



**Tips and Tidbits**  
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**Question: How can an outdated position description (PD) affect the quality of applicants on a referral list?**

The importance of an updated PD in the recruitment process is often not realized; however, the position description is the document that dictates the skills necessary to perform the job being advertised. The most pertinent portions of the position description are excerpted and highlighted as duties in the vacancy announcement. Subsequently, it is from this revised set of duties that the skills against which applicants are “rated” is determined.

If a PD is outdated or otherwise does not reflect the actual duties and skills required for successful performance, candidates may fall short of the “specifics” desired by Management. While all referred applicants are basically qualified [as per the Office of Personnel Management’s Qualification Standards Operating Manual], the “fit” of the skills match determines how closely an applicant’s qualifications align to that of the position being recruited.

A mismatch between the skills Management would *like* queried and the skills that are actually pulled from the position description is not always easily remedied. To illustrate, the recruitment of an Information Technology Specialist against an official PD that was written in 1985 probably would not yield candidates with the specific experience desired by Management. Accordingly, Management may opt to provide a more suitable list of qualifying skills; unfortunately, it is not appropriate to simply develop a “substitute” list of skills as all skills advertised in the vacancy announcement **must** be inherent in the PD. Typically, the “fix” for a mismatch dictates the job description be updated prior to issuance of the vacancy announcement. However, when Management’s requested substitute skills exist in the origin PD, but are not embedded in the excerpted vacancy announcement, the substitute list may be acceptable.

A list of potential skills is provided to Management by HR Specialists during the initial stages of the recruitment process. Management is then responsible for selecting the final set of skills (generally between 3 and 7) as well as determining which of those skills will be desired and which will be required. Both desired and required skills are job-related. Desired skills, while not mandatory for an applicant to possess prior to coming into a new position, can be learned on the job. On the other hand, applicants must bring those skills designated as required to the job in order to be able to successfully perform the duties of

the position. Determination of the number and mix of these skill categories will also impact the number and quality of applicants referred.

A periodic review of position descriptions should occur on an annual basis, when the organization changes, or when new missions are absorbed by the activity that dictate corrective duties in a position description. This will not only ensure employees are cognizant of the duties they are expected to perform, but will facilitate a better list of candidates should a vacancy arise as well.

Please contact your servicing HR Specialist with questions or for additional information.

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