

Employee Handbook Essentials: What Policies Are Missing From Your Handbook?





Employee handbooks and manuals are not typically enjoyable reading material.

In fact, after receiving the handbook on the first day or during the first week of employment, some employees will never look at it again, and instead relegate it to a rarely used drawer, cabinet or shelf, only to be searched out in the event of a potential problem.

But that's exactly why employee handbooks are vital to companies – they provide the structure for settling possible conflicts before they arise.

A company's employee handbook provides its workforce with a step-by-step guide to success, establishing a code of conduct for employees to follow, providing a framework for supervisors to follow when addressing any instances of misconduct, and acting as its first line of defense against lawsuits or liability claims.



Why do employee handbooks matter?

While employers are not necessarily required by law to have an employee handbook, they are required to create and maintain certain employee policies (like non-discrimination, family and medical leave and sexual harassment). An employee handbook provides the perfect means of compiling and distributing these policies, and can also help protect employers and employees alike.

How Employee Handbooks Protect Employers

Having an employee handbook is hardly a surefire guarantee that things won't go wrong, but it can serve as a first line of defense if they do. In the event that an employer is faced with claims of unfair termination, accusations of regulatory noncompliance, or a frivolous lawsuit or liability claim, the policies contained within the handbook can help an employer defend against those allegations.

How Employee Handbooks Protect Employees

For employees, company policies provide a blueprint that outlines the boundaries of acceptable behavior. By clearly defining expectations for employee conduct, the employee handbook can offer the support an employee might need if a customer, coworker or vendor pressures them to push the envelope.

What does a good employee policy look like?

A well-written policy should:

- + Establish the objective of the policy.
- + Explain why the policy is necessary.
- + Identify to whom the policy applies.
- + Clearly outline acceptable and unacceptable behavior under the policy.
- + Warn of the consequences if an employee fails to comply with the policy.

Policies should also neither be overly broad nor overly specific, instead allowing the employer enough discretion to make sound decisions regarding their workforce and comply with applicable laws.

Below is an example of an attendance policy that might be found in an employee handbook:

Unnecessary absenteeism and tardiness is expensive, disruptive and places an unfair burden on other employees and your supervisor. All employees are expected to report to work on time and on a regular basis. It is your responsibility to notify your immediate supervisor of any absences as far in advance of your starting time as possible. If your immediate supervisor is not available, Human Resources/another member of management should be notified.

If you fail to give such notification, you will have to explain an unexcused absence and could be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Unnecessary or frequent absences will have an adverse impact on your promotional opportunities. If you are absent for three consecutive days without giving notification, your absence may be considered a voluntary resignation, effective the first day of the absence. Absences not covered by vacation, holiday, floating holiday or sick benefit may be deducted from your compensation as permissible by law. Absences covered under the Family and Medical Leave Act are not subject to disciplinary action.

Employee Handbook Checklist

This checklist outlines many of the possible sections an employer might choose to include in its employee handbook. You can use it to conduct an audit of your existing handbook, or as a guide when creating a handbook for the very first time.

NOTE: This checklist is not intended to be exhaustive. Depending on where a company does business, or if the business is a federal contractor, additional policies may be required. Employers should consult with their HR outsourcing providers or employment law counsel to determine what additional policies may be required.

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Adoption Assistance Policy — Explains the Company’s policy for reimbursing certain expenses associated with adoption.
	Alternative Working Schedules Policy — Explains the alternative schedule options available to employees whose lives do not allow a standard working schedule.
	Anti-Discrimination Policy — Explains that the Company does not discriminate against any protected traits, or allow discrimination of any kind in the workplace.
	At-Will Employment Statement — Explains that either party can terminate employment at any time, and that there should be no illusion of a contractual agreement between employees and the Company.
	Attendance & Standard Working Hours — Explains the Company’s expectation that employees must be regular and punctual in attendance due to absenteeism and tardiness placing a burden on the Company and its employees.
	Background Check Policy — Explains that the Company performs background checks as part of ensuring that quality employees who have performed well in the past are hired.
	Business Expense Reimbursement Policy — Explains that the Company will reimburse employees for necessary and reasonable travel expenses related to the normal conduct of business.
	COBRA Benefits — Gives an overview of the Company’s compliance with the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, P.L. 99 272, and later amendments, otherwise known as COBRA.
	Code of Ethics Policy — Informs the employee of the Company’s Code of Ethics; it goes into detail on the Company’s prohibition of improper payments, political contributions, reporting to management, antitrust laws and exchange of information with competitors.
	Communicable Disease Policy — Explains the procedure for dealing with communicable diseases in the workplace. It defines “communicable disease” and explains that the Company does not discriminate against individuals with communicable diseases.
	Company Car Policy — Details the provision of Company cars for business use to certain employees, upon approval.

