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So, You've Drafted An Employee Handbook--What's Next?

This week's Tip sets forth best practice guidelines for implementing an employee handbook, including seeking legal review, determining distribution methods, introducing the handbook to your workplace, obtaining handbook acknowledgments, and maintaining the handbook on an ongoing basis.

So, You've Drafted An Employee Handbook--What's Next?

In last week's Tip, we provided guidelines for drafting an employee handbook. This week, we set forth steps to take after you've created your handbook, including seeking legal review, determining distribution methods, introducing the handbook to your workplace, obtaining handbook acknowledgments, and maintaining the handbook on an ongoing basis.

The following are best practice guidelines for implementing an employee handbook:

- » **Seek legal review.** Before distributing a new or revised handbook to your employees, it is important to have legal counsel review it to ensure that the language used in your handbook is appropriate and the policies are up to date with current employment laws.
- » **Determine how to distribute the handbook.** Once legal counsel has signed off on the handbook, decide whether you would like to provide your employees with a paper or electronic version of the handbook. Distributing a paper copy of the handbook is the traditional method, however maintaining a paper copy can be challenging when changes to policies are necessary. You may not want to re-print the handbook each time you update a policy as re-printing can be costly. It may also be difficult to make sure that older versions of the handbook are no longer in circulation and relied upon by employees. Recently, many companies have opted to maintain electronic versions of their handbook, and have made the handbook available on their company Intranet.
- » **Introduce the handbook.** Whether you will be distributing a handbook for the first time or you are issuing a revised handbook, it is good idea to plan how you will introduce it to your workforce. First, take some time to review the handbook with your managers and make sure they understand how to apply the policies. Next, consider sending a company-wide email or holding staff meetings to communicate the importance of the employee handbook. Urge employees to read it carefully, encourage them to ask questions, and let them know whom they can contact with questions or concerns about policies and procedures.
- » **Ensure every employee receives a copy.** Regardless of whether you distribute the handbook in paper or electronic form, make sure that every employee receives a copy. Consider how you will provide copies to employees who are out on leave, who work remotely, or (if distributed electronically) those who do not use computers during the course of their jobs. Employees also need to know how they can access or receive a copy of the handbook in the future.
- » **Obtain handbook acknowledgments.** It is always a best practice to obtain signed acknowledgments when the handbook is first issued, at the time of hire for new employees, and whenever there are changes made to the handbook. Handbook acknowledgments are important for confirming that employees have received and read the employee handbook and that they understand its contents. When setting any deadline for employees to submit acknowledgment forms, allow employees enough time to read the handbook carefully and to ask any questions they may have. Have a system in place to track who has completed and returned an acknowledgment form and to follow up with employees who have not done so. Signed acknowledgments should be stored in employee personnel files.

Review and update regularly. Once your handbook is in circulation, it is important to review each policy on a regular basis, and when you learn about any changes to the law that may affect the policies in your handbook. At a minimum, it is a best practice to review your handbook at least once per year. During the review, you may want to consider the following questions:

Since the last review, have any federal, state, or local laws or regulations changed that would affect the policies and procedures in the handbook?

- Do the policies and procedures in the handbook comply with all applicable laws and regulations?
- Has your company grown in size or started operation in another state, which may impact the policies to be included?

- Do the policies and procedures adhere to current best practices?
- Are the policies up to date with current business practices?
- Are the policies clear and do they convey the information as intended?
- Are the policies meeting business needs?
- Do the policies align with company culture and values?

Again, any revisions to policies should be reviewed by legal counsel prior to distributing to employees. Additionally, be sure to obtain new acknowledgments from your employees each time the handbook is revised, and store updated acknowledgments along with the initial handbook acknowledgment.



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