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# THE HIRING HANDBOOK

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A Guide for Success as a Hiring Manager

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- Executive Insurance Recruiter -



A Publication of



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

## Jeff Nixon



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CHAPTER

1

How to Write a Good Job Description

# A Paradigm Shift

## Candidate-focused vs. Job-focused

Many a frustrated hiring manager has asked the question as they begin the process of filling an open position: **“How do I write a good job description?”** Usually their struggles stem from the fact that they are focusing on the wrong thing—the perfect candidate. They are trying to write a job description that looks exactly like the person they hope to hire for the position. This process is unrealistic, seeing as perfect people are awfully hard to find, and therefore not very helpful.

So what does a good job description actually look like, or perhaps the better question is rather what does it **DO**? The answer is quite simple: **it attracts qualified candidates to apply for the position, and it helps you select the best candidates to interview for a job. However, the focus should not be on the *candidate*, but rather on the *JOB* itself.** Strictly speaking, your goal is to find someone who can simply do the job asked of them, right? So it stands to reason that the focus should be on what they will be required to **DO** in their new position, rather than just the desired skills, background experience, and accolades.

My suggestion for writing job descriptions is to go to anyone involved in managing the position and gather detailed information from them on what exactly needs to be accomplished to be considered successful. Armed with all of that info, you can then format it to explain precisely what the person will be required to *do*, most likely followed by a wish list of what you prefer the person to *have* in terms of education, years of experience, etc. This process will keep your job descriptions both clear and objective.

## Here's a basic example to follow:

XYZ Company is seeking an Underwriting Manager in the transportation / commercial auto department for their (office location or territory) operation. Candidates will be responsible for a sizeable staff of underwriters and assistant underwriters who focus on commercial auto and transportation accounts in a 3 state territory. Additionally, they will be responsible for product development and product management involving commercial auto.

### *Requirements for the position:*

- Experience in the underwriting, marketing, and management of commercial auto / transportation risks
- Experience in underwriting supervision and management
- Successful track record for marketing and writing new business
- Strong broker / agent relationships in (territory)

### *Desired additional qualifications:*

- Product development or product management experience
- 4 year college degree
- Professional insurance designations such as CPCU, CIC, etc.
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office applications

This position represents a significant career opportunity. Salary will be commensurate with candidate's experience. Relocation assistance is available to qualified candidates.

As shown in the example, you may also want to include required or desired skill sets, such as computer software proficiency or excellent written and verbal communication skills—just be sure that anything you include ties directly into specific job functions, not just keeping up appearances. **Remember, it's a job description, not a candidate description.** Keep the right focus, and you'll have a much easier time selecting qualified candidates to interview.

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CHAPTER

2

The Benefits of Using a Recruiter

# Why Recruiters?

## The Benefit to Your Company

If you're an insurance carrier or agency, you might be wondering "What's the point of **using an insurance recruiter**? Why incur that cost when we can just put the word out online and let the candidates come to us?" It's certainly a valid question to consider, and it's helpful to know all the facts in order to make the best decision for your situation. Maybe you shouldn't use an insurance headhunter for your next hire, and maybe you should.

Here are some **reasons and benefits to utilizing an insurance search firm** to help you decide if it's the right choice for your company or not.

- **Recruiters have connections you don't.** Through previous searches and an ever-expanding database of candidates, a recruiter probably already has a handful of possibilities in mind the moment you send him a new job order. Not to mention his network of other recruiters, like the [National Insurance Recruiters Association](#), with their databases, too! Tapping into that resource alone can quickly connect you with highly-qualified candidates that may or may not be found elsewhere. For example, you may need a new Chief Underwriting Officer or Senior VP of Claims, positions which can't be filled by just anyone in the market for a new job. An insurance search firm can locate executive-level people who are perfect for the position, but may not even have advertised their resume online.