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Company Credit Card Policy — Explains the guidelines for use of a Company credit card, and why the cards are provided to certain employees.
	Complaint Policy — Explains the Company’s goal to have open communication with employees and details how they should go about voicing complaints or grievances.
	Confidential Information & Company Property — Details the importance of protecting the Company’s confidential information and property, and the guidelines for doing so.
	Conflicts of Interest — Explains that employees should always act with the Company’s best interest in mind, and should not put themselves in a situation that conflicts with the Company’s best interest.
	Contagious Illness Policy — Explains that the Company’s goal is to maintain a healthy workplace for all persons, and in order to do so the Company evaluates contagious illnesses to determine whether or not an employee with a contagious illness will pose a threat to the health of himself or herself, other employees or customers.
	Customer Complaint Policy — Details the customer complaint process and how such complaints should be handled by the Company and its employees.
	Direct Deposit Policy — Explains direct deposit policy and the advantages of using direct deposit.
	Disciplinary Action Policy — While each employee’s relationship with the Company is at-will, and a disciplinary procedure is not followed in all circumstances, the Disciplinary Action policy explains the Company’s basic approach to discipline.
	Diversity Policy — Explains that the Company encourages and welcomes diversity, recognizing it as a key competitive advantage.
	Domestic Partnership Policy — Explains that the Company promotes acceptance of diversity, specifically in regard to sexual orientation, and, because of this, provides the same benefits to registered domestic partners and their families as it does to legally married individuals and their families.
	Dress Code — Explains the Company’s general dress code and reasoning behind it.
	Driving While on Company Business — Sets the expectations for employee behavior while driving on Company business.
	Drug-Free Workplace Policy — Explains the Company’s expectation that employees will not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol while working, and establish requirements for employees to notify the Company within a certain time frame if they are convicted under any criminal drug statutes for a violation occurring while the employee was working.
	Educational Assistance Program — Explains the Company’s Educational Assistance Program that reimburses employees for costs associated with furthering their education, assuming that the courses will assist employees in performing their current job functions, or will help them along their intended career path within the Company.
	Emergency Action Plan — Details the Company’s procedures in different types of emergency situations (fire, medical, violence, etc.).

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Employee Classification — Lists the different classifications of employees and the criteria for each one.
	Employee Discount Policy — Explains any discount(s) offered to employees of the Company and what the discount(s) can be used for.
	Employee Fraternalization Policy — Sets the boundaries for employee fraternization, and explains the behavior expectations for employees regarding personal and/or romantic interactions between employees in the workplace.
	Employee Referral Bonus Policy — Explains that the Company provides a bonus to employees who refer candidates that end up being hired.
	Employer-Offered Insurance — Explains that the Company provides group insurance plans to full-time employees and provides an overview of how the costs are shared (the percentage the employer pays versus the percentage the employee pays).
	Employer-Provided Mobile Devices Policy — Explains the guidelines for using employer-provided mobile devices, and explains which employees are generally provided such mobile devices.
	Employment of Relatives Policy — Details that hiring and/or promotion decisions must take into account that immediate family members may not have a direct supervisor-subordinate relationship, create an adverse effect on work performance or create a conflict of interest.
	Employment Taxes & Voluntary Deductions — Details the deductions that will come out of each employee's paychecks. In addition to taxes, this includes the optional deductions for benefit coverage, of which a portion will be paid by the employer.
	Employment Termination — Explains the different circumstances under which an employee may be terminated (resignation, termination or layoff), provides notice period expectations for employees who choose to resign, and details other situations that may result in termination.
	Equal Employment Opportunity — Explains that the Company provides an equal employment opportunity to all individuals and values a diverse workforce.
	Facility Access & Visitors — Explains the Company's goal of maintaining maximum security and safety at a minimum inconvenience to employees. It details the guidelines that help to maintain this safety and security, including the requirement that visitors be escorted by authorized personnel at all times, and that only certain doors are unlocked at specific times.
	Federal Family & Medical Leave Policy — Explains the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
	Flextime Policy — Explains the Company's use of flextime, which allows employees to determine their own work schedule as long as they are present between certain hours of the day, work a certain amount of hours per week, or meet certain production quotas.

