



Tasks vs. Role: *Bringing Home the Bacon*

By Scott Delman



The understanding of task vs. role yields dividends toward making organizations more successful and profitable. Why? And what is the important distinction? What difference could it make to the employee, employer, or the customer?

The *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* defines **task** as: A **piece of work** assigned or done as part of one's duties. And **role**

as: The **actions** and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person or group.

Summarized, a task is a piece of work – one's duties; a role is one's actions.

Take an objective look at your job descriptions and hiring practices. Ask yourself if they are in line with obtaining workers who will bring you to that illusive "level of performance" you have often wished for at management meetings. Most often, I find they are not. *Read on.*

Job descriptions are all too frequently written like IRS instructions. They are a list of tasks, requirements, boundaries and guidelines. Yes, they are "accurate," but offer little perspective as to what it means to do a good job and how to be valuable to the company. For example, look at the following description:

Truck driver-Level 1: Load and unload merchandise, materials and supplies as requested. Must have safe driving record, CDL license and be able to lift up to 80 pounds. Supervised by warehouse manager. Overtime required.

There is nothing technically wrong with this job description. It accurately reflects the duties of the truck driver. Unfortunately however, it does not suggest the complete scope or scale of the position itself. It doesn't address (or acknowledge) the value of the truck driver's role, only the tasks. Now check out this next description:

Truck driver-Level 1: This is a service position, meaning that you are always serving either an internal or external customer. You have and are expected to use the authority to make decisions to provide successful transactions and satisfy customers. Being accurate and on time is a must. Each transaction must be handled in a way that positively spreads our organization's reputation. We keep our word 100% of the time and work each day until our obligations are complete, frequently resulting in unscheduled overtime. Working safely (by using good judgment and following all company and OSHA regulations) is required. Load and unload merchandise, materials and supplies as requested. Must have CDL license and be able to lift up to 80 pounds. Supervised by warehouse manager.

Plainly, there is a distinction between the two versions. The employee who works within the second job description has had his/her role clearly defined, has parameters within which to function, and understands the standards of the organization so that (s)he is aware of what optimum performance looks like.

Obviously, the truck driver who demonstrates (adequate) communication, customer service, teamwork, professionalism, and client retention skills will out-perform the driver who *only* delivers his/her freight.

This example of task vs. role extends to all positions in all organizations. Whether it is the CFO, sales rep, A/R specialist, field worker, janitor, engineer, IT specialist, and so on, all members of an organization share common responsibilities (roles) in the aforementioned areas of customer service, effective communication, teamwork, professionalism, etc. Their tasks will vary widely, but they commonly represent their company's standards to outside clients, vendors and co-workers.

Take a moment and think about what your workers reveal about your business or organization to your marketplace, community and each other. Is your message truly on track? Do you have the right employees with the right "skill sets"? If not, take a good look at your recruitment practices.

Hiring effectively is crucial. Most companies are fairly good at hiring "skills," but lack the know-how to hire the best "ambassadors". To be competitive, an organization needs to secure qualified, trainable people who will perform adequately at both their tasks *and* their role. Learning to screen, interview and employ candidates who have the best chance of helping a company improve its overall market position takes a strong commitment and a sound recruitment strategy, as well as a solid training program for new employees.

Hiring effectively and developing the role functionality in *every* employee, will pay back handsomely and take some of the struggle out of more successfully "bringing home the bacon."

With twelve years experience in consulting and training, Scott Delman "Unleashes the Possible" in companies and organizations. He is the author of How To Mean Business, Water Cooler Wisdom, and president of ClientKeep, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in strategic development and education, creating organizational alignment, enhancing customer service, productivity, and overall professionalism.

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