



Is it time to start measuring employee loyalty in dog years?



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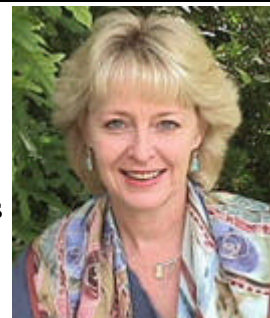


## Is it Time for a New Look at Job Descriptions?

Guest columnist Pamela Holloway has three suggestions.

By Pamela Holloway

The ancient artifacts we call job descriptions haven't changed much over the last half century. But the world of work has.



Rather than having a single job, most of us perform a variety of roles and activities. What we do changes frequently, and typically bears little resemblance to formal job descriptions.

Isn't it time for a new approach to defining work? One that's more in tune with the times and focused on effectiveness rather than efficiency? One that actually provides real guidance and enables "right person right job." Isn't it time we put job descriptions to work?

We should start this process by revisiting what we want job descriptions to do. For example, job descriptions should:

- Provide guidance to people as to what to do and how to do it.
- Provide information that could be used in staffing the job -- not only technical skill requirements, but also information about the "nature" of the person best suited for the work.
- Provide a basis for "Who's Who" and Expertise directories that enable people in the organization to know who does what and who knows what.

What do we need to change in order to accomplish these objectives?

I suggest three things:

### 1. Expand job descriptions

First, expand job descriptions to include multiple roles and areas of expertise.

Traditional job descriptions no longer work because they're based on the

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concept of a single job. But few of us have "a" job or static area of responsibility. We're involved in different projects and work with different teams. What we do and how we do it changes monthly, weekly, sometimes even daily.

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■ Multiple roles and responsibilities are now the norm rather than the exception. ■

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Several years ago, my job title at Mobil was Global HR Process Consultant (which always made for interesting conversation at cocktail parties). During the course of one year, I developed global data standards, negotiated outsourcing contracts, developed web sites, and managed the training function. How would you like to write that job description?

Multiple roles and responsibilities are now the norm rather than the exception. Our job description "language" should accommodate this diversity. In the Mobil example, we might note the types of work processes, such as Strategic Planning, Developing Standards, and Negotiating Contracts and then the contexts within which those activities were performed.

Context elements might be things like the function: HR or IT, Global versus US, the timing, and the depth and breadth of involvement. My job or work profile would include not only those processes and contexts from that one year, but from other years and jobs as well.

## **2. It's about work and people**

Second: "nature of work" characteristics should be added to job descriptions. These are additional attributes of the work that can be used to better match people to activities.

For example, is most of the work hands-on, "in the trenches" or is it more conceptual, planning, and analyzing? Does the work deal mostly with people, data, or things? What's the level of responsibility, in other words, what are the repercussions of mistake making?

Of all the ways better job descriptions can benefit an organization, perhaps the most important one is their ability to enable right person right job or job fit. Given current turnover rates and the escalating war for talent, we absolutely must do a better job at matching people to work. Job fit is now job one!

In order to accomplish this, we must stop looking at jobs and people as two separate entities and focus instead on the relationship between the two.

We also need to develop a common language for describing work and people. a language that goes beyond technical skills. degrees. and years of

people, managing and good by one common sense, suggest, and you can experience, and begins to get to the heart of what work is really all about - the behaviors, cognitive skills used and the social context in which it operates.

### 3. Employee can help

Finally, job descriptions should be written by or with the person in the job.

I mean, if you look at the benefits of good job descriptions, a common theme emerges. Who is in the best position to supply job information? Who knows better what the job is actually all about and what kinds of skills and competencies are most important? The incumbent!

I'm an advocate for enabling employees to complete their own work profiles and job descriptions. Some people may need help articulating details about their job, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be the primary supplier of information. Consider using an interview process for gathering key information.

I'm also in favor of "self-assigned" job titles. Encourage employees to choose their own job title, one that actually means something to them, one that motivates them and makes them feel good about what they do. Chief Visionary. Client Caregiver, Director of Talent.

Job descriptions and job titles provide identity and purpose. Perhaps by redefining work, we can help make employees feel better about who they are and what they do.

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