- **Insurance recruiters know your industry.** When you're discussing the open position with the headhunter, you can rest assured that he understands the terminology of the insurance industry. In his searches, he'll be looking for candidates with the right background and skill set, and he'll know how to discern from his conversations with them whether or not they could be a good fit.
- **Recruiters have time and resources you don't.** A job search takes an enormous amount of time, which is usually a rare and precious commodity for most companies. Posting the position in multiple locations online, calling other colleagues to look for recommendations, and sorting through the barrage of resumes that come back to you are daunting tasks. Allowing a recruiter to handle all of that work for you, in addition to preparing the best candidates extensively beforehand, prevents your valuable time from being wasted; instead, you can simply focus on interviewing merely a handful of highly-qualified ones and choosing the best fit for the position.

Insurance recruiters are very experienced in locating candidates that match your criteria and the culture of your carrier or agency. Particularly when it comes to high-level positions in your company needing to be filled, having an expert just bring the right people to you can save you a lot of headaches.

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CHAPTER

3

4 Important Questions to Ask  
During Interviews

# The Crucial Questions

## Revealing the True Potential of Candidates

Every hiring manager's goal is to hit a home run with every new employee they bring on board. No one ever wants to make a bad hiring decision that ends up costing the company more time, money, and frustration. So it's critical to conduct thorough interviews that give great insight into the candidates' backgrounds, personalities, skills, and goals so that the chances of hiring the right fit the first time are high. While there's no foolproof method, I believe that asking the right questions during the interview will most often give you the insight you're looking for.

The following list is a good starting point to include in among other interview questions, especially ones that are more technical or job-specific. However, make sure that you don't neglect these bigger-picture, open-ended questions that are geared toward discovering whether or not the candidate is a good personality match for the department and the company as a whole.

### **1. How does this position fit into your short and long term career plans?**

If your goal is to hire a long-term superstar for your company, it's important to know whether or not this candidate sees himself rooted and growing in your organization for years to come. Also make sure you come to the interview with clarity on your short and long term needs for the person who fills this position so that you can assess each candidate accordingly.

## **2. Aside from compensation and benefits, what motivates you to come to work every day?**

Beyond the bottom line for every employee, it's important to build a team of people who are personally invested in the work they do. This doesn't mean a disproportionate work-life balance; it means that when they are at work, they receive some sort of internal fulfillment for what they do. Otherwise, they will burn out after a while and move on to another job or career that provides that for them.

## **3. What personality/work style do you most enjoy reporting to and/or managing?**

Do you need someone with a reserved, calculating personality to sit behind a desk and crunch numbers in peace and quiet all day with little to no supervision? Then don't hire an outgoing candidate who thrives on human interaction, group projects, and input from management, regardless of how amazing he or she is with numbers. Or if you need to hire a manager for a department of interns, it would be a mistake to choose someone whose prefers overseeing a mature and seasoned group of employees. It will be a bad personality fit that won't last long.

## **4. What are some of your hobbies or interests outside of work?**

You might be thinking, "That has to do with the candidate's personal life outside of work; therefore, it's not my concern." Well, showing interest in the candidate as a person, not just an asset to the company, goes a long way toward earning their trust and loyalty. Their answers will also give you further insight into their personality and help you remember them better when making the final hiring decision. This may even be a good question to start out the interview with in order to break the ice and get the conversation flowing more comfortably.

In addition to these 4 questions, you might also want to include some others from our list of [Frequently Asked Interview Questions](#) during your next interview. I hope you find that they are helpful in your efforts to select great employees for your organization.

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# CHAPTER

# 4

## What to Look For When Interviewing Candidates

# Reading the Candidate

## The Signals to Be Watching For

Everyone realizes that candidates get nervous before and during interviews—hoping they impress the hiring manager with their credentials and personality, and not saying anything that will jeopardize their chances of being hired. What most people don't think about, though, is how nervous the employer could be, as well. After all, they have to make a very critical decision based on credentials and impressions. Hiring the wrong candidate can end up costing the company a lot both financially and in productivity. So naturally, there is a lot of pressure to get it right the first time.

If you're in this boat, the person who sits on the other side of the table from the candidate during interviews, here are some helpful tips on what you should be looking for to help you make the best decision.

**1. Is the candidate likeable?** This isn't about personality types; it's about whether or not you would want to work with this person. The most qualified candidate in the world who makes you miserable every time you're around them will not benefit the synergy and productivity of the company. However, someone who is courteous, professional, genuine, and enthusiastic about this opportunity will likely be a person you and the rest of the team would enjoy partnering with.

