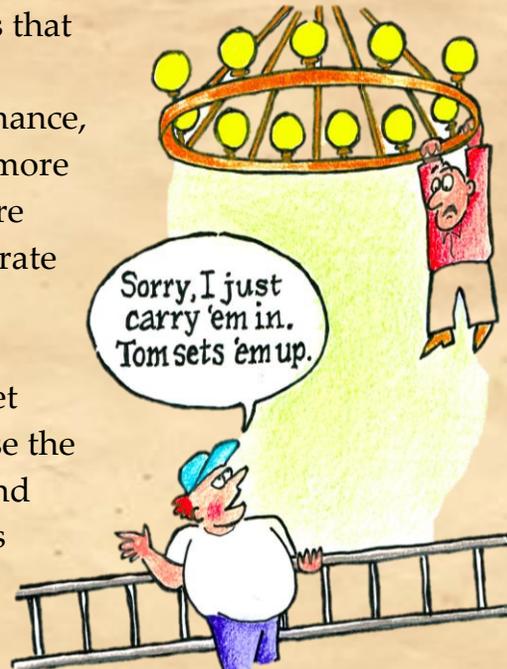


# JOB DESCRIPTIONS – DEADLY THINGS

A staple of traditional human resource management is the development of job descriptions. Their purpose is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of an individual who holds a particular job title. Job descriptions can also be useful in helping an organization establish a reasonable compensation system that will typically be comprised of a sequence of pay grades. In all of these functions, well-developed job descriptions can be a useful tool. Job descriptions can, however, become as problematic as they are helpful.

Job descriptions work best for positions that have a narrow focus and require straightforward, repetitive task performance, i.e., the more complex the job (and the more skill sets required to excel at it), the more challenging it becomes to write an accurate or helpful job description. Often when we attempt to break a complex and sophisticated process down into discreet behavioral parts or expectations, we lose the essence of the original concept. A second inherent weakness of job descriptions is that they fail to recognize the wide variety of abilities and talents that will be found in various individuals

working under the same job title. By focusing on a fixed listing of tasks and responsibilities, job descriptions tempt leaders to overlook the uniqueness of each employee they supervise, and in doing so may discourage employees from contributing all they have to offer to the success of their company. For example, we could write a specific job description for a shortstop on a baseball team by breaking down every



defensive responsibility that he has, as well as what we expect from him when he is at the plate and running the bases. Yet some shortstops play fantastic defense, but hit with little power. Other shortstops have great speed that we want to utilize on the base paths, while others possess the power to hit 35 homeruns per year. Beyond those differences, however, some shortstops also have the interpersonal skills to be tremendous leaders in the clubhouse, or the appealing personality to be a great marketer to help attract customers to the franchise. Trying to write a single job description that would apply to all shortstops would likely be foolhardy, yet we often do nonsensical things in business that we would never do in any endeavor where the public watches and score is kept.

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