA (mission, vision, and values).

Follow these steps and you'll be well on your way to writing a great job description and finding a staff member that will be the perfect fit for your church!