

## Ep #6: Unofficial Job Descriptions



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #6: Unofficial Job Descriptions

You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, episode 6. We're talking all about unofficial job descriptions today. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Hello, hello, hello. How are you doing today? I am so good. I am in Austin, Texas right now. I got into town a few days ago. And I came in a few days early for this mastermind event through the Life Coach School, which is the coaching school that I'm certified through. And it is just one huge reunion here. It's so much fun. It's so good to see everyone after being cooped away the past couple of years.

I've actually been dying to get to Austin for a while now. I'm a big foodie and I know that they have a great food scene. I've been exploring some restaurants and one place it's definitely on my list I'm going to tomorrow night is owned by a friend of mine. In a past life I used to be a bartender. And I got my first bartending opportunity from a man named Brandon Hunt.

And a few years later, after he hired me, he moved from Detroit to Austin and started a Detroit pizza company. And it's become a huge success. He has several locations in the city of Austin, and they're expanding outside of the state of Texas, him, and his business partner. So I'm going to be taking a ton of my coaching colleagues tomorrow night to dinner at one of his locations.

It's called Via 313, which is the Detroit area code. And I want to introduce a bunch of my coach friends to Detroit style pizza, which is amazing, and in my opinion, much better than Chicago. I'm sure I'll offend some of you who might love that. But if you haven't tried it, definitely try it. And I will report back on my experience at Via 313. I can't wait.

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Anyways, enough about Detroit style pizza and Austin. Let's dive into today's topic. We're talking all about unofficial job descriptions. Now, what do I mean by that term? I'm not talking about what's on your firm website. I'm also not talking about the title you hold, or the name of your position, or the type of law you practice.

So unofficial job descriptions aren't about whether you're an associate, or a partner, or of counsel. Or whether you practice as a criminal defense attorney, or some type of civil litigation, or you do transactional work. Okay? It's not about that. What I'm talking about is the unwritten standard that you hold yourself to when it comes to your job. I find that with my clients, they unintentionally craft these unofficial job descriptions and then they use these definitions against themselves.

Why does this happen? Normally, it's because the standard that they set for themselves is completely unattainable. So if you go through your day to day work life with an immense amount of pressure, constantly feeling stressed and overwhelmed, or maybe you feel inadequate, as though you're missing the mark, chances are that you've come up with an unofficial job description that you've written for yourself unintentionally, and that definition is not serving you.

So what we want to do is gain awareness here as to what that definition is and how you're using it against yourself. And if it needs to change, you're going to want to redefine your job description in a way that supports your wellbeing instead.

The best way for me to explain and teach this topic is for me to give you plenty of examples of some of the unofficial job descriptions my clients have come up with that they've written for themselves because you'll probably be able to relate to a few of them. And if you do see yourself in any of these unofficial job descriptions, what you're going to want to do is get to work on rewriting the job description in a way that serves and supports you instead, okay?

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So the first example is a client of mine, she does trademark law and she's a litigator. And when I asked her a while back what her job description is, how would she define her job? She said to me, well, it depends on whether or not I am representing a plaintiff or a defendant. And as someone who used to practice civil litigation myself, I said, of course, I completely understand that. Run me through both examples.

And she said, okay, well, if I'm representing a plaintiff, then my job is to make sure the plaintiff gets 100% of the requested relief. I said, okay, great. And if it's a defendant? She said, if I'm representing a defendant, my job is to make sure the plaintiff gets 0% of the requested relief. I said, awesome. How often do either of those outcomes happen? That's the question that I asked her. And she goes, none of the time, cases always settle. It's never that all or nothing result.

I said, great, do you see, like of course, you're super overwhelmed because you're defining your job in a way that's completely unattainable. No wonder you feel terrible every day when you go to work. You're making it impossible for you to do a "good job" by the way that you're defining what doing a good job is. So you're constantly going to feel like you're missing the mark if that's how you're thinking of your role in that litigation setting, right?

Another example that comes up for clients of mine all the time is they say that my job is to win. And first and foremost, that's really vague. What we mean by winning isn't always clear. But if it's, again, in the litigation context or maybe you're doing transactional work and you're trying to get a specific term negotiated, something like that.

But if you're defining your job as my job is to win, and a lot of times you don't win, like I used to do criminal defense work and we would lose frequently because we would have bad facts and there would be a lot of evidence against our clients. So if you are only giving yourself permission to think that you've done a good job and to celebrate the work that you do on the moments where you win, you're going to feel pretty awful most of the time.

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The other problem with having an unofficial job description that is focused on winning, is that the result is out of your control, right? Think about judges, we can't control judges or what opposing counsel says or does in a negotiation process. So we define our jobs in a way that we don't actually have control over which, again, is going to make us feel really powerless and really discouraged and defeated when we're not able to control the outcome in a specific scenario.

So instead of defining your job as "it's my job to win" you're going to want to rewrite your unofficial job description in a much kinder way. That might look like saying my job is to advocate for my clients, right? That is in your control, you can do that. It doesn't rely on anyone else, it doesn't outsource your success to anyone other than you, okay? Which is what we want, we want you being in complete control of whether you're doing a "good job" or a sufficient job, or that you're just doing your job, right? We want that to be completely within your control.

