

# CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP LETTER

A ministry of World Vision International

February, 1975

## Job Descriptions

In the January 1975 *Christian Leadership Letter* we discussed the concept of management by objectives as being a very effective approach to managing the Christian organization. What particularly commends it is the emphasis on purpose and goals, rather than on organizational or functional structures. It has the further advantage of providing a means of evaluating the individual performance.

There will be those Christians who draw back from the edge of personal evaluation. It is one thing to talk about our organizational failures or successes. It is quite another to discuss individual performance. But to the contrary, should it not be in the very nature of a Christian organization that we should be open enough to one another to seek an understanding of where we are contributing and where we are hindering organizational effectiveness?

But it is a difficult task at best. One excellent way to carry it out is on the basis of a position, or job description.

### What is a Job Description?

Basically, a job description is a written outline of what is expected of an individual in a particular job. It is a description of the job, not the person filling it. It centers on what is to be accomplished, rather than who is to accomplish it.

### What Is It Good For?

It not only helps the organization and the individual measure his performance against goals, but it has a number of other uses, depending on the type and size of the organization.

For the larger organization with a scaled salary structure, job descriptions not only help us compare one job with another inside the organization, but also to more accurately compare our pay scales with others'. For the latter this is about the only way to keep from comparing apples with oranges. It is especially true for jobs with generic titles such as "secretary." Such a title can cover anyone from a typist to a member of a board. A job description gives it definition.

A job description is perhaps most valuable when there is a need to fill a new or a vacant position. It clarifies what kind of a person to seek. It gives the potential staff member a picture of what is expected of him or her. Remember the person hiring has the greater responsibility. If the new employee doesn't succeed, it's probably your fault. (See "You're Fired!" *CLL*, April 1974.)

A job description helps relate one job to another. It not only should place any necessary boundaries around a job, but also help the incumbent to see his job as part of a larger whole.

### What Should It Contain?

Date - They get obsolete quickly!

Title - Try to be descriptive without being too wordy. If there are a number of grades in the job, consider a standard set of terminology, e.g., junior secretary, intermediate secretary, senior secretary.

Purpose - Describe the why of the job. What is supposed to be accomplished because this job exists! "In order to...." This

is the place to fit in the general and perhaps the spiritual aspects of the job.

Type of Supervision - Either a statement as to what position (not person) this job reports or, for a larger organization, one of a category of types of supervision, e.g., general, regular, close, the employee will be under.

Responsibility - Without going into a great deal of detail, be as specific as possible. Not "acts as a secretary," but "takes machine dictation, transcribes letters, reports and other documents using an electric typewriter. Sets up and operates an office filing system, etc."

Include a statement about the amount of supervision exercised and how detailed this supervision must be, e.g., "Gives close supervision to a secretary and two clerks."

Don't try to cover everything. If you have described 75-90% of the job, that's adequate.

It always is a good idea to have an ending paragraph - "Performs other duties as requested." This will cover anything you have missed and may save a lot of misunderstanding later.

Education and Experience - These are grouped together because they complement each other so closely. A rule of thumb is that two years' experience equals one year of education. Give the minimum amount and the type of education needed to do the job.

Then give the minimum and normal maximum years and type of experience. For example, "4-6 years experience, including two years as an associate pastor."

Lastly, include a statement about the amount of on-the-job experience that will be expected in this job before the job is being completely filled. No one can do a job adequately on the first day they arrive, and many executive jobs are only fully comprehended after one to two years experience.

Working Conditions - Where will the job be carried out? Does it require any unusual hours? Is travel required? If so, how many days per month away will be required? Are there any other unusual features to the job, such as a good deal of driving?

Special Requirements - Are there any special licenses or peculiar skills required, such as a preaching license, flying or driver's license?

#### What Not To Include

Don't include factors that relate to the person rather than the job - salary, vacation, sick leave, etc. These should be covered in a general organizational policy and any deviations from policy negotiated with the individual.

#### Using a Job Description for Evaluation

A few job descriptions can be so specific that it is possible to tell immediately whether the incumbent is performing above or below the standard set. But most will require the establishment of individual plans with personal milestones.

In a local church, the duties of the pastoral staff may be very broad. They may be such that to emphasize one may require the de-emphasis of another. This is why each staff member, working with the responsible board or individual, should write out the specifics of what is to be accomplished each year and how it will be measured. This may be in the form of a particular accomplishment (institute an adult Bible class) or a number of events (make 10 home visits each month).

But whether in a local church or other organization, review and evaluation should not be limited to once a year. Preferably there should be a quarterly discussion about performance against goals. They may need to be changed! No job is a static thing. New situations will demand a new focus. Just make sure you don't let yourself off the hook by changing the requirements after the job is done. Remember anyone can hit the bullseye if you

draw the target after the shot is fired. The job description should be seen as the boundary within which all milestones and goals should be found.

