

Employee handbook: 6 Must-have policies for your manual

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When employees join an organisation, they need to understand how the business operates and how they, as employees, will be expected to contribute and behave within the organisation. Joining a new organisation for an employee can be both exciting and a daunting experience, but with access to an employee handbook, an employee will know how the organisation operates and what to do when encountering certain situations.

What is an Employee handbook?

An employee handbook collects regulations, procedures, working conditions, and behavioural standards that govern employee behaviour in a specific business. Employee handbooks typically contain company information, a welcome letter from the president or CEO, the company's mission, vision, purpose, values, and broad strategic goals, the company's commitment to employees, and various non-compete, non-disclosure, and employee confidentiality agreements, if the company employs them. It also covers issues like work attendance expectations, ie. Working hours, leave options/ paid-time-off, overtime, etc., company property, compensation and benefits, and anything else the employee may need to know regarding the organisation and their welfare.

There are various advantages to having an employee handbook. The book outlines the workplace dos and don'ts, which helps an organisation run more smoothly. It promotes employee accountability and ensures consistent job performance by understanding what is expected of them. An employee handbook is also seen as a way for employers to defend themselves against charges of discrimination or unfair treatment. It is a quick reference guide to the company's rules and procedures and an outline of management's expectations. Upon joining an organisation, an employee must be given a copy of the handbook during induction to make them aware of their responsibilities and what they can expect from the organisation.

6 Must-have policies to have in your handbook

In a 2018 Small Business Compliance Survey conducted by Comply, it was found that while 84% of businesses offered employee handbooks and formal written policies, and 85% required their employees to acknowledge receipt of these policies, there were some essential policies not stipulated clearly within

the workplace. For example, 56% of these small businesses did not have a formal weapons policy in the workplace, and 47% did not have a social media policy.

Today's workplaces are evolving, and workplace regulations must adapt to reflect these changes. By revising employee rules and manuals to reflect current trends, you can help create clear boundaries, avoid workplace misunderstandings, and ultimately safeguard your company. Developing or updating your handbook is essential to keep the language straightforward, simple, and relevant to the business. When creating this document, it is essential to make sure that it is in line with the country's labour act or labour statutes in which the organisation is operating. Key policies that affect how your employees function within the organisation or what is expected of them must be outlined.

To start, here are six key policies that should be found in your employee handbook:

Conditions of Service Policy

Under this policy, the following issues can be covered:

- Hours of work including breaks and rest periods if any
- Leave options:
 - Annual leave
 - Maternity leave
 - Sick leave
 - Special leave
 - Compassionate leave
 - Unpaid leave
- Working and public holidays
- Overtime

This policy must be written out and in line with the labour law, outlining the procedures, i.e. how to apply for leave, and the number of days one can take under each leave option. Possible exemptions that the organisation can make can also be highlighted to avoid any potential confusion. This policy should also specify which holidays the firm observes, including which holidays the organisation closes for and how employees will be rewarded for working on holidays if the company is a restaurant or other business that stays open on holidays.

Remuneration & Benefits Policy

In this policy, the following can be covered: salary administration-how salary will be paid and how often, possible allowances that one will be entitled to, potential benefits, i.e. medical aid, funeral cover etc., pay grade structure, overtime payment, bonus payout and how one can be eligible for a bonus etc. "The last thing you want to do when you hire someone is to surprise them about when their paycheck is going to arrive," says Paul Rowson (Managing Director of *World at Work*, a global human resources association). He goes on to say that, "You want to let people know how often they will get paid and how they will get paid, do you offer direct deposit, and how many pay periods there are in a year."

Again clarity is a need in this section, employees must be clear in terms of what will be due to them in terms of compensation and benefits that they will be eligible for depending on their level. There is also a need to outline the procedures involved when requesting certain benefits i.e. applying for a loan. Employees may not always remember all the benefits you talked about during their interviews. The employee handbook can be helpful in reminding employees of these benefits.

Standards of Conduct/ Code of Conduct Policy

This policy will act as a roadmap of how employees will be expected to work and it will also help define the company culture. This policy will guide employees in understanding the appropriate behaviour expected within the organisation. Some of the basic information that can be included in this section is:

- Dress code and grooming standards
- Ethics and professionalism
- Confidentiality
- Workplace safety
- Use of company property

This section must be written, removing any possibility of ambiguity and outline possible consequences should one fail to abide by the outlined statutes, i.e. disciplinary action.

Non-discrimination policy

The Non-discrimination policy is an important policy to have within your staff handbook. This policy outlines how your organisation will not tolerate discrimination, and possible consequences should such acts take place. This policy will cover discrimination in the following forms:

- Age
- Gender
- Race/ Ethnicity

- Religion
- Disability

One can discriminate against their colleague or subordinate without being aware that they are discriminating, in this case, it is essential to then highlight what will constitute or be considered discrimination in your organisation. It will also be essential to highlight the procedures that one can take should one be facing any form of discrimination. The idea of feeling safe and belonging in a place can help one in deciding whether to stay or leave an organisation.

Sexual Harassment Policy

Similar to the discrimination policy, this is another essential policy to have in your employee manual. Informing and educating employees through an up-to-date sexual harassment policy is critical. This policy should show the employee that the organisation has zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. Like discrimination, one can commit sexual harassment without being necessarily aware that they are harassing their colleagues or subordinates. So this policy outline what is considered or what constitutes sexual harassment and what are the possible consequences must one commit such an offence. Through this policy, the organisation must show how victims of harassment will be protected and how it is safe for them to report such incidences when they take place.

Remote Work Policy

The COVID 19 pandemic has brought about many changes in the workplace, for example, many companies, as a way of protecting their employees from the deadly virus, have resorted to employees working from home. Considering this, a remote work policy would be a good policy to add to an employee handbook in this current environment.

Questions to address in a remote worker policy include:

- Who is eligible for remote work?
- Are there any limitations on remote work?
- How will you monitor remote workers?

It is important to outline in this policy the organisation's position regarding the issue of working remotely and how the organisation has a right to terminate the option at any time, and factors considered when employees are working from home.

The employee handbook is critical to the growth and structure of your company since it informs employees about what the employer expects and what the company will deliver in terms of a productive working environment. Once developed, legal experts must review this document to ensure that it does not contradict the labour act. It is also essential that employees know how important this document is and how different it is from their contract of employment. Additionally, the organisation can add a form for 'Acknowledgement of Receipt' where employees sign to show that they have received the handbook, gone through the document and understood its contents.

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