

## Job Descriptions

Hilary Findlay, a lawyer, and Rachel Corbett, a risk management consultant, are founders and directors of the Centre for Sport and Law. They are regular contributors to *Coaches Report*.

A coach is a coach. Right? Wrong. We often think of coaching as a single job. But in fact, there are many different tasks that can go into the job of being a coach. These tasks might include recruiting athletes, liaising with parents, planning training regimes, monitoring fitness levels, designing strength and conditioning programs, supervising training and competition schedules, assisting individual athletes with personal goal-setting, organizing facilities and equipment, developing team selection criteria, selecting teams, and doing all the administrative work that accompanies a competitive schedule. It also means being a bit of an accountant, a travel agent, an insurance broker, a psychologist, a chaperon, and a guardian. The job is multi-faceted and the person filling the role of coach is typically multi-talented.

While we might understand all this intuitively, problems arise when these tasks are not clearly described and the authority that accompanies these tasks is not defined. The topic of job descriptions is primarily about human resources and personnel management; it also has a legal dimension because the resulting disputes are often resolved through legal or quasi-legal methods.

Recently we received a call from a coach on the brink of a nasty dispute about the tasks and authority that his coaching job entailed. People within the organization could not (or would not) clarify his authority, and he was becoming increasingly frustrated. We asked if we could have a look at his employment contract, in the hope that it would articulate his responsibilities or at least point us in the direction of a job description. It did neither. The situation that he finds himself in is one of confusion, frustration, and escalating animosity.

There is widespread agreement that a detailed job description is an essential part of the coach's employment contract. But even before a job description is prepared, the sport organization should undertake a job analysis. A job analysis involves examining a job position and job-related tasks from the perspective of the needs and objectives of the organization. Depending on the organization's situation, needs, and resources, the position of "coach" may be broadly or narrowly defined.

In performing the job analysis, the organization should gather information about the responsibilities of the job, the tasks and activities to be performed in fulfilling the responsibilities, the authority tied to the position, and communication and reporting relationships. A coach, or someone familiar with coaching, should be involved in developing this job analysis.

From the job analysis, it is then possible to generate a job description and job specifications. The job description sets out the specific duties and responsibilities of the job, working conditions, authority of the coach, and relationship of the coach to others. The job specifications identify the skills, talents, education, and experience that might be needed, or desired, to execute the job description. Together, these two documents will give the organization a clear view of the kind of person they

wish to hire and will give the prospective coach a clear idea of the scope and substance of the job.

The job description needs to be clear and concise and should

- ❑ identify the position (title, level, for example)
- ❑ summarize the job (major functions/activities)
- ❑ define the coach's relationships (reporting to, working with)
- ❑ describe the responsibilities and duties of the coach (this expands on the functions and activities and forms the basis for the coach's performance appraisal)
- ❑ define authority (types of decisions the coach can make, budgetary limits on decision-making)
- ❑ set standards of performance (standards or markers for achievement)
- ❑ outline working conditions (travel, hours of work, weekend work, overtime)
- ❑ identify job specifications (personal requirements such as abilities, skills, experience, education, level of certification, and other qualifications).

The coach who contacted us feels that he has the authority to select the national team. We reviewed the list of duties set out in his contract and found that he was to be involved in developing selection criteria, but the job description didn't elaborate on how, when, and with whom that would be done. The coach felt that the following phrase authorized him to select the team: "coordinate and administer team appearances, team events, and the registration of team members at competitions." We disagreed. In this organization, it is not at all clear how selection decisions are made.

Wouldn't it have been preferable to have a clear and straightforward description of the tasks to be performed by the coach, based on a properly done job analysis? It is well worth the effort to prepare an accurate and clear job description for two reasons: disputes can be avoided and the sport organization can ensure that tasks are being performed by those with the best skills and talents ... yet one more step in tipping the scale in the direction of success.

There are other reasons to do a proper job analysis and use it to carefully and accurately set out job responsibilities and duties. A well-done job description will form the basis for performance evaluation, will help to clarify levels of compensation, and will establish levels of seniority. In effect, the job description defines the employee's value to the organization.

In closing this column, we would like to add that one more task for the multi-tasking coach is to be a good personal business manager. Knowing what the specific coaching job entails, ensuring it is clearly and fully reflected in a well-written job description, and incorporating the job description into a coaching contract is a critical part of the repertoire of skills of the professional coach.