

# Your Employee Handbook: 2024 Updates & What to Include

## By HR Answers

*2023 has been a year of resetting after COVID. There have been dozens of state and local regulations passed that impact employers of all types and sizes. Crafting an Employee Handbook that provides your team with clarity on how you approach compliance with each regulation is a key to long-term success.*

*Whether you're crafting your first handbook or an update, make sure to include what matters!*

### Handbooks 101: Why You Need a Handbook (no matter the size of your business):

1. **Build Trust with Your Employees.** The success of every organization is built on a foundation of trust between employees and their employer — and a key method to establish this trust is through open communication. Specifically, the communication of expectations. A tried-and-true way to communicate expectations consistently across your workforce is to develop and present your team with a well-crafted employee handbook that includes: company policies and workplace and expectations, clears up confusion about when and where work is performed, and what to do if you cannot make it to work, or complete assignments as expected.
2. **Help Outline Solutions.** Ultimately, the employee handbook should help leaders completely avoid conflict with employees in many situations. Employee handbooks provide information on employees' benefits and rights, as well as their responsibilities and obligations to the company. I like to say that it serves as a CEO's "master FAQ"
3. **Facilitate Open Communication.** Your well-crafted, custom handbook will serve to establish trust and a regular, open line of communication between you and your employees; and provide a platform to build and nurture solid relationships between you and your employees.

### **Important Policies to Consider & Update for 2024**

- Updated Telecommute
- Revised Timekeeping for Non-Exempt Employees
- Company Property
- Cybersecurity & Digital Devices
- Social Media
- Data Privacy
- Sick Time & Other Required Leaves
- Leave Donation
- Personal Leave
- Disability Accommodation
- Smoking/Vaping in the Workplace
- Whistleblower Protections
- Reporting & Solving Problems
- Non-Harassment (related training requirement)
- Civil Workplace (Bullying)
- Drug Testing (considering new rules)
- Pay Transparency for Employees

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## **Employee Handbook Checklist:**

### **Top 10 Tips for Prepping Your Handbook for 2024**

- 1) **\_\_\_\_\_ Employee Handbooks are NOT Contracts.** The Purpose of this Handbook policy serves as a disclaimer is what defines the nature of the employee handbook. It should clearly state that the handbook is **not** a contract of employment. This will prevent terminated employees from making claims against your company for a “breach of contract” at some point in the future. Work with a qualified attorney to craft non-competes, non-solicitation agreements, and intellectual property protections (which can cover you **after** an employees leaves your company).
- 2) **\_\_\_\_\_ Company Goals, Mission Statement and Core Values.** Employees need to know that they are part of a larger system; and how and where they fit. Use the Employee Handbook to lay a foundation for company goals, share your mission statement and company core values. Set the stage for an incredible employee experience by weaving your company’s values, mission and vision in throughout the document. This provides your employees with a sense of unity and common purpose. Paired with a great new employee orientation and on-boarding program, including this important information throughout your handbook will help them develop a sense of belonging and commitment to your organization.
- 3) **\_\_\_\_\_ Employment Classifications.** This is one of the policies where every word counts. Use clear definitions to distinguish full-time employees from part-time and seasonal employees. This policy will also inform employees that some employees are “non-exempt” and others are “exempt” and how that may affect their pay. Carefully crafted, the classifications in this section will tie together information related to benefits and perks of employment.
- 4) **\_\_\_\_\_ State & Local Leave Policies.** Each state has its own set of rules and regulations related to mandates leaves. Some states require paid sick leave, some require paid “PTO” or “leave for any reason.” There are also: family leaves, disability leaves, military leaves, jury duty leaves, bereavement leaves, and others. A comprehensive search of your state’s department of labor resources is an important step in the process.
- 5) **\_\_\_\_\_ Timekeeping & Pay Policies.** To maintain compliance with various federal, state and local wage and hour laws, companies must define the workweek as the 7-day period which is then used to calculate overtime. State laws must also need to be taken into consideration and articulated in this policy as well. Outline your general pay schedule so that employees may look back and rely on this information as needed. A clear timecard and timekeeping policy is critical in this section. Consider including a policy informing employees as to the proper use of timecards (or time clocks, apps or web-based systems) will be a lifesaver for managers and supervisors when employees are coming and going during the course of the business day. **Also! Watch for new from the US Department of Labor for updates to the Exempt Salary Basis – which could be coming in early 2024.**

