



Innovative
BENEFIT PLANNING

DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN CREATING AN EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

The employee handbook is an important communication resource for your employees that also limits your company's legal liability. It can be tough to decide what does and does not belong in the employee handbook, but these tips can help you along the way.



1. **DO include an Acknowledgement of Receipt:** Keeping the above in mind, it is good practice to include an Acknowledgement of Receipt at the end of the handbook. All employees, new and old, should have a signed acknowledgement on file. The Handbook is NOT a Contract, but it will show that the employee has read and understands the policies and procedures you have in place.



2. **DON'T house all company policies:** The handbook is a place to communicate policies, procedures and benefits. Although the handbook might sound like a good place to house all company policies, a handbook is not the place for manager or department policy manuals. These should be created separate from the handbook. For organizations with employees in more than one location, it would also be wise to house state-specific policies, procedures and benefits in a separate addendum.



3. **DO write to your audience:** When writing your handbook, it is important to write the handbook to your audience: your entire employee population. Refrain from verbiage that will be hard for them to understand and policies that are not relevant to them. Do not include employee names or other information that may change frequently. Don't commit to a policy that cannot be enforced, like a no-fault attendance policy or strict progressive discipline policies. Avoid rigidity. Do not include personal appearance policies or personal/romantic relationships policies (except prohibit owners, officers, executives from in-office dating) if they will not be enforced or are impractical/unrealistic.



4. **DON'T limit your ability to use discretion:** Above all, it is important to avoid language which unduly limits discretion and use language that leaves you some wiggle room. For example, say an employee has an extreme medical issue on their way into work and is rushed to the hospital. If you have written into your policies that missing work under any circumstance is a punishable offense, you are leaving yourself little room to show compassion to this employee. By doing so, it would leave the employer vulnerable to another employee's lesser excuse for missing a day of work and could violate disability or leave laws.



5. **DO evaluate the handbook on an ongoing basis:** Once the handbook is written, that is not the end of it. As the company grows, different laws may apply. Things that used to work, may no longer fit in with the company culture. For these reasons and more, the handbook must be periodically reviewed and revised to reflect these changes. It is important to know who will be tasked with this and how often you would like it to be done. It is also important for supervisors to be trained on existing policies and any new ones that come into play.

Although you might want to address every possible question your employees may have in the handbook, there will always be a question you did not consider. Make sure to address what department an employee can go to with any questions, comments or concerns. Remember to humanize your handbook, while also clearly carving out the guidelines by which your organization will operate.

Innovative HR Consulting

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