

Get employee buy-in on job descriptions

Do you have current job descriptions for every position on your team? If they're more than six months old, you may have a lot to gain by updating them--including increasing your employees' commitment. Here's an easy plan to get quality results:

Review the format. A job description should have a general purpose statement that explains the actual role of that position within the organization, in easy-to-understand language. It should then include a list of specific job duties.

Get employees involved. Give each worker a copy of his or her most recent job description, no matter how outdated it is. Ask employees to review the lists of job duties carefully, adding any new ones and scratching out those they're no longer performing. Then ask them to number and list the duties in the order of their importance.

Evaluate the revised descriptions. Is the work evenly distributed among your staff? If not, develop a new, better-balanced plan for dividing work. Are the employees' priorities in line with yours? If not, decide who knows best and adjust accordingly. Have responsibilities changed so much that a job needs to be reclassified with a new salary range? Talk to your manager.

Meet with each employee. Coordinate changes or confirm existing functions. This is a perfect time to discuss priorities and reach agreement about the high-payoff items in each employee's job. This is also one of the best times to discuss each person's feelings about particular job duties, which can help you identify potential performance problems and opportunities to better match employees' skills to work assignments. (It's good to do this exercise shortly before, but not during, an employee's annual performance review.)

Turn the description into a "contract." While the job description is not a real employment contract, it can be a mutual agreement between you and each employee about the nature of the work. You and the employee should sign it and each get a copy for your own records.

When conducting employee appraisals, make sure you include ample time for workers to give you feedback on your performance and on the operations of the department. Those who work for you have a uniquely valuable perspective, and getting their input is a way you can see your own strengths and weaknesses clearly in a safe, accepting environment.