



**Tips To Help
Create and
Distribute Your
Company
Handbook**

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Letter From the President

Thank you for your interest in downloading Tips to Help Create and Distribute Your Company Handbook.

This eBook can be useful to your business because it helps you navigate the HR wasteland and gives helpful tips and guidelines to build an effective, practical and well communicated company handbook. Many times, organizations get stressed out about creating or updating a handbook. Have fun with it and realize that it's an opportunity to communicate what's important and unique about your organization.



A well thought out and professional handbook helps organizations set clear expectations. It is not just a set of meaningless rules. It helps everyone get on the same page, so they can focus on their job.

Created the right way, it is a tool that can help with culture because it reflects what's important to the organization. I hope you find this as a useful resource to keep in your HR Toolbox.

ConnectedHR is a Professional Human Resources Support and Services firm so please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any other needs or further questions.

Mark D'Agostino
President, ConnectedHR

Introduction

Employee Handbooks; they're the foundation of your company policy and an awesome opportunity.

As an introduction to a workplace, the Employee Handbook communicates your expectations as the business owner.



We will take you through the basic, must-have rules that need to be in your handbook. These are the rules you've always seen in handbooks but may not know why they're so vital.

We will help you avoid the common mistakes many employers make. From legal compliance to regular updates, it's important for your handbook to be a resource, not a liability.

Together, Connected HR and our clients have created numerous effective HR policies. This guide is another tool in service to that.

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CHAPTER ONE

WHY HANDBOOKS ARE IMPORTANT

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WHAT IS AN EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK?

Why Do I Need One For My Business?

An employee handbook is a document that outlines the critical company policies and operating procedures in one spot for your employees. Whether it's in digital form or printed, it's essential for every company to create a handbook and for every employee to review.

When drafting a handbook for the first time, it's important to include all the basics:

- Dress code
- Attendance
- Discrimination
- Paid and Unpaid leave
- Theft/destruction of company property
- Harassment
- Disability
- Equal opportunity employment

This list is always growing, as shifts in society and technology happen, it's important to take that into account when updating your employee handbook.

Examples of this may be:

- Social media conduct
- Phone usage at work
- Bullying
- LGBTQ rights

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CHAPTER TWO

HANDBOOK BEST PRACTICES

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KEEP THESE TIPS IN MIND:

1. *Stay On Top Of Legal Compliance*

More than anything else, your handbook needs to be legally relevant. Every company needs to adhere to anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, at-will work laws, and anything else required by local and state governments.

- Anti-Discrimination policies include those regarding race, gender, disabilities, and age. It is illegal to base hiring, firing, pay and advancement on any of these qualities.
- Equal Opportunity policies include those referring to wage and hiring practice involving those covered by anti-discrimination policies, as well as people of differing national origin, immigrants, and veterans.
- At-Will employment is the condition between employers and employees allowing either to terminate the working relationship at any time, provided the adequate and legal reason is given by the employer. Every state except Montana has At-Will employment.

Many handbooks will outline these, reaffirm your commitment to uphold them, and provide access to more elaborative resources. The US Department of Labor has an in-depth section pertaining to these and other requirements.

2. *Don't Go Crazy With Company Policies*

Employees from every industry have a story about an absurd or overbearing company policy. These range from official languages, withholding pay, social media restrictions, and lots more. Policies like these are just ridiculous, they're often illegal.

- Company policies requiring that employees speak English only while at work are becoming increasingly common across the US. The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) has ruled that this runs afoul of anti-discrimination laws unless the employer can show it's vital to day-to-day business.
- Many companies have rules regarding social media use but try not to take it too far. Any policies limiting free speech or expression, or requires certain messages to be disseminated by employees, violates the National Labor Rights Act of 1935.
- Withholding pay for any reason is illegal in every state. Even if a company has rules about overtime, or an employee punches in early, or out late, or said employee is responsible for damaging company property, an employer may not withhold wages. This is commonly seen in the retail and food service industries, where companies attempt to penalize cashiers whose drawers are short at the end of their shift.

Essentially, a policy is illegal when it impinges on employee rights. The National Labor Relations Board investigates situations where free speech is involved, which is the majority of cases.

3. *Have Employees Sign the Handbook*

This one's easy. After considering the extremely important federal regulations above, you want to ensure that your employees have as well.

Also, having your employees submit signed certificates agreeing with the content proves that they received the employee handbook, protecting you from many potential lawsuits.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

This handbook provides basic information regarding employment with [COMPANY NAME] It has been provided as a guide and reference only. [COMPANY NAME] reserves the right to amend, modify or eliminate any policy or procedure at any time.

The company also reserves the right to hire, transfer, promote, discipline or otherwise manage employees as it deems appropriate.

