



Writing a Job Description by Rabbi Maccabee Avishur

Some schools have lots of applicants for their openings, so they may wonder why they should work to review and upgrade their job postings and job descriptions. Perhaps it's enough to remark that attracting many applicants to your postings is a distinction shared with fast food restaurants, low-paying convenience stores, and retail operations. Other schools, including those in smaller markets (i.e. those with a small number of local, trained teachers), can't get enough qualified candidates to apply.

A well-designed job description is one step in improving the candidate pool.

Clearly communicating expectations about a job can help a school identify and hire the best candidates. Ideally, potential applicants will self-screen, comparing their own knowledge, training, experience, skills, and abilities with the expectations outlined in a good job description. In addition, research has shown that a job description that successfully explains the specific characteristics of the job and the interactions the new employee will have with others in the school is more likely to attract top candidates who will be more likely to perceive the opportunity as a "good job."¹

Higher-quality job descriptions attract higher-quality candidates. In addition, a well-crafted job description can help schools screen candidates more efficiently. Time invested in crafting a job description pays dividends down the road.

Where to Start

Effective schools take the time to define what makes a teacher successful. They identify the training, experience, knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors exhibited by their effective teachers. The process of gathering this information is called a Job Analysis. At a minimum, school leaders should get together to discuss what they believe great teaching looks like at their school, focusing on elements listed above and using concrete, objective language.



¹ Jones, W., Haslam, R., & Haslam, C. (2012). How do people differentiate between jobs: and how do they define a good job?. *Work*, 41 818-821.

Ideally a job analysis for teachers is conducted by compiling existing information and research from experts in the field, input from the school leadership, and input of teachers within a school. The data collected is gleaned to identify the most essential values and competencies. This is summarized in paragraph form to complete a job description. Schools can reach out to the YUSP for support with the job analysis process.

What to Include in a Teacher Job Posting



"He's been here for ages. But nobody is quite sure what his job classification is."

After a job analysis, a school should have a clear idea of what the essential functions of the position are. Job postings should include a clear and universal **job title** and explain who the successful candidate will be **reporting to** and working with.

Just below the job title and direct report information, write a brief **general description** of the position and **how the position fits into the school**. Next, identify the **essential functions** of the position. The main point of this is to communicate what the successful candidate will be doing

every day.²

A school should also make sure to include additional roles or responsibilities expected in the position. Turnover is often related to surprises in job duties not revealed in the job posting or interview process. Employers should give realistic job previews, but should avoid being overly-detailed. Research shows that job descriptions that include duties that are not pivotal to the performance of the job lower a candidate's perception of that job.³ If the teacher will be on lunch and recess duty, let the candidates know sometime during the interview process and the contract, but not in the job description.

Deciding on Salary

One of the most essential steps in the process of creating a job posting is figuring out what the salary will be for the successful candidate. This should also be the first step

²Some schools, like other businesses, use the job description as an opportunity to help clarify the physical tasks that might be necessary to fulfill a job as a way to help them navigate the litigious waters of accommodations for applicants under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It is certainly wise to include this in a contract, but it's better to leave it off the online job posting; it can (and should) be shared with candidates who make it past the initial screening.

³ Smith, B. N., Hornsby, J. S., & Benson, P. G. (1990). The Effects of Job Description Content on Job Evaluation Judgments. *Journal Of Applied Psychology*, 75(3), 301-309.

after deciding what the position is that you need to fill. The salary you are able to pay will help you make decisions about the rest of the job description, including essential and desired skills and traits, and minimum experience.

Some schools might have the luxury of deciding that they'd pay \$35,000 for a "green" candidate and \$65,000 for an experienced one, but most schools don't have an extra \$30,000 within their salary budgets to play with. Rather, salary is usually limited to a small range.

Meet with your budget team to decide the amount you can pay for this position. Knowing this number will help you identify the target market of your candidate pool. It is important to note that research supports what might seem obvious: higher pay is correlated with attracting higher-quality candidates.⁴ If your school can responsibly afford to increase its pay scale, especially relative to other schools in the area, this will attract candidates of a higher caliber.

