

Finding Your *Fit* in the Workplace: The Case for Realistic Job Previews



Kelly O. Morgan, MS

*Senior Campus Manager, Lockheed Martin
Villanova HRD Alumni*

Article Summary:

Realistic Job Previews (RJPs) are an effective yet underutilized tool for attracting and retaining top talent. Much like a free trial at a gym, RJPs allow candidates to experience a job and organization before committing, providing a firsthand look at the work environment, culture, and team. This process helps improve person-organization fit, a key factor in job satisfaction and retention, with research showing that employees with low P-O fit tend to have higher turnover rates and lower job satisfaction. RJPs enable candidates to self-select based on their values and career aspirations, which benefits both the candidate and the organization. By offering a realistic view of the role and company, organizations allow candidates to make informed decisions, reducing turnover and building trust. As technology advances, tools like AI and augmented reality could make RJPs even more personalized and immersive, enhancing the hiring process and fostering long-term employee satisfaction.

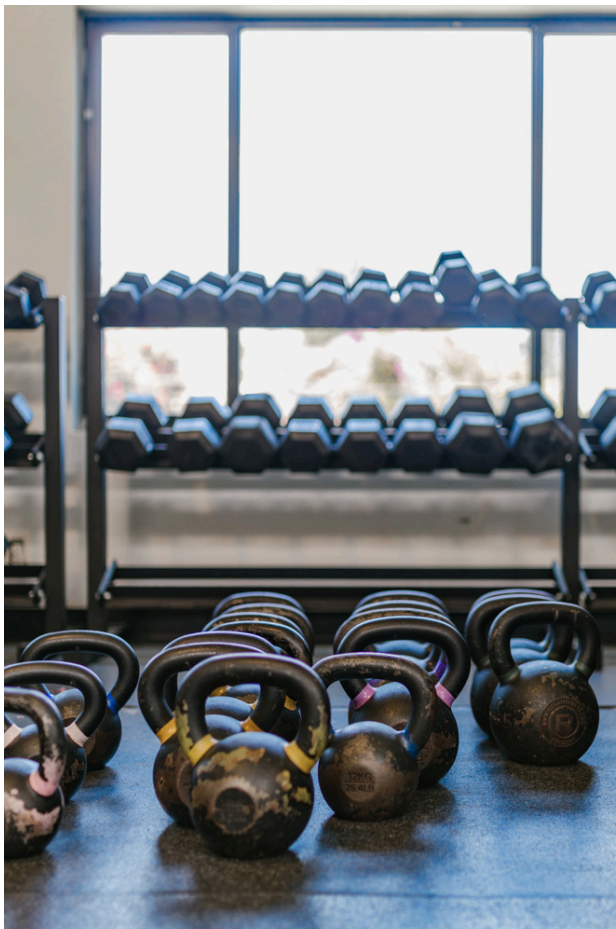
When candidates are given high-quality information and opportunities to engage with the company in a meaningful way, the realistic job preview is more likely to be mutually beneficial to both the candidate and the organization.



When it comes to attracting and retaining top talent, few tools are as effective or underutilized as the realistic job preview (RJP). Think of it as offering a behind-the-scenes look before someone commits, much like a free trial before joining a gym.

You are considering joining a new gym, but you are not sure if it's for you. You have heard great things about the state-of-the-art equipment, the energy of the classes, the reputation of the trainers, but before committing to a membership, you want to experience it for yourself. So, you take advantage of the gym's free trial week.

Realistic job previews are the professional equivalent of that free trial, offering a chance to "test drive" a job before signing on. RJP's give you a chance to "try out" an organization and get a feel for the work environment, the team, and the culture.



Research has shown that Person-Organization fit is a key predictor of job satisfaction, performance, and retention.

You might hear from current employees, participate in job simulations, or even meet your future manager. This allows you to see firsthand the company's culture and work-life balance. You might realize that the reality of the company is not what you expected. Or, conversely, you might find that it's exactly what you're looking for, and you are even more enthusiastic about taking this opportunity.