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- 6) **\_\_\_\_\_ General Policies & Procedures.** This is what we refer to as the “nuts and bolts” section of the employee handbook. The section really holds everything together. In this section simplicity is key. You can easily and quickly cover the basics and provide information that employees need so that they can really focus on their work. *In this section, we cover policies from dress codes to telephone use, visitors in the workplace, attendance and punctuality and anything else that we deem pertinent to day-to-day management of your business.*
- 7) **\_\_\_\_\_ Non-Harassment and Non-Discrimination Policies.** Employers with 15 or more employees are subject to Federal Civil Rights laws, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which expressly prohibits workplace discrimination. In this section, we will be clear that your company has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to harassment or discrimination of any kind. You will provide various, multiple methods that employees can use to voice complaints and the different individuals who workers can turn to if concerns arise. A clear, concise procedure for complaint handling will also be included in this section. Be sure to check your state’s training requirements in this area.
- 8) **\_\_\_\_\_ Employee Benefits.** This is certainly a hot topic for most employees! These policies will not provide all of the details relevant to each and every employee benefit, but will highlight the different benefits provided (health, vision, dental insurance, etc.). Keeping the language simple and short provides employees with a basic understanding of the benefits provided, and avoids having to update your handbook document anytime that a benefit changes.
- 9) **\_\_\_\_\_ Employee Conduct/Behavior Policies.** Use this section to outline and define expected employee conduct, as well as what could be considered misconduct. Explain the potential consequences of such actions but *beware not to bind the company into a plan of action by using absolute statements.* This policy, meant to assist employees in making important decisions about their own conduct, should also highlight the company’s right to consider each employee incident on a case-by-case basis to determine appropriate behavior. Taking a well-balanced approach to communicating expectations to employees, this section will communicate that the philosophy of the company is to treat employees fairly and equitably and help them to establish their role as critical and valuable members of the team.
- 10) **\_\_\_\_\_ General Safety.** As a steppingstone for additional, more industry-specific, safety training and the communication of the importance of safety in the workplace, a simple, overarching safety policy should be included in the employee handbook. This policy will outline guidelines that apply to every employee, regardless of their position. This general safety section might include policies such as: general safety and accident reporting policy, policy governing weapons in the workplace, information on how to handle inclement weather, etc.

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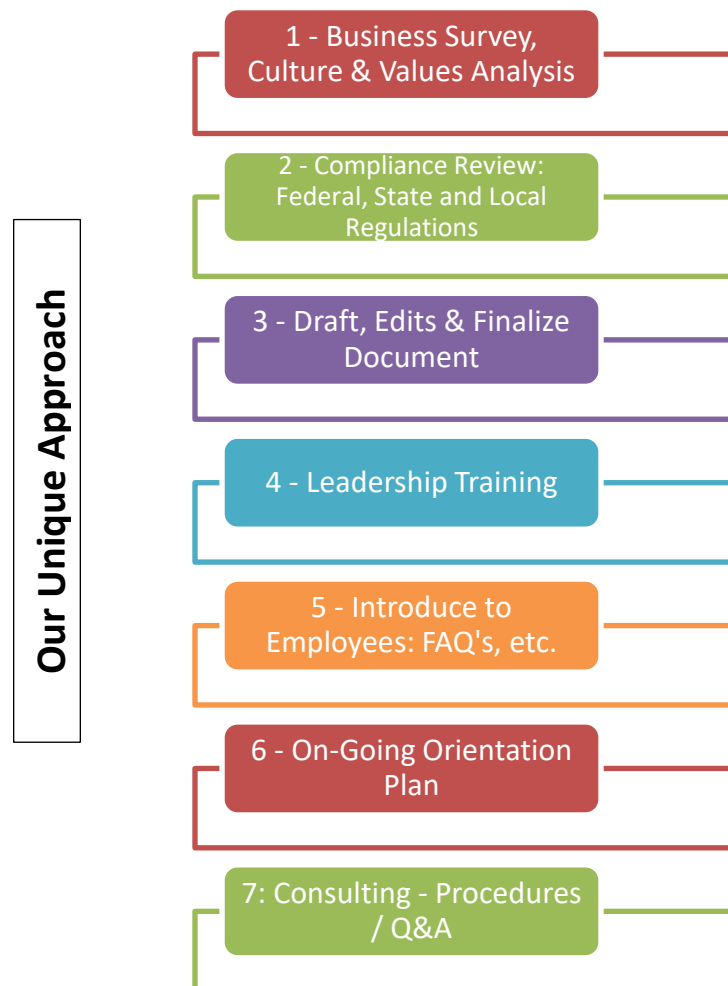
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### Next Steps

We know this can seem like a lot. We're here to help.

With decades of experience in human resources leadership, the HRAnswers.org team, including your certified, professional HR consultant, Niki Ramirez, MBA, will take time to expertly coach and guide you through the process of developing and rolling out your new Employee Handbook. This will include key components that you just cannot get anywhere else, such as: a unique business and culture analysis, regulatory compliance review, and training for your team.

Rest assured, we've done this 100's of times over the years. Our framework takes out the "guesswork" and helps you feel confident that you've got a tool that is meaningful for you in your organization, and for your employees; not just a cookie-cutter document that is meant to fill a gap or provide a "shield" for your company. Let's collaborate and craft a document that you're proud of that provides your employees with a sense of belonging and helps them get answers to common questions about how to be successful at work!



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