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Funeral/Bereavement Leave — Explains that the Company understands employees may need time to grieve in the event of the death of an immediate family member, and the amount of time off work the Company offers to employees who've suffered such a loss.
	General Computer Usage Policy — Explains the importance of safeguarding corporate information assets, and the guidelines for Company computer use.
	Harassment Policy — Details that the Company will not tolerate harassment of any kind, including harassment related to any characteristics that are protected under law, and that the policy applies to all persons involved with the Company in some way.
	I-9 Immigration Reform — Explains that the Company will only employ persons who are legally eligible to work in the United States, in compliance with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.
	Improper Payments & Gifts Policy — Explains the Company's prohibition of payments or gifts that might be reasonably expected to interfere with the exercise of independent and objective judgment in making or participating in business decisions.
	Injury & Illness Reporting Policy — Explains the importance of and expectation that employees will immediately report work-related injuries and illnesses to the Company.
	Internal Transfer or Promotion Policy — Explains that movement and advancement within the company is encouraged, employees may be transferred or promoted at times, and that moves within the company may be management- or employee-initiated.
	Jury Duty — Explains that the Company will pay the difference between jury duty pay and regular wages for days that employees are unable to report to work due to jury service, as long as the employee has been employed by the Company for at least 90 days prior.
	Lunch and Rest Periods — Explains the amount of time allotted to employees for lunch breaks and rest periods, and that these breaks are unpaid.
	Media Relations Policy — Details the procedure for responding to media inquiries, and also explains who is authorized to provide statements to the media regarding Company business.
	Military Leave — Explains that the Company provides military leave to service members, and details that the employee will not be required to use vacation time for military duty (training or service), but if he or she chooses to, the full regular vacation pay will be received.
	Mission Statement — Explains the Company's mission, details how superior employees are selected and gives an overview of how the Company intends to fulfill its mission.
	Nursing Mothers — Explains the Company's commitment to providing lactation accommodation to mothers returning to work following the birth of a child.
	Off-Hours Company Smartphone Use Policy for Non-Exempt Employees — Explains requirements for off-hours use of employer-provided smartphones by non-exempt employees, and why such use is not compensated.

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Online Social Networking Policy — Explains that employees must be careful to protect the Company’s reputation in their use of online social networking sites
	Open Door Policy — Explains that the Company encourages open communication between employees and management, and that concerns should be voiced so that a resolution may be agreed upon.
	Orientation Period — Explains the orientation period (the first 90 days of employment) in which employees undergo training and are directed by their supervisors.
	Overtime Pay — Explains how employees are compensated for hours worked in excess of 40 hours each week, and which employees are eligible to receive overtime pay.
	Paid Time Off — Details the amount of paid time off (PTO) that employees are eligible to earn each month, based on status (full- or part-time).
	Parental School Leave — Explains that, because the Company understands the value of parental involvement with a child’s education, employees are allowed to use a portion of their allotted sick leave annually to attend school functions or activities related to their children’s education, as long as prior notice is provided.
	Pay Periods & Check Distribution — Explains when and how employees will be paid, including in the case of special circumstances like holidays or work absences.
	Performance Evaluation Policy — Explains that management will provide ongoing performance feedback to each employee, and may, at times, perform formal performance evaluations.
	Personnel Records Policy — Details the content that employee personnel files contain and the employee’s responsibility for keeping pertinent information up to date with the Company.
	Phone Call Policy — Explains that the Company provides phones to employees for business use, and details appropriate use of Company phones.
	Physical Examination Policy — Explains that, at times, the Company requires mandatory, job-related medical examinations in order to ensure that employees can physically perform the mandatory functions of their jobs.
	Recording Devices Prohibited — Explains that the use of all types of recording devices (including camera phones) is prohibited on Company property or during working hours unless specifically permitted by the Company.
	Religious Observances — Explains the respect that the Company has for the individual beliefs of all employees, and that, because of this respect, one day of paid leave is provided annually to employees who have religious obligations on days of operation.
	Safety Policy — Explains the Company’s commitment to maintaining a safe and secure working environment, and also emphasizes the importance of reporting accidents promptly and thoroughly if they do happen.
	Salary Advance Policy — Explains whether or not the Company may grant a salary advance to an employee in an emergency situation, as well as any stipulations.