**2. Are they extremely negative about their former or current job?** That's a red flag. Someone who whines, complains, and criticizes their ex-boss or ex-coworkers will likely end up doing the same thing to you later down the line. Obviously, the reasons people have for leaving or wanting to leave their place of employment vary drastically and are often perfectly understandable. However, the candidate's attitude is the real issue—whether it's professional, discreet, and gracious; or bitter, critical, and careless—because you want to be sure that it's the sort of attitude you would want them directing toward you.

**3. Does the candidate ask a lot of questions about the position and the company?** This means that they are approaching this from the standpoint of a long-term relationship. They want to make sure that it's a great fit for them and vice versa; something they truly want to commit to for the next several years at least. This is good news for you, because it means they want to be on the same page with your vision and expectations for how they could help bring the company to the next level.

**4. Did the candidate discuss any specific contributions they could make, especially right away?** I highly encourage all of the candidates I speak with to do thorough research on the company they are interviewing with beforehand. The candidates who really go above and beyond will find out what your company's current efforts are and then explain to you specifically what they could do to make an immediate impact. For example, a candidate interviewing for a Commercial Lines Underwriter position could tell you how they have developed successful relationships with brokers that your company is not currently doing business with, and that could result in a significant positive impact in the territory. That would be extremely valuable to you as an immediate return on your investment.

**5. Did the candidate follow up with you after the interview?** That small gesture reveals to you that they respect the time you spent with them and are grateful you considered them for the position. It also shows they enjoyed getting to meet you, learn more about the opportunity, and most likely, that they want to reiterate their desire to be a part of your organization. The candidates whose follow up letters include specifics that relate to the interview are the ones that probably made the strongest impression on you. For example, if you mentioned how your goal is to top last year's sales by 10%, the follow up letter might talk about how the candidate was able to increase writings in their current role, which could assist you in reaching your goals. Now that's a great and memorable final impression!

This is certainly not a complete list of qualities to be looking out for during interviews, but it will give you a good foundation for setting apart the candidates who have the greatest potential for success in your organization.

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CHAPTER

5

Common Hiring Mistakes and How to  
Avoid Them

# Mayday! Mayday!

## Hiring Decisions That Backfire

The job hiring process is often a tedious and stressful one, particularly for the person in charge. Selecting the best candidates to interview, conducting those interviews, making the right decision, and extending the appropriate offer all relate to the many variables which often factor into some costly mistakes in terms of energy, time, and money. While there is no magic formula for the hiring process, there are some good strategies the hiring manager can implement to avoid as many of these “pot holes” as possible.

**Mistake #1:** Putting too much faith in your intuition.

Like it or not, we are all biased creatures by nature, and we view life through our own perspective, which means we don't always see the big picture. Your “gut feeling” may influence your view of a particular candidate because their style of accomplishing tasks is vastly different from yours. Perhaps that's exactly the style desperately needed in their department.

**Solution:** While chemistry is an important factor in a hire, make sure that you intentionally consider the facts about their track record and skill set. Also, it's very wise to get input from other managers to balance and complete the company perspective on the candidate.

**Mistake #2:** Obsessing on a particular set of credentials.

Education, skills and background experience are key factors in candidate selection, but one should never be totally inflexible. You might miss a young superstar because you are focusing on a specific requirement, even though he or she is innovative and competent with the ability to learn new things in record time.

**Solution:** Base your candidate filter on the duties that need to be accomplished in the position, rather than strictly on past credentials. The primary goal of any hire is to find the most qualified candidate who can accomplish the tasks and goals needed for the department to meet their goals. Any candidate who can do that and fits into the culture should be a viable prospect.

**Mistake #3:** Overvaluing charm and undervaluing consistency.

Performance cannot always be determined by personality. Placing too much stock in a brilliant smile and a great sales pitch can cause you to be blinded to poor track records of consistently delivering results on time. Many a manager has hired the candidate who “talks a good talk” but has failed to achieve success.

**Solution:** Know exactly what results you expect to receive from this position before you begin the candidate selection process. Make sure you complete satisfactory reference checks on each strong candidate before a decision is made and set up a standard to measure all candidates equally throughout the process.