While it is true that more money means more-experienced and highly-qualified candidates, not all schools are necessarily looking to hire experienced teachers. Some may prefer to hire less-experienced teachers, especially if the school has the infrastructure to support them. This can be a cost-effective decision.

To Include Salary or Not?

The following general comment is important to consider when thinking about salary and the job description in general. Trust and transparency begin in the hiring process. Publicizing salary early in the hiring process is emblematic of a school's level of transparency and the value the school places on faculty. The decision to disclose the salary range early in the hiring process may seem insignificant, however, as a symbol of your school's ethos and *Modus Operandi*, it should not be underestimated.

It is worthwhile to note that compensation is not synonymous with salary. Some schools offer a less-competitive salary but a great benefits package including hefty tuition remission. We believe that schools should openly advertise their entire benefits package, including medical, dental, paid-time-off, retirement plans, and tuition remission. In addition, work-life balance is incredibly important to many teachers. If your school offers teachers a life outside of school, that can be attractive. Some teachers just want the time while others want the opportunity to earn extra money by tutoring, working in a school, or running a small business.

Have you ever met a candidate who was happy that your job description stated "Competitive Salary Commensurate with Experience"? Probably not. Schools typically have several reasons for not wanting to include specific information about compensation in their job postings.

Concern #1: Advertising the salary range disadvantages my school during salary negotiations. Some school leaders may believe that they will meet candidates whom they can hire for cheaper than the advertised range.

⁴ Figlio, D. (n.d). Teacher salaries and teacher quality. *Economics Letters*, 55(2), 267-271

Response #1: Most candidates view a school's reluctance to list a salary range as a sign that the school is interested in weakening the candidate's hand in negotiations and is hoping to get the successful candidate for less than they might have been willing to pay, or that the school doesn't know what the range actually is. Including the range is a sign to candidates that your school is transparent, honest, and professionally-run.

If you're concerned about overpaying, rest assured that it is unlikely that you will meet and choose to hire a candidate whom you think is actually worth less than the salary you originally advertised. If you have established clear criteria in your job description, candidates who don't qualify will be less likely to apply, and you'll have an easy time weeding out those who apply anyway.

However, if you choose to interview and ultimately make an offer to a candidate whose qualifications don't match the minimum qualifications you established, that candidate is not technically entitled to the salary you planned to offer, and you are not obliged to offer it. You can tell him so openly. Say, "We had computed that salary based, in part, on a list of qualifications, some of which you don't have. Nevertheless, we are excited about your candidacy and your potential, so we are willing to hire you, but at a lower number." Anecdotal evidence from colleagues in the field suggests that in the rare cases when this tactic is needed, it is usually successful. Candidates who apply without the requisite qualifications are ready to negotiate. Nevertheless, occasionally such candidates may walk away from the offer. This is probably for the best in the long run.

Concern #2: There's no real benefit to posting salary information. If the school posts a salary range that is commensurate with years of experience and training, unexperienced and unskilled candidates will still apply. After all, job seekers are some of the most optimistic and, sometimes, unrealistic, people in the world. Especially in the age of electronic applications, some candidates believe they have little to lose by submitting a resume via email even if they aren't qualified. So, posting a salary won't save a school leader any time. In addition, a posted salary range might turn off those who are currently earning more than the stated range, causing the school to lose out on potential candidates.

Response #2: Optimistic but unqualified job seekers are likely to apply to your opening whether or not the salary is listed. So, excluding the salary won't save you any time either. Usually, screening out these unqualified candidates takes only a matter of seconds anyway. However, our work reveals that more sophisticated candidates, the kind you are likely seeking, are actually less likely to apply to a job that omits salary information. In other words, you increase your chances of attracting your target candidates by advertising salary, especially if you adopt the language suggested in the model below that doesn't include a salary ceiling.

Concern #3: My current faculty, many of whom are earning less than I plan to pay the new teacher, will express their frustration, incredulity, and hurt when they see the salary I'm offering. It is true that if the salary you are offering is out of step with what current faculty are earning, this can have an impact on staff morale, and current staff may feel empowered to demand more pay. In addition, although a rare occurrence, parents, who are already apt to complain about the cost of education, might lash out at the school for being irresponsible with tuition dollars.