Another example of an unofficial job description that doesn't serve people, this just came up with a new client of mine. He said that he was really experiencing almost paralyzing stress on a daily basis and that his job feels really overwhelming and heavy. And as we started to flesh this out and I asked him, you know, how do you define your job? What's your job description? You know, tell me what you think your job is.

And he goes, I know this isn't possible, but I see myself that it's my job to be a lifesaver for my clients. And he also referenced like to unscrew up what's already become a screwed up situation, right? Kind of like trying to put the genie back in the bottle, which, of course we know we can't do. There are certain things that we have control over, but traveling back in time and preventing a bad situation from occurring isn't one of them.

So even though he knows that he can't save lives, and he's not representing criminal defendants in capital cases. He does civil litigation work, so he really isn't needing to be a lifesaver, but he's defining his job that way. So of course he feels immense pressure on a daily basis. So that's another example of a definition that's not serving you, right?

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Maybe that resonates with you. Maybe you see yourself as being a lifesaver to your clients. And if you do, that probably feels really heavy and stressful.

One of my other clients just answered this question when I asked, how do you define your job? Explain to me what you think your job is, kind of the unofficial definition of it. And her response, which I find to be very common, she told me, my job is to manage other people's perceptions of me. And so many people that I work with are doing this on a daily basis. They're so consumed with other people's opinions, obsessing over micromanaging what everyone else thinks about them.

And, of course, we don't have that ability, right? Other people get to have whatever opinions that they want to choose to have about us. They're in control of that, we are not. That's outside of our control. They get to think whatever they want, they might choose to think really wonderful, marvelous thoughts about us, or they might choose to think negative thoughts about us. But that is their business, we don't actually control other people's opinions of us.

So when we try to control other people's opinions of us, when it's something that we just lack control over, we're going to feel really powerless on a daily basis. We're going to feel very worried all of the time because we are defining our job as controlling other people's perceptions of us. But we're also going to feel very out of control because it is something that is out of our control.

So if that's you, if you think your job is to manage other people's perceptions of you, maybe it's the partners that you work for, or a supervisor that you work for, or to manage your clients perceptions of you, you could do an excellent job with the substantive work that you're doing, and people can still have a negative opinion of you. That's on them, right?

So if you're taking that on yourself, and making that your business, your chief concern, you want to check in with yourself there and ask is that

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serving you? Or is that creating a lot of heaviness that you carry with you on a day to day basis as you attempt to go about completing your job?

Another really ambiguous definition that a lot of my clients have is they say, well, it's my job to get the best possible outcome for my client. And the problem with this is what in the world do we mean by best? That definition, what constitutes best, is going to be different for everyone.

And I find that best is normally pretty synonymous with a perfect job, getting a perfect outcome. Which when I confront people with that they say, oh, of course, we can't ever achieve true perfection. But that's pretty much what we mean when we say best.

Either we haven't defined it at all so we can't even figure out if we stumble upon achieving that best outcome. We still will feel like we're missing the mark because we haven't defined what best outcome means in a given situation. But oftentimes, the best outcome is sort of like the first example I gave you, that 100% requested relief achieved for the plaintiff or 0% of the requested relief if you're representing the defendant.

It's that very polar opposite extreme ends of the spectrum, that's what we're normally referring to when we're using a term like best outcome. And if you are using that, again, you're going to frequently feel like you're missing the mark. So you want to check in with yourself there. And if you're using that, start with defining what do I even mean by best outcome, and is that best outcome attainable here?

Also a similar example or for instance of this is when you say my job is to get my clients the outcome that they want or to make sure my clients are happy. Again, this is sort of similar to example number four as far as managing other people's perceptions of you. We don't control whether clients are happy or not. I know that seems counterintuitive to what we're frequently taught, but you could do an exceptional job and a client could still be dissatisfied. That's within the realm of possibilities.

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So if you're defining whether you're doing a good job or not based on someone else's happiness level, you're going to feel really out of control. Also, depending on the type of law you practice you probably know this, sometimes the outcomes that clients want, they're not possible.

So if you are defining your job, the only time that you give yourself permission to think that you've done a good job is when you get an outcome that your client wants, that might not be happening in a lot of the cases or matters that you work on. So again, you want to check in with yourself there and see if you're using that type of unofficial job description against yourself. If you are, you're going to feel really pressured and really unsuccessful.

I had this come up for me on one of the last civil cases that I handled before I switched to coaching full time. I was representing someone, and I was going to send over a demand letter with a drafted complaint. And I was hoping to settle the case before having to file the complaint and avoid all the discovery and pretrial litigation process.

And in preparing the demand letter and the complaint, I had, of course, talked to my client about the outcome that he was hoping for, how much money he was hoping to receive in a settlement. And we had come up with what we thought was a really fair figure, that he would be pleased with for it to be resolved for that amount.

And, of course, I didn't have control over opposing counsel, they get to counteroffer at whatever it is that they counteroffer at. And they countered, and they came in really low. And I communicated the offer to my client and much to my surprise, he was actually really okay with it. He wanted the matter to be resolved very quickly. He wanted to avoid any risk of not having a favorable outcome if the case was dismissed.