- I understand that the policies, rules, procedures and benefits described in the Employee Handbook and the other Policies and Procedures are subject to change at the company's sole discretion, and that should the content be changed in any way, the company may require an additional signature from me to indicate that I am aware of and understand any new policies.
- I acknowledge and agree that the company may change these policies and benefits as it deems advisable to meet the needs of the company and its employees, and reserves the right to interpret and apply or not apply such policies in any given case.
- Furthermore, I acknowledge that none of the policies and procedures set forth in the Employee Handbook are a contract of employment or change the at-will status of my employment.

By signing below, I acknowledge complete understanding of the above points.

This is to acknowledge that I have received the [COMPANY NAME] Employee Handbook, and that I am responsible for knowing and complying with its contents.

4. *Less is More*

Be concise. Summarize benefits whose full descriptions can be found in a separate packet. Provide a general outline of the most important policies and then provide a URL or printed document that goes into further detail. If your handbook is too thick, it won't be read and will be very difficult to update and edit.

Going into too much detail on things like insurance plans means that it will need to be changed every time the company plans slightly shift every year.

Contact forms are better as PDFs on the company server, rather than a quickly obsolete directory at the back of your handbook. Remember, it's a handbook, not a phonebook.

5. *Keep Your Employee Handbook Current*

Regardless of how many years you've had your handbook, schedule an annual review of the material. Look at how the industry has changed.

Look at what federal and state laws have been changed or introduced. Have your in-house attorney, or a hired attorney, check the legality of each policy.

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CHAPTER THREE

HANDBOOK MISTAKES TO AVOID

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WATCH OUT FOR THESE COMMON MISTAKES:

Waiting Until You Need a Handbook

Waiting for any reason to develop a handbook eliminates its most vital purpose. You can't prevent a lawsuit after it happens. Your employees shouldn't need to assume things about your company, and before you think "Some things are obvious" remember that every office, and every person, is different and your version of "obvious" is not shared by everybody. A company that depends on an unwritten understanding of conduct is opening themselves up to litigation.

Furthermore, the content within a handbook is often referenced in these lawsuits, and employers can use such writing as an effective defense. It's a tool. Use it.

Overdoing Your Employee Handbook

Think about every employee handbook you've ever been given. Did you read it or flip through it? These books are often huge stacks of papers bundled together in outlining every legal statute and minutiae that impacts your decision for each particular policy. Those handbooks don't get read, and they're difficult to reference when you need to.

A well-written employee handbook should be under 100 pages long. If it takes more than one paragraph to explain the dress code, you're doing it wrong. When it comes to more complex issues (ie. harassment, FMLA, etc), definitely elaborate enough to be clear. Keep in mind, a long-winded section won't be read, and you may as well not have written it.

Making It Only About Policies

You want your handbook to be read. Focus on the reader- think about who they are. Typically, this is a new hire. They're being handed a lot of different material, possibly training, possibly dealing with a bunch of other manuals. A handbook isn't needed every day, and it won't be read if it's too dry.

Some ways you can add some personality to your handbook include:

- Talk about company culture and mission
- Explain what you envision for the company
- Write a welcome
- Share your stories about the company
- Share important learning moments you've experienced
- Focus on the culture
- Focus on your mission
- Focus on the lessons that define what those are and why.

There's a difference between boilerplate rules and regulations, and the thoughts of the CEO. The latter is far more interesting to your employees.

Not Taking It Seriously

An employee handbook can be done internally. If you've already set up a fully functioning HR department, if you've worked with HR policy in the past, you can absolutely write the handbook yourself. You likely have the experience to do so, and the resources to have an in-house lawyer, or other qualified people, evaluate the sections that deal closely with litigation and worker's rights. If you can handle all that, you'll likely be all set.

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CHAPTER FOUR

HANDBOOK DISTRIBUTION

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DIGITIZING YOUR EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Handbooks are a pain. They get damaged. They get lost. If you make any changes, they need to be reprinted and redistributed.

As companies grow, different employment laws begin to apply to them, which means you may be reprinting your manual every time you expand and, as you gain more employees, you're going to need to print more and more. In those cases, out of date handbooks, that aren't in line with current workplace laws, actually become a liability.

Most companies already have an online portal for their HR functions- a third party site that employees use for calling off or getting insurance updates. Many companies outsource their entire HR department to professional firms. You already want to make things easier for yourself.

Many companies, especially ones where workers are on job sites and may need to adhere to safety and OSHA requirements, issue company tablets. Use them like clipboards that allow project managers to communicate with each other, give updates and reference company material. That material should include your Handbook.

Updates become easier and you have an opportunity to be more elaborative- we often try to keep companies from handing out phonebook-sized manuals to new workers. Every policy should be outlined in your material, but good handbooks tell employees where they can find more information. A digitized page can have a link.

Get Your Handbook Started Today!

Your employee handbook can be the backbone of your office; it's essential to take the time to ensure it's done right. Connected HR provides services to help create, maintain and implement employee handbooks for all business sizes.

Start With An HR Audit



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