### How To Begin

In an organization of more than a few people, introduce the program with care and thoughtfulness. It may be viewed as an attempt to check up on people's performance rather than to benefit the entire group. Call a meeting to explain the time schedule and what is expected. Show how the final product will be used. Emphasize that you are after information about the job, not the person.

Using the outline given above, ask each person to describe their job, not themselves. Have the supervisor either write a parallel description or review the one submitted by the staff member. The supervisor and staffer should then do their best to reconcile any differences.

If you are encountering difficulty obtaining a description, go to the interview approach. Here make sure you avoid "why" questions and concentrate on how, what and where.

In a larger organization, you may want to first establish the meaning of some standard terminology, such as levels (junior, intermediate, senior), levels of supervision (close, regular, general, broad), or equivalents (one year of education is equivalent to two years experience).

Try to use a standard format so that each job is seen in relation to the others.

Write descriptions for all levels, every job.

Don't overlook the tremendous benefit of job descriptions for volunteer staff. (See "Volunteers," CLL, November 1974.)

### Some Warnings

Writing job descriptions takes time and effort. Don't start without planning enough hours to do an adequate job. If

you are going to do an entire organization, plan on at least six months to complete the job.

Job descriptions get out of date quickly. Make it a yearly practice to have each employee and supervisor review and rewrite each year.

Don't let the job description get in the way of doing the job. It's a beginning point. Be ready to change it.

If you are planning to use the job description to establish salary scales, you may want outside professional help.

### Some Additional Advantages

One consulting firm that we know analyzes the communication within an organization by asking each person to describe their job and then asking their supervisor to describe the same job. The theory is that if there is a good communication up and down, there will be a close match between the two descriptions. Written job descriptions can be used for the same type of analysis. Many men and women who are frustrated by their inability to please their superior, along with many superiors who are frustrated with those who are working for them, are quite surprised to discover what the other really thought the job amounted to. By limiting areas of responsibility, many times the incumbent is greatly relieved, while at the same time, a discussion between subordinate and superior may provoke a statement like, "I never realized you wanted me to do that!" A broader job description may then be necessary.

It follows that job descriptions are an excellent vehicle for delegating tasks and at the same time pointing out to the superior his or her failure to delegate.

Many times the writing of a series of job descriptions will identify holes in the organization - work that everyone thought someone else was doing. At the same time, they may uncover duplication and overlap of effort.

## A Top Management Responsibility

The details of the job description program may be delegated to those outside the top management level of the organization. But whether it is the board of a local church or the management of a large service agency, time should be set aside for a criti-

cal review of the finished product and a discussion as to whether these descriptions do adequately fit into the goals and purposes of the organization.

In A Coming Issue...

...We'll discuss performance evaluation.

If you like the Christian Leadership Letter . . . .  
you ought to give serious consideration to  
attending the Two Day Seminar

## MANAGING YOUR TIME

LOCATION	DATE	CONTACT WORLD VISION AREA DIRECTOR
Atlanta	Mar. 20-21, 1975	Rev. Richard R. Hamilton, 525A Cedar Hill Ave., Wyckoff, New Jersey 07481
Detroit	Apr. 17-18, 1975	Mr. James Franks, Box 209, Grand Haven, MI. 49417
Orange County, Calif.	May 1-2, 1975	Rev. W. Herbert Scott, 919 W. Huntington Dr., Monrovia, CA. 91016
San Francisco, E. Bay	May 15-16, 1975	Rev. Joseph A. Ryan, 1130 S. W. Morrison St. (Suite 425), Portland, OR. 97205
St. Paul	Jul. 1-2, 1975	Dr. Harold Christenson, Bethel Seminary, 3900 Bethel Dr., St. Paul, MN 55112

The *Christian Leadership Letter* is a monthly ministry of World Vision International, and is sent free of charge upon request. World Vision is a Christian service agency involved in a wide range of activities in support of the Church all over the world. These include leadership training, welfare, disaster relief, medical aid, evangelism, childcare, and an information center on the work of the Church.

The editors of the *Christian Leadership Letter* are Ted W. Engstrom, Executive Vice-President of World Vision and Edward R. Dayton, Director of World Vision's Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center (MARC). Address your requests and comments to *Christian Leadership Letter*, 919 West Huntington Drive, Monrovia, California 91016. Copyright © 1975—World Vision



Dr. Engstrom



Mr. Dayton

AIR MAIL

MR DAVID KRAFT  
FLYGHAMNSVAGEN 18 I  
183 64 TABY  
SWEDEN  
7175 9187

Address correction requested

919 West Huntington Drive, Monrovia, California 91016

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP LETTER  
A Ministry of World Vision International