Response #3: Obviously, a school must be sensitive to staff morale. If the position is a specialized one that requires specific training, and this is clearly communicated in the job description, your faculty probably will not take offense in the outsized salary. Recent research suggests that this is particularly true among younger employees who value giving different rewards to people with different skills.⁵

However, if the higher compensation is not linked to special training or skills, you can expect some backlash from your current faculty. Explaining your reasoning for the higher compensation (challenges in recruiting, changes in the field, etc.) may assuage some anger. It's good to "get out in front" of this message early with your faculty to reduce potential backlash. However, if you feel that faculty morale will be negatively impacted, it may be wise to forgo listing the salary and to begin a strategic plan for creating a more transparent system of compensation in your school, a tactic that has worked well in managing faculty expectations and morale related to compensation in the public sector as well as in schools in the private sector that have tried it. The YUSP can help your school with this process.

As for parents, school leaders must be prepared to respond with actual data. The most useful data is from surrounding public school districts. Find out what their pay scales are, including their benefits (pension, medical, etc.). Sharing with parents how your salary and benefits compare with the local public schools (your school's are probably lower) can go a long way in assuring them that your school is being fiscally responsible.

Concern #4: Our salary range will be low and not competitive with other schools, and this will turn away potential candidates.

Response #4: First, determine if your salary range is competitive. You can speak with our office to learn about aggregate salary information for your geographic region. If it turns out that your salary range is low relative to your competitors, this may be a legitimate reason to not post the range. However, it is important to consider that candidates who will be investing time in the application and interview process may ultimately be severely disappointed when they learn that your salary range is below their salary requirements. This could lead to strongly negative PR for your school that will turn away future potential candidates.

If your salary is low for the area, but you offer other amenities and benefits that are potentially attractive to candidates, it can be helpful to list those along with compensation.

What to Write

If you decide that you want to list salary, what should you write? Some schools prefer to list a range, as long as the range isn't so large that it's meaningless to candidates.

We strongly recommend the following. Using the formula above, decide on the minimum amount you will pay a candidate who meets your minimum qualifications. Then, advertise the salary with the following phrase:

⁵ <http://www.yuschoolpartnership.org/school-leadership/leadership-development/107-articles/1706-current-thinking-in-compensation-structures>

“Salary starting at \$x and up, commensurate with qualifications and experience.”

This salary, coupled with your indication of the experience required will help you attract candidates from your target market, whether beginning teachers, mid-career folks looking to change schools, or teacher leaders.

Conclusion

To be a great school, you need great teachers. Recruiting great teachers depends in part on a great job description, so schools should not neglect the process of writing one. Part of this process includes the job analysis to identify the training, experience, knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors of effective teachers in your school. A second element is transparency about compensation practices. These are the foundation of effective human resource practices for schools and the beginning of writing a complete job description.

Use the template beginning on the next page as a model to begin writing a great job description. For support with any of your placement needs, please contact the YUSP.

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JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE with examples

The school

School name: Generic Jewish Day School

Location: Somewhere in North America

School general description: GJDS is a Modern-Orthodox, Zionistic school with a strong focus on skill-building in *Limudei Kodesh* and College-preparatory General Studies and a track record of successful technology integration throughout the school.

School website: www.GJDSwebsite.org

Grades served: 18 mo - 12th grade

Size of student population: 450

Size of average class: 19

The Job

Job title: Middle School Judaic Studies Teacher

Reports to: Asst. Principal for Judaic Studies, Middle School

General description: The MS Judaic Studies Teacher will teach 5 periods of Jewish Studies per day to different sections of students and will be involved in Jewish Life in the school.

How this job fits in our school: *Limudei Kodesh* is at the core of our curriculum. Data from our parent body tell us that parents choose our school because of the high level of learning we demand from their children in their classes. Our Jewish Studies teachers work closely with one another and the Asst. Principal for JS to promote the mission of the school. In addition, the JS faculty work with other members of the faculty on continuing to advance the quality of education in the school.

