

Focus on Job Descriptions, Not Job Titles

Anthony Balderrama, CareerBuilder.com writer

For the last decade, some universities have come under fire for giving students too many A's. If students have low Grade Point Averages (GPAs), their career prospects will suffer and universities will look like an institution of under performers, critics charge.

Still, wouldn't churning out class after class of honor students result in a pool of professionals with impressive credentials but little actual merit? You'd think so.

Whether or not that's actually happening on campuses across the country is hard to say, but a variation seems to occur in workplaces.

"Many job seekers don't realize how much "Title Inflation" there is at some companies, and how much title definition variance there is in the marketplace," says John Nicholson, CEO of Résumés That Jump, a résumé writing service.

At his previous company, marketing coordinators had major responsibilities, such as managing multimillion-dollar budgets and working on high-profile partnerships..

He knows that at similar companies, they could have had fluffier job titles, like "Senior Marketing Manager," but they'd also have fewer responsibilities.

"When it comes to résumés and job interviews, titles are a lot less important than what you've accomplished and what you can bring to an employer," Nicholson says.

Of course, that's all well and good to say, but won't your ego take a hit if you have many responsibilities and an unassuming title, especially when you walk into an interview?

Just decide what you want and act accordingly, says Ann Latham, author of "Clear Thoughts - Pragmatic Gems of Better Business Thinking."

"If you are looking for an identity, job titles are paramount," Latham says. "In that case, I recommend a small company where you can get a big title sooner. Or try a company where almost everyone is a VP."

Take a different tack if you want something more substantial.

"But if you are looking for a position that will provide a challenge, satisfaction and growth opportunities, job titles are meaningless," Latham says. "It is the responsibilities and the opportunities that count. These are what will drive your day-to-day activities and your learning."

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Employers Aren't Dumb

Job seekers often forget one of the most important details of a job search:

- Employers have been where you are
- They helped make you what you are
- In other words, employers are aware of inflated job titles, too
- They are the ones who created the titles, after all
- Therefore, on your job search, approach listings with the same skepticism as employers.

Keep This In Mind

Laurent Duperval, president of Duperval Consulting, suggests the following tips for focusing on job descriptions and not job titles:

Titles Are Often More Fiction Than Fact

"Somebody had to put up a job posting and had no idea what to call the position, so they made up a name. The name may not have anything to do with the actual job," Duperval warns.

Egos Beget Titles

"Because people attach so much of their self-esteem to their titles, companies have had to change the names of the same jobs, just to make it seem like a more important position," Duperval says.

"“Secretary”, which used to be a fine title, has been replaced by “Administrative Assistant”; a “Janitor” is now a “Sanitation Engineer”; and so on.

No matter what the name, you still have to file, open mail and type letters, or sweep the floors, clean the toilets and keep the place clean."

If you're looking for work that falls under the “Secretary” or “Administrative Assistant” label, do you honestly care what the title is? If you have the appropriate experience, the company culture suits you and the compensation is in line with your goals, it would be silly to turn it down.

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Titles Are Not Transferable

"A title in one company means something completely different in another company," Duperval cautions.

"In some companies, everybody and his dog is a “Director”. In other companies, “Directors” have large, multimillion-dollar accounts and are responsible for hundreds of employees. You just never know."

Anthony Balderrama is a writer and blogger for CareerBuilder.com and its job blog, The Work Buzz. He researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/abalderrama.