In industrial-organizational psychology, this process is called "person-organization fit" or P-O fit. Research has shown that P-O fit is a key predictor of job satisfaction, performance, and retention. Employees with low P-O fit tend to have higher turnover rates, lower job satisfaction, and retention. With RJP's, you can make a more informed decision about whether it's the right fit for you.

WARMING UP FOR SUCCESS

Thanks to your free trial, the RJP, you're now getting a feel for the company to see if it's right for you. RJP's help candidates compare the demands of the job and organizational culture with their own values and career aspirations. This process, called self-selection, benefits both the candidate and the organization, saving time, money, and resources.

But what happens when there is no free trial, no RJP given? If an organization doesn't provide RJP's, candidates might accept a job with unrealistic expectations, leading to increased job dissatisfaction and a sense of broken trust.

This can lead to higher voluntary turnover rates, as candidates often feel misled and may leave the organization soon after joining.

Remember, though, that just because you get to try out the facilities, doesn't mean you have to commit. In the same way, Human Resource leaders need to avoid viewing RJP's as exclusively a way to attract candidates, because the process can also have an adverse effect. Instead, RJP's should be used to build a genuine connection with candidates and a realistic preview of the job and organizational culture. It's important to note here that research has shown that presenting realistic job previews in a more negative light, especially earlier on in the hiring process, can be more effective in helping candidates make informed decisions. Studies have found that this approach can lead to more accurate self-selection among candidates. This allows them to get a more realistic sense of the challenges and demands of the job and decide whether it's something they're truly interested in and equipped to handle.

LISTENING TO YOUR COACH

In Olympic weightlifting, the snatch is often regarded as the most complex lift in the sport. Its dynamic movement warrants the athlete to lift a load from the floor to overhead in one fluid motion. It is highly technical, requiring synchronized movements. As the snatch is an intricate symphony of moving parts, so is the realistic job preview to the recruitment process. In both instances, an oversight of a seemingly insignificant element could lead to operational failure.

Here are a few fundamental “cues” to keep in mind while crafting your RJP's.

MAKE EVERY REP COUNT

When you're working out, you don't just want to go through the motions, right? You want to make sure you're performing each exercise with intention and purpose, so you can get the most out of it. The same thing applies to the recruitment processes. Gone are the days of the old “post and pray” method and hoping for the best. Hiring managers must make sure they're sending the right signals to jobseekers.

This is where signaling theory comes in; the idea that an organization's values, culture, and diversity are communicated subconsciously through externally facing marketing, like job postings and social media. It's not just about throwing some buzzwords out there - it's about being intentional about the messages the company is sending, so jobseekers can get a sense of what it's really like to work for your organization.

So, how can you practice good signaling theory? It starts with being clear, honest, and consistent in your messaging. Use transparent job descriptions and authentic employee testimonials to give jobseekers a sense of what they can expect from your organization. By doing so, you can reduce misunderstandings and misalignments, and foster better long-term outcomes for both parties.



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TECHNIQUE BEFORE LOAD

If you've ever been a newcomer in the gym, chances are that you needed to work on perfecting your technique long before you worried about adding weight to your bar. Similarly, a candidate's experience during an internship or RJP should prioritize meaningful work and exposure to the company culture over mere duration. If an intern spends three months doing menial tasks, their understanding of the company and their role within it will be limited. However, if they are given the opportunity to work on meaningful projects and collaborate with their full-time colleagues, their experience will be much more valuable.

Research has shown that this principle applies across various industries and forms of RJP delivery. When candidates are given high-quality information and opportunities to engage with the company in a meaningful way, the RJP is more likely to be mutually beneficial to both the candidate and the organization.

ENGAGE YOUR CORE

All the impressions and considerations listed in this article have one key component in common: organizational honesty. Remember how some candidates who experienced no RJPs at all felt misled with a sense of broken trust? Organizational honesty is exactly how it sounds – an organization's commitment to ethical principles and values, such as honesty, transparency, and accountability, in all its operations. Simply put, realistic job previews and any factor contributing to the production of RJPs, always leads back to organizational honesty. They set the tone for organizational culture and continue to be a top trait of employers that jobseekers hold in high value.



