



Marketplace- and Industry-Equivalent Titles Are Essential for Successful Recruitment

By Ilah Stolz, RN, MS

A title on a business card or a job description today is much more than just a label. Rather, it offers to the world a definition of the individual's level of experience, stature within an organization, and decision-making authority.

How many times have you skimmed a stack of business cards you collected during an industry function, a luncheon event, or some other gathering and formed an opinion of each individual's place in the working world based on his or her title? Even if it was a subconscious judgment, you undoubtedly viewed certain titles as having more influence, responsibility and cachet than others.

What if two of those cardholders you met at that function had identical levels of responsibility within their hospitals, but one was called a "manager" and the other a "director," or one was a "director" and the other was a "vice president"? Without any further information, you'd likely judge one as having more distinction than the other.

Do you think this situation is merely an outlier? Unfortunately, we see it frequently in the positions for which we recruit at B. E. Smith. It's becoming so troubling that we sometimes don't even feature a title in our search material because it doesn't accurately reflect the depth and breadth of responsibility needed for the opening.

By titling a position as manager or director when it is truly a director or vice president role, the organization may eliminate itself from consideration by job seekers who are skimming listings looking for key words of interest. It is similar to when employers glance at résumés and CVs and toss them into either the "interview," "maybe," or "no" pile. Why? Because job seekers may look at a title and see the position as either a lateral—or even downward—move when it might actually be a promotion.

I have been in senior hospital administration for more than 20 years, and title inequity has always been an issue. It tended to be somewhat less of a concern within individual marketplaces because competing employers generally monitored each other's titles and pay grades and matched them. However, for a variety of reasons, it is more common today and is a real challenge for organizations, as their recruiting typically requires a search beyond the city limits. With the growing imbalance in supply and demand for many healthcare leadership positions, this bad situation is getting worse.

As impractical as it sounds, the solution is for the industry to settle on a common title structure that—within reason—applies from position to position, hospital to hospital, and marketplace to marketplace. As that likely will never happen, you can take steps to protect the integrity of the job classifications in your hospital.

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I am not suggesting that management positions requiring advanced academic degrees should be slotted into titles, pay scales and raise structures as if they were front-line employees; competitive differences are essential to separate one opportunity from another. However, when a side-by-side comparison of two jobs shows drastically different titles for the same level of responsibility and authority, no one wins.

With strengthened and more competitive titles in the market, candidates will be inclined to look at your openings, and recruiters will be more successful. Job seekers will drill deeper when they hear about positions that seem to be a good fit for them, because the title will give them a general idea of what your position entails. This not only simplifies the process for candidates but also ratchets up the quality of candidates for employers.

To begin the process, you should evaluate your organization's title structure based on these three components: level of responsibility, pay range and the individual's place in the organization as it relates to decision-making authority.

Start by looking at levels of responsibility. Do you have individuals with different titles who are responsible for the same type of work, albeit in different departments? Are they paid essentially the same (or should they be, based on the work they do)? Do they have the same decision-making authority?

This exercise is typically a bit of an eye-opener as you discover inequities that merit a thorough review and, perhaps, an adjustment. But before you take any significant action, look within your marketplace and at comparably sized organizations elsewhere in the United States to see how their titles compare to yours. Review this evaluation the same way you likely look at pay scales; you may not want to lead the pack, but you must be competitive.

Once you have all the data in hand, attack the low-hanging fruit by eliminating the most glaring problems first. Then work your way up to the more challenging, perhaps politically sensitive positions whose title adjustments will require more time and finesse to modify.

Whether you think you're close or you know you have a lot of work to do to make the job titles competitive in your organization, start today. Plan for some grumbling, as this subject is touchy and has financial ramifications. But if you stay the course you will be rewarded—particularly the next time you have a tough job opening to fill.



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