

WiWwH Job Descriptions

August 2023

Laura: [00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to what is wrong with hiring the podcast, where we talk about why hiring people and getting hired are both absolute nightmares. I'm Laura Klein, an extremely tired hiring

Amy: manager. And I'm Amy Santee, a jaded yet cautiously hopeful career coach. And I'm feeling pretty energetic today.

Laura: That's good. You can be excited and energetic for both of us. I'm just feeling old. Please be advised that this podcast may contain drinking, swearing, and screaming into the abyss. Pretty much like most podcasts. Today, we're going to be talking about how to interpret job postings and watching for red flags as well as the green flags and yellow flags and possibly checkered flags.

I don't really know. I don't know anything about racing. But I think to start out, Amy's going to start by sharing a little job posting for us just so we know what we're all talking about.

Amy: Yes. And just for a little bit of context. It's a job posting that I [00:01:00] may or may not be hiring for. I may or may not have written it with the help of chatGBT and it may or may not contain references to actual tech job postings that I've come across in the wild.

Laura: I just want to say that we can just get rid of the may not on that last one, because I think I have seen 90% of these in actual postings in some form or another.

Amy: I think that's a fair estimate. Yeah. All right. Here we go. Are you a proactive and results driven self starter who thrives in a fast paced dynamic atmosphere?

We are seeking an entry level self starter. Synergy architect to join our cutting edge team and help us to disrupt the status quo. You will leverage your visionary mindset to develop cross functional paradigms for optimal value realization and disruption spearhead collaborative stakeholder relationships that cultivate out of the box ideation.

proactively engaged in vertical [00:02:00] integration of solutions and horizontal scaling of iterative learning for holistic transformation and develop and execute scalable strategies that transcend traditional KPIs to drive our global market monopoly. We're looking for candidates who have a minimum of 20 years of experience with wireframing.

Google Analytics, Chad GPT, 3D printing, SQL queries, social media marketing, and synchronized swimming in an agile waterfall environment. Proficiency in Microsoft PowerPoint, Lotus Notes, and a typing speed of at least 80 words per minute. A proven track record of creating pixel perfect interfaces for presentation to egocentric co founders and interpersonal skills and navigating those dynamics with finesse and diplomacy.

And finally, An IQ within the top 1 2% of the population, and a high level of agreeableness. If you are smart but nasty, you will not [00:03:00] last. We pride ourselves on treating each other like a family, and we value the contributions of our team with intangible rewards, like the illusion of job security, plus pizza parties.

Our co founders resemble a symbiotic blend of Bill Gates and Margaret Thatcher, leading with visionary insight and unparalleled self importance. Are you ready to join the elite? So Laura, what do you think of that job posting?

Laura: I'm sorry, I almost had to turn off my mic so you all wouldn't hear the shrieking because I happen to know for a fact that at least one of those bullet points, it sounds ridiculous, is stolen directly from an actual UX one.

I wish that some of them were this straightforwardly unhinged because I know if I see something that says, if you were smart, but nasty, you won't last. I'm like, okay, great. Thanks. Thanks

Amy: for the note. Won't last. Thanks for letting me know. Not going to apply.

Laura: Yeah, obviously [00:04:00] you're exaggerating some, but way less than I'd like you to be.

You, you often see All of these types of things from the like minimum of, six years of experience and in a technology that's been around for three years. I've been seeing that since the nineties. I think the first time I saw that was in the nineties. The proficiency in all the things .

Despite the fact that you don't need that. And like any tool you've got, I can learn. I'm not too worried about that. Pixel perfect interfaces for presentation to egocentric co founders. Woof. That hit home.

Amy: It'd be great if people just came out with it and, but then no one would apply for those jobs. And we'll be talking about. Of course, how to assess or evaluate or interpret job postings on the internet and what to look for, how to read between the lines what to pay attention to in terms of what's really going to be a good fit for you and your skills and your compensation requirements and [00:05:00] various other things.

Laura: And just to kick us off, like I, let's talk a little bit about what the purpose of a job posting is, because it seems obvious, but like I think in this in a previous version of this. Podcast. That I did last year. I talked to hiring managers about, how they actually write job postings and it turns out it's pretty hard.

