

The Dating Game

Part one: How to write a person specification

Is filling a job vacancy a bit like running a dating agency? You have a job description; you define the ideal person to do the job; you find a real person that matches your ideal and...hey presto!...the person and the job live happily together ever after.

Well, any recruiter knows it's not as simple as that (and neither is running a dating agency!)

There's a degree of agreement that a person specification should be formatted something like this:

	Essential for the job	Desirable for the job
Knowledge		
Skills		
Qualifications		
Personal qualities		
Previous experience		
Personal situation		

You fill in the cells with information like "Must Have 'A' Level French" or " 3 years experience in software sales."

But is it really that simple?

Desirable for the Job or Trainable in the Job?

A particular skill or quality might be "nice to have" but not essential in the successful candidate. There are other attributes which are not essential at the outset since your own training/development programme provides them. It seems to me these are two separate issues deserving too separate columns.

How am I Going to Assess Whether a Candidate has these Qualities?

This is the crucial question. It's all very well saying you want an amiable person with 3 years experience in retail, high level communication skills and a working knowledge of the internal combustion engine, but how do you find out if the real person in front of you has these qualities? You need another column in your specification. This will not only say how you'll assess whether the person has that quality but what "having it" means.

This goes back to how you fill in those first two columns of essential and desirable qualities. The golden rule is...

Be Specific

If you write "creative" as an essential requirement what exactly do you mean? Creative can mean coming up with lots of ideas, avoiding rules of writing a poem. How would creativity show itself in action in your business in this particular job?

Once you've drafted your specification go back and sharpen up the words. Wherever possible, move from adjectives to things people do. Beware of feel-good requirements. It might be nice to have someone with a 1st class English degree. What you specifically want is someone who can summarise any argument in a 10 minute oral presentation. They're not the same thing.

See next month for more tips on how to use person specifications to sharpen up recruitment...and add value to your services