What great teaching looks like in our school: Great teaching in our school is primarily about teaching kids, not subjects. Successful teachers in our school love children and love teaching them. They identify different learning needs and respond to them by creating lessons that address those different needs. Teachers in our school continuously look to grow by inviting visitors into their classrooms to observe their teaching and help them reflect on and upgrade their practice. Standards of good teaching, based on work done by the JNTP and educator Charlotte Danielson, guide this work. Good teaching means reaching beyond the walls of the classroom to connect with kids in venues where they are likely to be, including the lunch room, the halls, sporting events, and *shabbatonim*. Good teaching in our school means being part of team committed to excellence, recognizing your role in that team, and playing in that role with full commitment, even as your role shifts along with the uncertainties of school life. In addition, good teaching means setting high expectations, communicating those expectations clearly to both students and parents, and keeping in touch with students and parents on a regular basis to keep track of student progress based on real data. The most successful teachers in our school are highly organized, were great students

themselves, and usually wear a smile. They are firm, but flexible, are friendly with students, but aren't their friends, and are warm and understanding, but not pushovers. They are life-long learners who are role models for responsible adult living and who support the mission of our school in deed and creed. They teach because they know it makes them the richest people in the world in the ways that really matter.

Main tasks and responsibilities: Teach five (5) classes per day; prepare and share daily lesson plans based on existing curriculum; closely monitor and record student progress; correspond regularly with students and parents about student progress

Specific subjects taught: *Gemara* (3 sections) and *Dinim* (2 sections)

Selected other tasks and responsibilities: Participate in MS daily *minyanim* (*shacharit* and *mincha*); participate in school-run holiday programs during school hours; attend regular department and faculty meetings; act as faculty sponsor for one student club; attend at least 1 *shabbaton* per year; participate in new teacher induction program

Minimum experience required: Two (2) years classroom teaching; MS school experience a plus

Required skills, training, and competencies: Masters degree in education or related field; *semicha* or other long-term Jewish learning; demonstrated competency and experience with lesson planning; ability to lead *davening*; basic computer skills including MS Office suite (Word, Excel, and PPT) and use of web-based tools like Google Docs; ability to type at least twenty (20) words per minute

Desired skills, training, and competencies: Demonstrated competency with curriculum design using backwards planning; training in differentiated instruction; ability to teach *ivrit b'ivrit*; training in educational technology integration; prior participation in new teacher induction or other similar training; experience teaching while being observed; experience participating in a one-on-one conference about teaching practice; ability to *lein* Torah; intermediate computer skills including Smart Board training, graphic design, and movie editing

Salary: Beginning at \$50k AND UP commensurate with qualifications and experience

Benefits: Full medical for employee (family subsidized); dental; vision; life insurance; medical FSA

Other compensation, if applicable: Eight (8) paid personal days per academic year in addition to all paid school vacations; employer match up to 3% for employee 403(b) plan, vested after 3 years; tuition remission of 50% per student and Building Fund forgiveness; reduced membership in local shuls

The kinds of supervision and support our new teachers can expect: New teachers in our school will be paired with mentor buddies. For teachers new to the field (fewer than 5 years experience), those mentors will observe the teachers in their classrooms on a regular basis and meet with them frequently to discuss their teaching. Teachers new to the field will also gather monthly to learn together and address questions of practice. Teachers new to the school with at least five (5) years of experience will rely on their mentors for help understanding school culture and will engage in regular peer coaching sessions where they observe one another and talk about their teaching. All

teachers are observed by a member of the senior administration on a regular basis. These observations are followed up by conferences about the teaching. All teachers meet with the senior administration team once per semester to discuss progress and future plans.

Professional development opportunities: GJDS considers its work among new teachers and their mentors and the work of peer coaches its most essential, valuable, and rewarding PD. In addition, the school supports faculty who wish to participate in conferences, and, with prior approval, may be able to provide financial support and/or time off to attend these conferences. In addition, the school strongly supports its faculty pursuing ongoing learning opportunities such as those offered by degree and certificate programs. In most cases, with prior approval, the school may be able to contribute financially to these pursuits.

How to apply: Please compose a cover letter describing how you heard about this job , a little about your teaching experience, and why you think you'd be a good fit for our school. Submit it, along with your resume (all in pdf format, please) via YU's JEDJobs school job portal (www.JEDJobs.com). We will respond to your application within five (5) business days.