

2026

Why Vague Job Descriptions Cost You the Best Candidates

The Real Reason You Are Not Attracting Talent

Recruit?
Recruit!

Recruitment • HR • Training • Coaching



What You Will Learn

- Why record application volumes do not equal a healthy candidate pipeline in recruitment
- How vague job descriptions silently push the strongest candidates away from your roles
- The data showing that clear, focused briefs cut time-to-fill, screening time, and bad-hire risk
- Practical steps to turn a generic wish-list into a brief that attracts the right talent

Most leaders have noticed something odd. Applications per role have surged, yet the comment around the leadership table has not changed: *"There are no good candidates out there."*

The data backs up the paradox. Recent research found that the average job advert now attracts around 340 applicants, up 182% since 2021. Yet 70% of hiring leads still report a talent shortage.

Higher volume, lower fit. So, what has changed? The bottleneck rarely sits where leaders assume it does. The brief itself is quietly steering the wrong applications in and the right talent away.

What the candidate landscape looks like right now

The CIPD's most recent UK research found that 64% of employers struggled to attract candidates over the past year, and 69% said competition for well-qualified talent had increased. The UK is no longer a soft market for skilled recruitment.

Niche technical skills, sector expertise, and strong soft skills remain scarce. Specialist talent has options. They choose where to apply, where to engage in the hiring process, and where to walk away unbothered.

Candidates feel pressure too. In one 2025 survey, more than 90% described the market as competitive, with 63% calling it intense. The best people quickly filter out roles that feel unclear or generic.

The disconnect is quietly costing you applications from the best people

UK research from job platform Totaljobs uncovered a striking gap. While 74% of recruiters said clear, detailed job descriptions improve application quality, 69% of job seekers reported that expectations in recent ads felt unclear.

The same study found 40% of candidates think ads list too many requirements, and 39% say the titles themselves are unclear. The picture for any hiring manager is consistent:

Vague briefs attract the wrong applications, in larger numbers.

AI is amplifying the noise. Recent data shows that two in five candidates apply to roles in bulk, and 58% use AI tools in their search. When briefs are weak, AI helps people apply to almost anything.

The cumulative effect is that recruitment teams spend their time screening unsuitable CVs rather than speaking to the few people who fit. The strongest candidates, meanwhile, see no clear reason to engage and move on.

Diversity also takes a hit. When briefs are crammed with inflated requirements, candidates from less traditional backgrounds self-select out. Many of the best performers come from those routes. A vague brief loses them before any CV arrives.

What a clear, focused brief delivers

The numbers on briefing quality are striking. One sector-based study found that improving job description accuracy reduced time-to-fill by 25 to 30%, lifted candidate fit from 55% to 80%, and cut screening time by around 40%.

Separate analysis reports that organisations with clear job descriptions reduce time-to-hire by an average of ten days. That difference alone lowers cost-per-hire and reduces the risk of losing strong candidates to faster-moving competitors.

There is a candidate-experience benefit too. 78% of job seekers say a well-structured job description improves their application experience. That experience feeds directly into employer-brand perception and later offer acceptance.

In a noisy, AI-inflated market, briefing clarity is now a competitive advantage. Briefs that demonstrate understanding of the role do something that AI-padded ads cannot. They earn the attention of the talent you want to hire.

Why your strongest candidates walk away

Even strong candidates are not waiting around. Gartner's Voice of the Candidate research found that 50% of job seekers back out of an offer before starting work. Of those who have accepted, 47% remain open to other offers. A 2024 candidate-experience report adds weight. 52% of candidates have declined an offer due to poor experience during the recruitment process. Brief quality is where most of that experience either holds up or starts to fall apart.

WHY VAGUE JOB DESCRIPTIONS COST YOU THE BEST CANDIDATES

The pattern is consistent:

- When the brief is vague, the interviews drift.
- Hiring managers ask different questions of different candidates.
- Feedback is inconsistent.
- Strong candidates lose confidence in the leader, the role, and the organisation.

By the time an offer goes out, the better candidates have either accepted elsewhere or lost the conviction to say yes. The cost shows up as a re-run process, a backfilled offer, or a vacancy left open longer than needed.

From wish-list to sharp brief: what good looks like in practice

The most effective hiring managers no longer treat the brief as an admin task. They treat it as a working session, ideally with their specialist recruiter in the room or on the call. The conversation upfront saves weeks later.

A sharp brief starts with outcomes, not a list of duties. What does success look like at twelve and eighteen months? Which problems will the new hire have solved? Anchoring the brief here changes everything that follows.

Next, separate must-haves from nice-to-haves. A focused brief carries five to seven essential skills or experiences. Everything else moves into a desirable section. Inflated requirement lists are one of the fastest ways to deter strong talent.

Be explicit about flexibility, location, and salary/package. Candidates make decisions on these factors early. Burying them or leaving them ambiguous costs you applications from people who would otherwise be a strong fit for the role.

Replace jargon and inflated job titles with clear, market-recognisable language. The aim is not to sound impressive. The aim is to be findable, scannable, and instantly understandable to the candidate you most want to attract.

Be honest about the role's challenges. Strong candidates do not want a sanitised pitch. They want to know what is broken, what needs to be built, and where the autonomy sits. Candid briefs attract the right kind of confidence.

Briefing quality is now your competitive advantage

In a market where applications are inflated, candidates are wary, and skill shortages persist, the quality of the brief is a key document when it comes to getting the results you want from your recruitment.

Vague briefs send mixed signals, and detailed briefs do the opposite. They show that the role has been thought through, the leader knows what the job is, and the organisation respects a candidates' time.

The teams that consistently attract the strongest talent this year will not be the ones with the largest budgets or the best-designed careers pages. They will be the ones who do the hard thinking up front.

That thinking starts with the brief. Get it right, and the rest of the recruitment process flows. Get it wrong, and no amount of advertising spend, sourcing tools, or interview structure will fix it later.

A specialist recruiter can be the difference between a brief that quietly leaks talent and one that brings the right candidates to the table. The briefing conversation is where that work begins.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon -

Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

Contact

Sarah Bishop
Founder & CEO
Recruit Recruit Ltd

www.recruitrecruit.co.uk
sarah@recruitrecruit.co.uk
01902 763 006
07827 860358