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Features

Lofty titles finally being chopped down to size

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HAVE you ever asked someone what they do and then had to feign a look of understanding because their job title made no sense?

Thankfully the trend of convoluted job titles might be coming to an end.

Bank tellers are now customer service operatives, cleaners are sanitation engineers and who knows what an internal technical sales executive actually does.

There is an emerging backlash against self-important job titles, says Link Recruitment client services general manager, Jason Cartwright.

“We are seeing the emergence of some cool titles that are a bit of a thumb of the nose to the long-winded silly titles,” he says. “For example, we now see senior management just having the title people leader.

“You see quite serious specialist roles just having the title team member.”

Cartwright says some of the job titles that pass across his desk are absurd and public sector organisations are the worst offenders.

“We fill 6800 jobs a year across Australia and some of the job titles are ridiculous.”

He cites the example of a public service employee who helped run a small team and demanded a new job title.

“He ended up with the title ‘deputy assistant manager of Team B’,” he says. “That just screams I’m not important.”

The worst offender he has seen had the title of associate vice-president of strategic solutions, stakeholder networks and collaborative solutions.

“I looked at the bloke and he just laughed,” he says. “I think Australians are pretty good at taking the mickey and seeing through things that are meaningless.”

UNSW School of Organisation and Management professor Chris Jackson says people tend to see their job title as a reflection of their social status.

“I think it is part of the prestige idea that if you have an interesting job title, you must be an interesting person,” Jackson says.

Because roles are more flexible today, specific job titles are no longer appropriate.

“People rotate around and as a result it doesn’t matter what your job title is because it describes what you do all the time,” he says.

Cartwright agrees there is an element of prestige to job titles, and some employers are willing to indulge their staff with fancy titles.

“A title is something very easy and free that an employer can give an employee to recognise achievement, promotion or seniority,” Cartwright says.

While plenty of Australian businesses may have jumped on the bloated name tag bandwagon, Cartwright says the problem is worse in the US and some parts of Europe.

A household name in US food manufacturing takes the cake, he says.

“They used to have roles which were called tasters and they are now called consumer palate simulation specialists.”

Executive by any other name does the filing CHIEF among over-used words is the term executive. Once conjuring images of high-flying “suits” such as chief executive officer or executive director, today it seems almost everyone has executive as their job title.

As a result the term is near meaningless, says Link Recruitment client services general manager Jason Cartwright.

“Executive is one of those words that just gets thrown around,” he says.

“As recruiters interviewing someone you’d ignore the term and ask, ‘What do you do?’.”

The ABC's Gruen Transfer show website decodes the role of an account executive at an advertising agency.

Account executives are junior “suits” in the agency, the website says. The word refers to the fact they “execute” tasks.

The account executive's main function is to record meetings, organise lunches and book meeting rooms and is often someone straight out of school.

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