The thing is that it's like an advertisement in that, you want to attract people and you want to find the best people quickly and easily, but you don't want, to lie, but you maybe want to present everything in the best possible light. And there's often this just throw everything in there, just in case we happen to stumble across a unicorn, and It's hard, so I feel some sympathy for folks, but it's not making it easier on the job seeker.

Amy: No, it doesn't, and, different people write, Job postings could be the hiring manager. It could be a recruiter who specializes in your particular function. It could be a recruiter who really doesn't know anything about the type of work or some [00:06:00] combination of these things. And of course it has to often go through review from various other stakeholders who are involved in the process, but for companies, yes, they're trying to find the right people and they're trying to prevent people who aren't.

a good fit from applying in the first place. And then as a job seeker when you're looking at a job position, your goal is really to determine fit. And I mentioned skills , but also your interests. What are your career goals? What's your interest in the particular company or product? But ultimately, can you literally go in and do this job on day one?

So In order to interpret a job posting accurately, you have to really be clear on what you know how to do and who you are and what your requirements are, what you really care about, and this should go without saying, but you have to actually read the entire job description ?

And there's some areas you might skip. With, boilerplate [00:07:00] type stuff.

Laura: Some of the bullshit boilerplate, you can just skip the stuff that's you want to read enough about the company so that you understand what their business model is.

And if it's something that you want to be associated with, if it's the Institute for Killing Puppies and Orphans okay, maybe not, or Hey, look, if that's your thing, really seriously, fuck off. But yeah, you want to make sure that. It's in line with it, but understand a lot of that is written by marketing and may have little to no bearing on the actual job.

It's so tricky because I always feel, if you've ever shopped for a house or as I like to do self shop for a house where I'm not actually shopping for a house. I'm just looking at pictures of houses. There are all these little code words where like cozy means it's like the size of a closet and fixer upper means that it's actually currently on fire and old world ambiance just means it's completely haunted. You just have to, you have to understand what these secret code words are.

Amy: Fast paced means

Laura: you might die and they will just step over your body and keep going. Or it just means it's a startup.

[00:08:00] But yeah. So you really need to know what those code words mean. And be able to interpret them and part of the way that you do that, honestly, this is one of those things where if you want to write well, you should just read a lot and you should read a lot of different things, read a lot of job descriptions ?

Read a lot of them, compare them to what you know, if you've actually interviewed for the thing. Hell, if you can find somebody at the company or whatever who's actually done the job, compare it to what the, you're always gonna get better intel if you can track down somebody that does the work.

But you just gotta read a lot of them to start seeing this stuff come up over and over and you'll get better at it at time.

Amy: Exactly, you do enough of it to start identifying those patterns. What are the outliers?

What do you, what can you expect from the particular type of job or level or role that you're looking at. That's very helpful. And reading the entire thing will also help you decide if it makes sense to apply. And I follow a lot of [00:09:00] recruiters on LinkedIn and YouTube who talk about how, most people who apply for a job are not qualified.

And they throw out percentages like maybe 10 20% of people who apply for jobs are actually qualified for The position and that a lot of people just don't read and they apply willy nilly without that. It's just going to be a better use of everyone's time if that's the case. So let's talk about some of the key components that are in job postings.

First and foremost things like what your responsibilities are, what skills are required what other types of requirements you need to do the jobs. Intended outcomes of your work, which is often times missing from job positions. Yeah, I

Laura: was gonna say, if you can find that's a great sign.

Amy: Yeah, that's actually a really good sign if it's like here's what you're going to be doing and here's what you're working towards Here's what the team is working towards. Here's like what success looks like. That's a very good sign because they're, being very Thoughtful about the role. So is it a [00:10:00] laundry list of all of these possible skills?

Is it tools or tools?

Laura: Is it? Yeah, you must know figma sketch Illustrator Photoshop like no you don't Stop

Amy: that. No, you don't. It's okay, there are some common tools that are part of a job, right? That's a given. But if they're over indexing on tools, and it's more about here's the tools that you need.

That are just a way to facilitate you getting your job done, then yes that's not very helpful. So yeah, is it clear what the role entails? Is it, is there enough detail or is it vague? Sometimes job postings are much too long. There's too much detail, 25 bullets for all of these different things that you're expected.

to do that can really feel overwhelming for, your typical 40 hour a week job, or even jobs that reflect multiple roles, right? Are you applying for a [00:11:00] designer role, a designer slash researcher role? Are you a UI, UX, Information architect, what does the job entail and does it reflect something specific and

Laura: specialized?