**Mistake #4:** Hiring someone who can do the job, but can't fit into the culture.

The most competent candidate in the world who doesn't mesh with the culture of the company and department he or she is working in will not last long in your organization. They will become frustrated, you will become frustrated, their performance will decline, and their position will soon be vacated.

**Solution:** The more familiar you are with your company culture, the better you will be at recognizing people who would fit into your organization. Clearly explain the vision, core values, and culture of the organization during every interview you conduct. Discussing this in depth with candidates will help you both learn early on whether or not they will be a long term asset to the company. Never underestimate the importance of this factor in the long term success of an employee with your company.

This is just the tip of the iceberg when evaluating your current process, but it gives you a good place to begin if you need to adjust some of your hiring habits. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact us directly.

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CHAPTER

6

How to Hire Great Leaders

# Thinking to the Future

## Hiring Great Leaders of Tomorrow

To hire great leaders for your company can often seem like a vague and idealistic goal. Most places of business probably describe their hiring objectives as such: “We need candidates who have X,Y,Z experience for thus and so many years. They need to have self-motivated personalities and be great team players.” While those characteristics are absolutely important, they don’t represent the complete package of someone who will become a great leader in your company, the catalyst for growth in not only the bottom line, but also in the very mission and purpose of your organization.

So what do these people look like, and how can you recognize them from the start?

### **1. They are just as adept at listening as they are at communicating.**

Great leaders understand that learning is one of their most valuable tools for growth and success. They might come to you with impressive resumes and awe-inspiring accolades, but they will give the utmost regard to what you have to share with them during your meeting or interview. You will sense their fascination with gaining new experience and new knowledge from everyone they come in contact with.

### **2. Their mission is corporate success.**

Great leaders will care just as much about the accomplishments of the organization as a whole as they do about their individual achievements. This attitude is absolutely crucial for anyone wishing to be a manager at any level. It displays an ownership of the whole entity and a commitment to do what is necessary for its success, even if that requires sacrificing some of their own personal preferences.

### **3. They care about the well-being of others, not just their profitability.**

While the bottom line is extremely important for the survival of any company, great leaders understand that it isn't the only priority. A genuine concern for the people that they work with and for will be one of their distinctive characteristics. They have fully embraced this principle stated in Michelle Moore's *Selling Simplified*: "One wise truth of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others." Consequently, they have positioned themselves to become true difference makers in their business, community, and beyond.

**4. They are committed to a great cause.** I can't really state it better than Steve Goodier already did: "Causes do matter. And the world is changed by people who care deeply about causes – about things that matter. We don't have to be particularly smart or talented. We don't need a lot of money or education. All we really need is to be passionate about something important; something bigger than ourselves. And it's that commitment to a worthwhile cause that changes the world."

**5. They are serious about continuous improvement.** One indication of this is the consistent addition of insurance certifications to their resume, like CPCU, ARM, CIC, and ACSR, to name just a few. Or perhaps you will notice their well-rounded set of skills regarding the latest technology and insurance software programs. Another indication of great leaders' mindset for improvement is their willingness to receive all kinds of feedback with a good attitude. It takes great strength of character to acknowledge one's shortcomings and humbly accept suggestions for improvement, a defining mark of someone you could trust implicitly to lead your organization well.

**6. They don't get hung up on personality differences.** Instead, they are known for their ability to skillfully navigate unpleasant situations, resolve conflict, and work alongside many different personality types. For you as the hiring manager, you need to ask candidates applying for leadership positions about their conflict resolution experience and their perspective on working with people who operate much differently than they do. A candidate whose focus is persevering until the best solution is found is the type of person you can trust to always rise above personal feelings for the good of everyone involved.

These are all traits that you as the hiring manager for your company need to intentionally probe for during meetings and interviews with candidates. Ask those challenging, open-ended questions, and pay close attention to their responses. People with these characteristics have the potential to lead your organization to a whole new level of greatness and influence.

“

The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it. ”

-Theodore Roosevelt

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# Stay In Touch!

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We are dedicated to the search and recruitment of professionals in the Insurance industry on a national basis. We would love the opportunity to serve you with assistance in your hiring needs.

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