

The Importance of Job Descriptions (and how they are changing in 2020)

A job description outlines the basic function and responsibilities of a specific job title. It typically includes the tasks, duties, goals, and expectations for the person in the position. An accurate job description also includes information about working conditions, tools, equipment used, and the job's relationship to other positions. An ideal job description includes work hours, specific soft skills that are important to succeed (communication skills, telephone manners, etc.) and any "special and occasional duties" that might fall into the position parameters.

Well, here we are in 2020 and most people's jobs have changed this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how many businesses operate. Some employers are shifting workers' job duties to adjust to a new normal. Most workers have little recourse if their job duties or hours have changed because of the pandemic, even if they're unhappy with their new job assignments.

Companies can legally change job roles at any time

Employers can fire an employee at any time for any reason. They can reduce hours and change pay. On the flip side, workers can leave a job at any time, usually without having to give notice. What employers must remember is that any change to a worker's job duties must be "reasonable." You cannot expect an employee to take on responsibilities for which they have no training or understanding of that job. Especially if the job is in a position higher than what they have now, and the employer is not offering a higher wage. But even if the employer is challenged legally, given Covid-19, it's likely that employers changing employee job descriptions to fit the new normal would prevail (unless there's discrimination based on race, gender, age, or another protected group.)

The Americans with Disabilities Act also requires companies to make reasonable accommodations for workers if they have a medical condition or disability that affects their ability to perform certain job functions.

Employers Changing Job Descriptions

Common sense assigns the writing of job descriptions to Human Resources but be realistic in realizing that HR should not be the only piece of this duty. It takes a team including owners and managers to understand the essential functions of each position. In reality, it depends on your company's resources and subject matter experts. Sometimes it is prudent to bring in an outside party to assist as many times the owner is the sole responsible person and is too close to the business to truly see each jobs' exact requirements. Many times, the owner feels if they are a "jack of all trades" than their employees are too.

Keep in mind that employees fulfilling each position should compare the job description with their daily activities when preparing for their periodic review and to ensure that both they and the employer are correct in what the job requires. And managers should evaluate the description accuracy as part of the performance management process.