Yeah. And this is often true of, if you were to product management role. You're like, Oh, that really sounds more like project management to me, or maybe a combination of both, or, some software engineering roles where it's look, if you are a front end developer and that's what you want to do you're not looking for things that are, like I'm looking for a full stack plus somebody who can set up a data center.

So you really have to understand that. And as somebody who was a designer and researcher for a very long time altogether, That's fine if that's a thing you do, and it's built into the process, but not if you're actually expected to do two entirely different roles at the same time.

So you're really looking for, do the peep, did the person who made this job description sound like they knew what the hell they were [00:12:00] talking about? And if the answer is no, it's weirdly... Not always the end of the story here like you just have to dig a little bit I will say cuz it's just you want to find out Oh, was that just cut and pasted from like somebody else's crappy or do you let chat GPT?

You know create this terrible

Or is this really what you

want? So there's some reading into it and figuring

Amy: things like that out. Yeah. And you talked about variation in titles and roles, and you mentioned product manager, project manager. Some people might even call it product owner, depending on the terminology within.

And so that's why it is helpful to. Look for jobs using variations of titles for a particular role.

Laura: And product owner can mean something very different in a place that is extremely devoted to Agile as opposed, [00:13:00] generally if you ever see product owner, it's probably some place that thinks they're Agile.

But it can mean something different, right? You see something like Scrum Master and you're like, That can mean a lot of things. It shouldn't, but it can. Don't even get me started on product designer versus UX designer.

Amy: What about UX and UI

Laura: designer? Okay, don't. I will come through this screen and yeah, please. Don't make me start drinking again, Amy.

Amy: I was a researcher for And I sometimes didn't even know what to call myself because we have UX researcher, design researcher, experience researcher, whatever.

So anyway, our point being that you want to be familiar with what the different titles are and not make assumptions about how companies are defining the responsibilities of those roles. What about engineering titles?

Laura: Oh, engineering titles are even worse. Like the leveling on engineering titles. Honestly makes no sense because it's all [00:14:00] different in every they try to like Balance it out. So some companies have adopted some of the big bang ones, but like i've seen differences between oh That's a sui role versus a software developer role and it's oh, okay Then and they have entire they can have entirely different pay bands and like promotions and they know exactly what that means But you might not if you haven't encountered it before or Oh, that's a staff level two and it's okay But is it?

Even when you're dealing with the leveling. For example, at a startup versus the leveling at a big company, a director at a startup is not a director at a big company. A, it's an entirely different job, just like 100% most of the time. Often director at a startup could be a player coach role or first designer in and also you have to do all the hiring later.

Or, you're just doing a lot more stuff. And then even beyond that, the director. At a higher level, a director at a large company may end up doing an entirely [00:15:00] different thing than a director at another large company, just because at some places they're doing strategy, and at some places they're doing very operational stuff, and

You can't say titles mean nothing.

I will say this because often they mean a lot when the recruiter is looking at your, your resume, but I will tell you, they don't really mean enough.

Amy: Yeah, it's a lot of people will get in, hired into a certain level.

And then when they want to leave, they have to look at titles that seem lower than what they were at, or vice versa. Maybe you don't get promoted for eight years. But, you want to you're at mid level, you want to apply for senior roles, or you're ready for senior, so it might make sense for you to look for jobs that are senior level and decide, can you do the job?

And take the level of the role with a grain of salt in terms of can I apply for this or not? And [00:16:00] something else that we see a lot on job postings is years of experience. And this really does prevent people from applying for positions. Oh, I don't have five years of experience with this thing. I only have four, so I'm not going to apply.

And what I want people to think about is that years of experience is really a heuristic. It's just okay, we're looking for someone who generally has enough experience to do this role. It might be that you've been doing it for five years, but what's more important is being able to actually do the job.

So it's not a precise measurement. There can be some correlation, between tenure and expertise and quality. So you just holistically.

Laura: I will say this as a hiring manager. One of the things that I do see is that the people who ignore that, the people who completely ignore the years of experience are often the ones [00:17:00] with zero experience and if it's a mid level job, this is not a first job.

