

Using Employee Handbooks to Implement and Reinforce Your Policies

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The importance of well-developed employee policies is clear – without them, you may find yourself facing a situation with no clear guidance to resolve it. Making sure those policies are known and adhered to, however, is just as important. Your employee handbook is often the best way to accomplish this. Your handbook is an opportunity for you to communicate with your employees in a variety of ways – build morale, explain policies, establish procedures. In addition, it can also provide guidance for management in dealing with difficult situations as they arise. It helps guide the application of rules to ensure consistency and fairness.

In order to be effective, your handbook must contain information about the issues you are likely to encounter. While the actual content of the policies will certainly vary from organization to organization (no two nonprofits have the same needs and issues), there are certain areas which you should be sure to consider including in your handbook:

Your handbook should include policies relating to:

- At-will employment
- Harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Family Medical Leave Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act / Michigan Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act - (generally, the employee must inform employer of disability and need for a reasonable accommodation)
- Workplace violence
- Military leave – (generally, federal and state laws govern)
- Electronic mail and internet use
- COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Reconciliation Act)
- Redressing grievances

Your handbook should also include an acknowledgement form that each employee must sign and return. This will help avoid any future disputes about whether the employee knew about your policies. A sample of an employee acknowledgement form is included at the end of this publication.

Your handbook may also include policies regarding:

- Your mission statement
- Employer's expectations

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- Working hours
- Dress code
- Attendance
- Pay days
- Deductions from Pay
- Alcohol and drug use and testing
- Vacation time
- Holidays and holiday pay
- Benefits
- Bereavement leave
- Safety
- Progressive discipline (with a restatement of at-will policy)

While these policies are more discretionary than those in the previous list, including them will help ensure that your expectations and intentions are adequately communicated to your employees, providing them with guidelines for their performance.

A Few Notes About Grievance Policies

Employee grievance policies are often the most frequently referenced portion of an employee handbook. Whether or not you choose to actually include them in your handbook, it is important that you carefully develop policies that fit with your organization. These policies must be carefully drafted and implemented to provide a regimented way for employees to state their grievances and for you to demonstrate that the organization takes those grievances seriously. They should include, at a minimum:

- **Require** employees to prepare a **written** statement of the grievance.
- Designate a **number** of **specifically-identified** individuals to whom the grievance may be directed:

Examples: The employee's manager, the human resources director and an officer of the company.

- Establish and adhere to a procedure for reviewing grievances and communicating the organization's response to the employee
- Take steps to prevent retaliation against the employee



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Whether these policies are included in the handbook or a separate document, it is important that they be stated as part of written grievance policy that the employee signs.

SAMPLE EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

The employee handbook describes important information about **{YOUR COMPANY}**, and I understand that I should consult the **{DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE}** regarding any questions not answered in the handbook. I have entered into my employment relationship with **{YOUR COMPANY}** voluntarily and acknowledge that there is no specified length of employment. Accordingly, either I or **{YOUR COMPANY}** can terminate the relationship at will, with or without cause, at any time, so long as there is no violation of applicable federal or state law.

I also understand and agree that any agreement contrary to or modifying this at will provision is not valid or enforceable unless it is in writing and signed by the {DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE} of the company.

Since the information, policies, and benefits described here are necessarily subject to change, I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur, except to **{YOUR COMPANY}**'s policy of employment-at-will. All such changes will be communicated through official notices, and I understand that revised information may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies. Only the **{DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE}** of **{YOUR COMPANY}** has the ability to adopt any revisions to the policies in this handbook.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that this handbook is neither a contract of employment nor a legal document. I have received the handbook, and I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it.

EMPLOYEE'S NAME (printed): _____

EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

This publication is for information only, and is not a substitute for legal advice. For more information on your specific situation, and to be sure that there have been no changes to the law, please contact Community Legal Resources at 313/962-3171.

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