

## Back to Basics

### Writing an Effective Job Description: Part 3 of a 3-part Series on Ranch Labor

Shannon Williams, Lemhi County, Idaho Extension Educator

Ron Torell, Nevada Livestock Extension Specialist

One of my favorite quotes related to labor is “Never hire a man who rolls his own smokes, wears lace-up boots or a straw hat. It seems every time you need a hand he is rolling a smoke, lacing up his boots or chasing his hat.” Another good quote is “Having you show up is like having two good men not.”

Any of you who have managed new employees have experienced these and other labor-related frustrations. Have you ever considered that you, the employer, may be part of the problem? In all likelihood when you hired this individual you failed to communicate what the job entails; failed to define what you want that employee to accomplish; and failed to express what is expected of the applicant, including qualifications and experience. In other words, you failed to write an effective job description. In this issue of *Back to Basics* let's discuss writing a job description for ranch positions and examine a sample ranch hand description.

While writing the job description the employer should consider why someone would want to work for them and perform this job. Job descriptions are the first communication between employer and employee. It lets potential applicants know what will be expected of them and what skills they need to possess. Most importantly, a job description provides a basis for recruitment and selection.

A job description should contain specific elements to be effective. Start with an accurate job title that entices someone to read the entire job description. A two-sentence overview of the job gives a potential employee the “big picture.” It is important to include who the employer will be and who will be the supervisor. Salary is important so include the specific salary or salary range. If there is a salary range, be prepared to explain what qualifications or experience determines base salary. Many jobs require specific levels of education, experience or certification. It is important to specify these. Be honest and up front when describing the hours expected for the position.

The “job duties” section is very important. This section should be very specific about what the employee's main responsibilities will be. It is best to list the main duties without listing every little item. Well-written job duties help a potential employee determine if this is a job they would like to apply for.

As you write the qualifications section, consider what training, education, licenses, or certificates are minimum to complete the job. Also include what trainings are “on-the-job” items. If the job is physical in nature, describe how physical such as walking, lifting heavy objects or very intensive. Again, be honest, not deceptive, in your description. Any special job requirements need to be identified in this section. Identify what specific traits you are wanting in a future employee and communicate this information up front.

A job description allows the employer to determine what they would like a potential employee to do and allows the potential employee to determine if this is the job for them. Communications through an effective job description is the first step to hiring an effective employee. The included side bar story is a sample job description for a ranch hand position. Feel free to edit this sample description to fit your specific needs. Keep in mind the items discussed in this article as you write your specific job description.

The authors invite you to participate in an educational program on labor. The program is scheduled for March 19 in Elko, Nevada and concurrently by interactive video at a location near you. See accompanying news release in this publication for additional interactive video locations and details.

That is enough for this month. As always, if you would like to discuss this article or simply would like to talk cows do not hesitate to contact Ron Torell at 775-738-1721 or at [torellr@unce.unr.edu](mailto:torellr@unce.unr.edu) or Shannon Williams, University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Agent in Lemhi County at 208-756-2824, [shannonw@uidaho.edu](mailto:shannonw@uidaho.edu)