This is, I'm sorry. Like it is not a first job. Yeah out of college or boot camp like I know there aren't enough intro roles. There aren't enough associates There aren't enough internships. I get it. I'm sorry I can't fix that but there is almost no way that if it's a mid level or senior role You're gonna come in and be effective at it having not had a job before right?

Exactly like you do want to be a little I am always a little careful with the But four or five years of experience. I don't care Like five years of experience means like probably had a job or two. Has shipped stuff, right? And five years of freelance, wildly different than five years at a startup or five years at a big company.

I'm gonna be looking at that stuff too. That's all way more important to me.

Amy: Exactly. Exactly. I wanna talk about some potential, some items in job [00:18:00] postings that might indicate potential concerns or red flags. Things

that either overtly feel like a red flag or reading between the lines might feel like a red flag for you.

Obviously one of the biggest ones is when there's no compensation information presented publicly to someone to help them decide will I be paid enough money to do this job. I

Laura: am so happy that we are moving to a world where it is normal and in fact legally required folks in some states to include that because it is so that really does bias.

Things against people who maybe didn't negotiate great the first time, or aren't comfortable speaking up for themselves

Amy: People who are underrepresented and have to prove themselves and work harder to do that.

Laura: Anyway, so that's about it. Also the really [00:19:00] broad range where they're like, Oh, it's somewhere, did you actually see, you mentioned a job ad for an engineer at Netflix.

Did you actually see this one with a range of 90, 000 to 900, 000? Yeah, that's a cop out. That's bullshit. That is some bullshit right there. Yeah that's, we might pay you anything. You might be made in magic beans, like fuck off with that.

Amy: It's a way to, to, do what's legal without doing the right thing.

And even if this was not a legal requirement, as it is in many states, and hopefully more states in the near future, it's just the right thing to do. Like, when it comes down to it, we need a job to make money to live and support our families and save for retirement and all of that stuff? And so it is.

Helpful to know ahead of time, does the compensation reflect the value of the work? Does it reflect what I have done, what I'm bringing [00:20:00] to the table, my training and education, whatever it might be. So, if that's missing then. I don't know.

You can do some research to find out, but it's that lack of transparency is definitely bothersome.

Laura: Yeah, absolutely. Now, reporting to people not in your function. So like a designer reporting to engineering or, everybody reporting to product or, and,

Yeah, I would say with the exception of startups, where often everybody's just reporting to the CEO.

But yeah, that can be a weird one, and it's something that you need to take a look at.

Amy: Yeah, I have seen a lot of people I'm gonna take, I'm gonna take that out. I've had my own experiences and know many people who have had the experience of Reporting to someone that essentially comes from a very different background.

It can be design reporting to engineering. It can be research reporting to marketing, it's, and each company's different and things aren't always as they should be. But that might be an indication that the [00:21:00] person you're going to be reporting to doesn't really understand the job or they think they need you and they probably do need you but maybe they're not sure why.

Or it might mean that the team is Not big enough. It's not as important of a function inside of that particular company. And

Laura: some people like being the first one in and that's cool. If that's you, that's great. But if you want to go to a place with sort of a mature, design organization, engineering organization, product, whatever, health marketing, go to some place that has that already set up so that there's a chain of command and you have a, a career ladder, you have a place to grow and all that kind of stuff. If you're reporting, if you're one thing reporting to another thing you might end up being the head of your organization someday, or you might end up with nowhere to go because...

Everybody reports

Amy: to engineering. Exactly. And this goes back to our earlier point of not making assumptions [00:22:00] about certain things ? I think some things are very obviously red flags. Some things could be yellow flags or checkered flags ? And sometimes it warrants additional research. You need to have a conversation with a recruiter or chat with people from LinkedIn or, just triangulate with different sources to confirm and confirm.

Your hypothesis about that. When I read the job description earlier I mentioned several phrases that so many of us have seen in so many job postings.

Things like, We're like a family. Work hard, play hard. Yeah, what are some of the other ones that you've seen,

Laura: I did end up somehow somebody posted a tweet of mine and it ended up on the front page of Reddit for the anti work.

Amy: That's one of my favorite subs. Yeah, sure.

Laura: No, I know. Aren't we all? I didn't mean to do that. And it seemed a little awkward considering the fact that I was working for a company that like actively tried to get people jobs. But I had some, I don't even remember what the tweet was, but it was something like, look if you keep [00:23:00] saying we're like a family, then I only have to talk to you at holidays.