When a jobseeker or employee lives through an experience without organizational honesty, the impact can be deeply harmful. An organization risks damaging their reputation, trust in leadership is eroded, productivity declines, attrition rises, and the communal feeling of betrayal could foster a toxic work environment.

GETTING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

When COVID-19 hit, organizations weren't just competing for talent—they were competing against the digital burnout that potential candidates were experiencing. With prolonged remote work, virtual meetings, and digital communication, lengthy online hiring processes were a marathon that jobseekers did not want to run. Since many of the usual in-person recruitment tools, like office tours or face-to-face assessments were no longer viable, organizations were forced to find new ways to attract talent that stood out against competitors. Organizations faced talent acquisitions hurdles once again when the Great Resignation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) and the concept of "quiet quitting" came into play. Now that we've navigated the digital landscape, it's time to rethink our approach to RJPs to keep pace with where the future of technology is headed. Artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) hold the promise to mold RJPs that can be highly personalized, offering candidates insights that align with their specific skills, values, and career aspirations like never before.

There is a growing trend among early career hires to prioritize career trajectory over monetary compensation. How insightful would it be, then, for organizations to offer a sort of "future self" interaction with the help of AI?

Candidates could input their current role (or in a student's case, their internship experience and curricula, perhaps) against the role they intend to apply for. Then, a potential roadmap of their career is formulated right in front of their eyes. Data from current employees in similar roles or of similar backgrounds could be used to paint an archetype picture of what a first promotion or long-term career growth would look like and to promote resources the organization offers to support their aspirations. This display invites candidates to picture themselves embarking on a path of personal and professional growth they could only find at that organization.

Augmented Reality, meanwhile, opens doors to immersive, interactive experiences that allow candidates to "try on" roles in real time. Taking the idea of employee testimonials a step further, organizations could form "Day in the Life" AR experiences for their most critically necessary roles. The interaction could offer simulated daily tasks of the role, a preview of company culture, a walk-through of relevant sections of the work site, and even problem-solving scenarios with typical challenges they may face on the job. This delivery of futuristic RJP implementation allows for an organization to demonstrate commitment to enhancing candidate experience in an authentic way, while showcasing their innovative utilization of advancing technology.

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YOUR NEW PERSONAL BEST

RJPs offer a dynamic and innovative approach to transform talent practices. As new technologies like artificial intelligence and augmented reality continue to evolve, it's time to rethink how we engage with prospective employees and provide them with a "free trial" that prepares them for success. Today's hiring landscape is dynamic, and organizations need to capitalize by showing off their malleability and forward-thinking mindset. By boasting their morality and steering future operations with new innovative tools, companies can not only attract top talent,

but also cement a foundation for long-term employee satisfaction and retention. A career is like a journey of fitness - it's not just about showing up, it's about making progress, setting goals, and celebrating successes along the way. By embracing RJPs and the latest innovations in recruitment technology, companies can revolutionize their hiring process and create a culture of growth and connection that sets them apart from the competition. All that's left to do is sign up.



MEET THE AUTHOR

Kelly O. Morgan, MS

*Senior Campus Manager,
Lockheed Martin
Villanova HRD Alumni*

Kelly is a 2024 graduate of Villanova's HRD program and former Research Assistant in the Diversity Recruiting & Retention Lab at Penn State. She has dedicated her career to advancing realistic job previews (RJPs) for more effective hiring. She has contributed to the field through her work outside of the office, including authoring *Let's Get Real: The Value of Realistic Job Previews in Recruitment Strategy*. Recognized for her expertise, Kelly has helped reshape talent acquisition at global aerospace and defense leader Lockheed Martin, guiding the optimization of hiring across the enterprise as an Early Career Recruitment Lead.