Included?	Policy Title & Description
	Severe Weather Policy — Explains the Company’s policy in the case of severe weather, and the procedure for informing employees if the Company will be closed in such circumstances.
	Sexual Harassment Policy — Explains that the Company will not tolerate sexual harassment, and that the policy applies to all persons involved with the Company.
	Sick Time — Details the definition of sick time, how it is accrued and how employees should notify the Company if they will be absent due to illness or medical reasons.
	Smoke-Free Environment Policy — Explains that the Company is a smoke-free environment and that smokers must observe the same guidelines as non-smokers regarding the frequency and length of break periods.
	Social Functions Policy — Sets the guidelines for employee behavior at Company social functions, and also gives examples of the types of social functions that may occur.
	Solicitations, Distributions & Use of Bulletin Boards — Explains that employees have the option of communicating with their co-workers about non-work events, fundraisers, etc. through the use of Company bulletin boards.
	Standards of Conduct — Provides employees with a list of examples of behaviors prohibited by the Company that will result in disciplinary action.
	Time Tracking Regulations — Explains the requirement that employees accurately record and track their hours via the Company’s preferred time tracking method (online, time cards, etc.), and should not punch in or out for another employee.
	Time Off to Vote — Explains that because the Company encourages all of its employees to vote, time off to vote is provided when the employee would otherwise not have enough time before or after work to do so.
	Vacation Policy — Details how vacation time is accrued, how employees should request to use their vacation time and how multiple, simultaneous, leave requests within a department will be handled.
	Violence in the Workplace — Makes clear the Company’s stance on violence; neither violence nor threats of violence will be tolerated.
	Weapons in the Workplace — Explains the Company’s policy on employees (licensed or not) carrying or possessing weapons on Company property.
	Welcome and Purpose — Introduces readers to the handbook and informs them that following handbook policies is a condition of employment, but that the relationship is at-will.
	Workers’ Compensation Policy — Details the Company’s policy regarding workers’ compensation, and the necessary tasks employees must complete in order to ensure that the proper workers’ compensation is paid to them.
	Workplace Bullying — Explains the Company’s goal of providing a safe and healthy work environment for all employees, and that, because of this, the Company prohibits bullying of all kinds.

Even if your workers don't treat your employee handbook with the reverence it deserves, the protection it provides both your company and its employees is vital to ensuring the longevity of your business.

But the process of drafting employee policies and creating an employee handbook can be **overwhelming**. That's why G&A Partners provides its clients with a **customizable employee handbook** that takes all the guesswork and uncertainty out of drafting employee policies that may or may not be compliant with applicable labor laws and regulations.

As a leader in the HR outsourcing industry, G&A Partners specializes in partnering with businesses who are in need of additional back-office support to **more efficiently manage human resources** and administrative functions by giving them access to a team of HR, benefits and payroll experts, all for about the same cost of hiring one full-time employee.

Whether you need full-service HR support or help in a few key areas, G&A Partners provides the people, processes and technology you need to grow your business faster and take better care of your employees.

Visit us online or give us a call today to learn more about how G&A Partners' comprehensive HR solutions can help you achieve your business goals and spend less time dealing with human resources, benefits and payroll.

gnapartners.com 888.676.1127