It was just like, you are not my family. You are absolutely not my family. And you shouldn't think you are, and I shouldn't have to treat you like you are. You are my coworkers or my boss or my employees, and that's fine. That's a perfectly reasonable relationship to have.

But any of the we're like family just has completely unrealistic expectations of the amount that you should suffer for

Amy: them. And it's not usually reciprocal? If you have a functional family, right? Not a dysfunctional family. If you have a functional family, then you reciprocate, you care about each other, you do things, whatever it might be.

In a dysfunctional family it's very problematic. And I think that's what it ends up being in a place like this where those expectations are not fair and it's usually a burden put on the employees to feel obligated to do what it takes, which does lead to that [00:24:00] suffering.

Laura: Yeah. Things like, startup like environment.

Oh, that's just absolute chaos. Okay, yeah, no one's making any decisions and we're pivoting constantly. Dedicated to your job or tireless work ethic. Yeah, we know what that means. That means that you think that I'm going to work weekends. Which again, look, if it's in there, fantastic. And if that's a thing that you want to do, you knock yourself out.

I worked really long hours at one point in my life and then I got tired and decided to stop. Up to you what you like, but understand that those things are in

there for a reason. They are trying to get people to self select out if they are not interested in working 80 hour

Amy: weeks.

What about when a job posting says that they will be looking for a good culture fit?

Laura: I think that they often mean that's even worse than when they spell out startup like environment or supreme dedication or willing to work long hours or whatever because they're looking for a good culture fit. We're not gonna tell you [00:25:00] what that culture fit is. You're gonna figure it out when you get in here.

Laura: And does that secretly just mean that I have to look like everybody else in your office, or does that mean that you want me to have the same general values,

Amy: And is the value, going to bars after work and getting drunk with your boss because you feel like you have to do that and be part of the culture and be a team player?

Yeah.

Laura: Hopefully not. I want to know that for an entirely different reason than I wanted

Amy: to know that in my 20s. I would agree. I'm past that as well. How about green flags? We talked a lot about red flags yellow flags,

what are some things that we might find in Job postings that might indicate something really positive, again, overtly or reading in between the lines, like what might this mean about the organizational culture? I think one that we already talked about is who will you be reporting to ? Thinking about the team and org structure.

Details about [00:26:00] the product you're going to be working on, the team you're going to be working with.

Laura: That's a big one at big companies, because it is, team to team can be wildly different at large companies, and if you're working on internal tools versus the consumer side versus the enterprise side, those are entirely different jobs, and it is .

100% expected that a company of any size over a few thousand is going to have all of these different areas. And who the hell knows if you really want to do consumer, the funny thing is people will go to places being like, Oh, I really want to do consumer. Cause it's like really exciting and sexy.

And then you end up on the admin tool. So I love admin tools. I think they're great. I think they're super important. A lot of people don't want to work on them. Let me know if that's what the job is, because I'm more likely to go to that than I am to like the sexy shopping interface, but, hell, let me know if it's the AI team or the innovation team so I can stay the hell away from it.

All that

Amy: stuff. And yeah, are you interested in it? But also, how deep do they go? Or [00:27:00] how clear are they? On why this is important. Does it sound like an exciting space to be working in at this company? Are they specific about why they are working on this and that can be very compelling.

Laura: Yeah, one thing that very few actually do include which is unfortunate I wish that more would is like what does the process look like? Some of them do and I always think that's great Like how many interviews you're gonna have how long like what are we looking at?

What's the timeline? You know those kinds of things information about the interview process I love it when they and the bigger companies do this now I think I see it less with startups, but people are starting to Reasonable accommodation support and, what you can expect in the interview process and I've seen zoom backgrounds, you can use one of our zoom or teams backgrounds so that it doesn't show where what your location is, or, one of them said if you need to bring a service dog and like those things shouldn't have to be stated, but if they are stating them, I think that it means that they've Thought about that.

And it's not going to be weird to the recruiter. Like you don't have to feel weird [00:28:00] about bringing it up. If that's a thing that you need or just want so I think that's lovely. And I think that it means that they're actually thinking about

the different experiences of different kinds of folks who might be Oh, Hey, that's our producer flashing the red

Amy: light. He's reminding us to go to the ad breaks, which we still don't have any sponsors. No, I'm just kidding. We don't want sponsors. But yes, we have a few more points to cover with green flags and then a quick wrap up.