So he agreed to accept their counteroffer and I noticed myself getting really bugged up about accepting their counteroffer. I felt really dissatisfied, I was feeling like I hadn't done a good job. And it was because I was using the standard to get the best outcome possible, which certainly wasn't the

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counteroffer that we had been presented with. I was also defining my job, or a job well done, as getting him close to, if not exactly the number that we had previously discussed.

And again, whether that was going to happen or not was completely outside of my control because I'm not opposing counsel, so I can't control what offer they make us. I'm also not the judge, so I can't control finding in our favor or, you know, jurors if it went to a jury trial instead of a bench trial. I don't have control over any of that.

And I noticed, here I was I wanted to counteroffer really badly, I almost blew up the negotiation process and ended up going through that pretrial litigation, discovery, all of that because I wanted to achieve this unofficial job description of getting the client the outcome that we had previously discussed.

And I realized, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's not my job here. What my job actually is, is to communicate my client's position to opposing counsel. To advocate on his behalf. And then to communicate the counteroffer that we received from opposing counsel to my client. Advise on the risks involved with accepting or with denying, and explaining the process and just presenting my client with those options.

That's what was required of me in that moment. It wasn't to get the best outcome. It wasn't to make my client happy. And it wasn't to get him the outcome that we had previously discussed because, again, that's out of my control. My job was simply to communicate information both ways, to opposing counsel and to my client, advise on the different possibilities and the risks associated with all of those, and then to get a decision from my client and communicate that decision back to opposing counsel.

And when we start to change the way we define our jobs and we make them so much more attainable, so much more within our control, we substantially dial down the pressure. We dial down that overwhelm, that stress. And we make it so much easier for us to satisfy a job well done, for

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us to achieve the standard that we set and feel good about the work that we do.

So if you feel frequently like you're missing the mark, you're going to want to check in with yourself here and figure out how are you defining your job? So start there, take a second and ask yourself, how am I defining my job? What exactly is it your job to do? Finish that sentence, my job is to do... Take a minute and see what comes up for you.

Maybe you think your job is to manage other people's perceptions of you. Maybe you think your job is to win all of the time. Maybe it's to get that 100% requested relief or to negotiate the best possible agreement for your clients. To get in every term into the contract that you want to get, or that you've previously discussed with your client that you think would be the cat's pajamas, as my dad would say, right, the best case scenario.

Now, once you do that and you've come up with what your current unofficial job description is, you want to ask yourself this next question, is it even attainable? Is that standard possible for me to achieve? And if it's not, you're going to want to rewrite that unofficial job description that you've created for yourself, okay?

Now, even if it is attainable, you might still want to rewrite your unofficial job description. And we can do this, figure out if that's the case for you by asking yourself this next question. Is my unofficial job description serving me? And if you see, like any of the examples I gave a few moments ago, that it's creating undue, unnecessary pressure, you're going to answer that question, no, it's not serving you. And you're going to want to bring yourself back to the drawing board here and rewrite that unofficial job description.

Now, when you do this, when you go back to the drawing board and you rewrite your unofficial job description, what you want to focus on is answering the question, what is within my control on a daily basis? What feels attainable for me? What can I accomplish? What's a definition or an unofficial job description that feels kind to myself? And come up with that answer, define that as doing your job, or define that as doing a "good job."

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A couple examples of this, I have a client, she's a trial attorney. We worked this through and rather than making the best possible argument in court, we've redefined her role as during trial her job is to bring all relevant documents to court and to ask questions that highlight the good facts and minimize the bad facts. She can check the box that she has done those two things. Ask questions that highlight good facts minimize bad facts, and bringing all of the relevant documents to court. That's totally within her control.

You can define it sort of like I did on that last civil matter that I worked on. Communicating my position to opposing counsel and relaying counter offers to my client. That's completely within my control, I'd be able to check that box and say, yes, I did that, I have accomplished that. Rather than, again, arguing a motion successfully which is outside of your control because you can't control the judge.

You might just define it as my job is to argue the motion. My job is to draft agreements or negotiate terms of a contract. My job is to present my client with all of the available options, advise about the risks associated with each option, and allow my client to make a decision, right?

These are really neutral ways that we describe our roles that are completely within your control, which is exactly what we want. We want you to make sure that your unofficial job description is completely within your control, that's how you'll go from feeling insecure and inadequate on a daily basis to feeling assured and accomplished.

Which, who doesn't want to feel that way, right? We, of course, all want to feel assured and accomplished as we go through our professional lives. Feeling that way is totally within your reach, you just have to tweak your unofficial job description, okay?

So go out and identify that unofficial job description that you're currently using, possibly against yourself. And if you are using it against yourself, rewrite it in a way that supports you and serves you, okay? All right, that's

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what I've got for you today. I will talk to you in the next episode. In the meantime, have a marvelous week.

Oh, and one more thing. If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, be sure to follow the show wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you haven't already, I'd really appreciate it if you would leave a rating and review to let me know what you think about *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast.

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