

## Aligning your 'Person Specification' with your organisational strategy

**Adelè Bird, Director of Senior Recruitment at Action Planning, reviews the limitations of the conventional 'Personal Specification' and encourages colleagues to think creatively when determining the competencies and experience required in their ideal applicant. Adele has worked as a third sector recruitment consultant for over 10 years and, prior to joining Action Planning, was Head of Afghanaid UK.**

I have never warmed to the phrase 'Person Specification'. It is a cold and impersonal term which does not reflect the fact that the position will be filled by an individual with unique talents and aspirations but, love it or hate it, the Person Specification forms an extremely useful part of the recruitment process.

In theory it should give you an opportunity to think through what skills the job really requires now, and what attributes you seek in the ideal candidate. For potential candidates, it should be an indicator of the skills and experience needed and help them decide whether they could perform well in the role.

Crafting a Person Specification gives you chance to reflect on what your organisation really needs, though often this opportunity is lost as employers rush to recruit a 'clone' of the person who is leaving. The document can also alienate potential candidates, who may see it as a series of boxes which need to be ticked rather than a platform on which they can sell their abilities.

So how does one go about humanising and clarifying this essential piece of the recruitment kit?

Ask yourself the two most pertinent questions. Did we need that role to start with and do we still need it now? Take the time to re-examine the position in terms of the overall strategy of the organisation. This is particularly important when considering fundraising posts. Do you know whether you are best placed to grow your income through winning more statutory contracts, securing major donors, developing community fundraising, making better applications to grant-making charitable trusts, attracting corporate sponsorship or launching an income generating business?

The answer will have a crucial bearing on the skills you highlight in your Person Specification and, if you are in doubt about where to focus your fundraising efforts, it may be better to make an interim appointment whilst you undertake a review of your fundraising strategy, possibly with outside help.

I always discourage charity clients from being overly restrictive when specifying the skills and experience which they require. Familiar phrases like "at least two years' experience", can impede rather than aid a good response. I also would also like to see more charities considering good applicants from outside the third sector. Those with a private sector background often bring a range of directly transferable skills, particularly to international NGOs.

I recall one particular example when I was at Afghanaid, recruiting for a post based in Kabul. I was intrigued by an application from someone currently working in Hedge Funds. I conducted a telephone interview and found her to be completely aware and savvy about the role and its requirements, as well as demonstrating a good understanding of what it would be like to be a young woman working in Kabul.

The Managing Director at the time related that had it not been for my interview report, this candidate would never have even been considered. The report convinced him to interview her; she was appointed and had a very successful time for over 4 years, being promoted up to Director level.

The charity sector will not garner innovative ideas unless it looks outside its own milieu. There is such a thing as transferable skill. Pigeonholing candidates because they do or do not tick the Person Specification is a bar to imaginative recruitment. Think that way and you may miss someone with outstanding potential, a bit like the clever young executive at Decca records who was so certain that 'groups' were on their way out that he turned down the Beatles.