Something else that is great to see is do they provide a learning and development stipend? Are there mentoring opportunities? Are there any signs that they care about your professional development? Are you there just to work your ass off for the company or are they looking at it in a bit more of a reciprocal way?

And I think some of that stuff is unfortunately getting cut now from, . Budget's getting tightened and layoffs and all of that, and that's something that a lot of people really want.

Laura: Good signs of maturity in the company, [00:29:00] likely not going to see it at startups or smaller companies.

Sometimes you do. And when you do, that's really nice. But it just, it gives you a hint about other things that you might expect that'll go along with

Amy: it. Exactly. And, a couple other things. I've seen really great postings that say, Hey, even if you don't meet all the requirements, we encourage you to apply.

And, they may say if you meet most of them, but not all of them, it's not apply if you don't meet any of them, but they're encouraging people. To do that because again, we know that some people will not apply to a position if they are, don't feel like a perfect unicorn match for it.

So I love to see that empathy for job seekers.

Laura: I do. I think right now, unfortunately, what we're seeing is people are applying for things that they're wildly overqualified for because it is rough out there, folks. And I just want to acknowledge that. That said, this is about this is about the long game, right?

Keep trying, and you never know [00:30:00] when this is the one where, eh, they threw one in because it was a nice to have, but honestly, you're so much better at these other things that they're gonna take you anyway.

Amy: Exactly. One organization I would like to call out is Code for America, and there's a couple of things I've seen in past job descriptions or job postings that I've really appreciated.

One thing I've seen is a section on here's what you'll get out of a job here. Here's the skills you'll develop. Here's the opportunities you'll get again, going back to learning and development budgets and that sort of thing. Also, Code for America works on a lot of civic tech projects social good type projects.

And I've also seen in their postings a preference or a nice to have for people who have personal experience or even professional experience working within the social safety net. So that's a great way of being more [00:31:00] inclusive and putting emphasis and valuing Perspectives and experience that don't just, link up to skills and shipping stuff, right?

That lived experience in that particular domain.

Laura: Yeah. And before we wrap up, I do want to talk about one quick thing that I'm now just going to blow everything that we just talked about completely away. And you can ignore the rest of the podcast. Here's the thing.

Very few job descriptions are written by people whose job it is to write job descriptions. A lot of these are written very quickly, or copy and pasted, or written by a recruiter who doesn't know what the hell they're talking about, or a brand new person, or you're required to put in all of this stuff and none of it is true, and It's unfortunate, it's sad, I hate that, but you need, part of the interview process that you're about to go through like this is just, this is the advertisement, this is them getting you in the door, and once you're in there, it is your job, it should be also be their job, but it's more important to you, so do this, [00:32:00] you need to ask clarifying questions, you need to Make sure that what it says in the job description is really the thing you're getting.

Little buyer beware here, ask those questions. And don't get all excited about something that you see in a job description. Wait until you've actually talked to the people and you found out what it actually is. That's all I want to say.

Amy: Yeah, exactly. And, the last piece of advice I would say is, again, to triangulate with other sources. The job posting is obviously the most important, but before you apply, check out the company career site. Look at who's on the board, who's in the executive leadership What kind of people do they represent?

Check out their social media, maybe their glass door. And I want to go back to code for America, which, I've had a high respect for many years. Something else I've seen in their job postings recently is that they call out specifically that they're currently in the bargaining process with [00:33:00] the.

Code for America Workers Union for the past two years. But what I know from reading articles from that union is that the management is actually union busting. If that's something you care about, you can put two and two together to go, they're saying this thing, but what they're actually doing in practice is this other thing.

And I don't feel good about that. So that's a personal decision, but a really great example of looking at different information sources to get a bigger picture of what's going on before you apply.

Laura: Yeah, you can't always believe all the hype. That is all the time that we have for today. If there's a question or topic that you would like to discuss, please reach out to Amy on LinkedIn, because Amy is listening.

And I'm Laura.

Amy: And I'm Amy, I think.

Laura: We want to thank everybody for all of you for listening to us. And we want to wish you the best of luck with your search. No matter what you're looking for, we are rooting for you.