

Creating & Communicating Company Policies Due to COVID-19

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UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE WORKPLACE

Examining the Impact of COVID-19

- When the pandemic hit, millions of Americans began working from home
- This unprecedented occurrence forced employers to find ways to make this new dynamic work
- Some businesses are now allowing employees to return to the office while others are permitting remote work
- Still others are following a hybrid model, where employees come in some days and work remotely other days

Examining the Impact of COVID-19 (cont.)

- Juggling any of these situations can be complicated
- Now more than ever, companies need clear policies and open communication
- Solid communication makes sure everyone on the team understands what is expected of them
- It keeps staff focused on meeting goals and helps employers maintain productivity, protect workers and avoid legal disputes

STRENGTHEN POST-PANDEMIC COMMUNICATION



Developing a Communication Plan

- Employers should use multiple forms of communication to educate employees about policies
- Analyzing your staff and work environment is essential in developing a plan
- An informal survey can help determine your staff's preferred communication methods
- This will allow you to pinpoint and utilize the most effective platforms

Developing a Communication Plan (cont.)

- Identify different ways to communicate, depending on the sensitivity and urgency of the information
- Texts and online chats are good for timely updates
- Non-urgent announcements can be delivered via email or posted on the company intranet
- Messages can also be delivered personally either in on-site meetings or through video conferences
- For ongoing communications, set a delivery schedule and stick to it

REVIEW YOUR COVID-RELATED PERSONNEL POLICIES



Reviewing Your Policies

- **COVID-19 vaccine:** If you make vaccines a requirement, it's critical to have a policy that explains how the vaccine is administered, how to request an exemption, and what happens if an employee refuses the vaccine. Your policy should also clearly state that employees will not be asked to pay any fee.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Sick leave:** This policy should state that employees should stay home if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms. If vaccines are not mandatory, make sure your policy doesn't penalize employees who need to miss work to quarantine or seek treatment.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Remote work:** Specify which positions are eligible for telework and explain the qualifications in your policy. Detail scheduling requirements when employees are expected to work. Other items to address: What equipment will be required? How will productivity be measured? How do workers access tech support?

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Health and safety:** This policy should contain the measures you're taking to prevent the spread of germs. Examples may include avoiding handshakes, as well as discouraging workers from using each other's phones, desks or other equipment. Social distancing procedures can also be covered, such as limiting the number of customers in a business and sanitizing breakroom tables after use.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Harassment:** Your policy should explicitly state that fear of the COVID-19 pandemic should never be misdirected against individuals because of a protected characteristic – including national origin, disability or any other prohibited basis. Emphasize that management will immediately review any allegations of harassment or discrimination and take appropriate action.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Travel:** Inform employees that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that only fully vaccinated individuals travel currently. Employees who become sick while traveling should promptly notify their supervisor and contact a healthcare provider for advice. Indicate the procedures for obtaining medical care when traveling outside the United States.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Infectious diseases:** This policy should outline the steps you are taking to safeguard employees' health and well-being during the widespread outbreaks of bacterial or viral diseases. It should also highlight procedures for maintaining essential operations and providing necessary services to customers during such outbreaks.

Reviewing Your Policies (cont.)

- **Disaster recovery:** Beyond COVID-19, your company should be prepared to handle the unexpected (e.g., fire, weather, emergencies, power outages) with a disaster policy. Include the methods for backing up data, as well as a structured communication plan for reporting to employees and customers.

IMPLEMENT YOUR COMPANY POLICIES



Implementing Your Policies

When developing or revising your handbook:

- **Be concise** — An effective handbook will be well-written with clear guidelines. Avoid jargon and use plain English in your policies.
- **Update frequently** — Laws are constantly changing. If your policies aren't current, they aren't compliant.
- **Know the laws** — Familiarize yourself with state and local regulations. It's a good idea to have your policies reviewed by an HR or legal expert before implementing.

Implementing Your Policies

- **Provide training** — Compiling written policies is the first step. In addition, employees and managers should receive regular training on how to follow the rules correctly.
- **Be consistent** — Always treat similar employees in similar ways. Don't discipline one employee for tardiness, for example, and give another a pass. Being inconsistent in policy enforcement can lead to a discrimination claim.
- **Get acknowledgment** — Have employees sign and date a form stating that they have received, read and understand the policies. Keep a copy of the acknowledgment in their personnel files.

Case in Point

- **Aramark Uniform & Career Apparel, Inc.:** A former female employee brought two separate actions against her previous employer, alleging hostile work environment sexual harassment and retaliation for complaining about such harassment. An investigation revealed that although Aramark had a formal non-discrimination policy in place, the extent to which the policy was enforced was questionable. Employees testified to receiving no harassment training and having little or no knowledge of the policy.
- This case cost the company hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

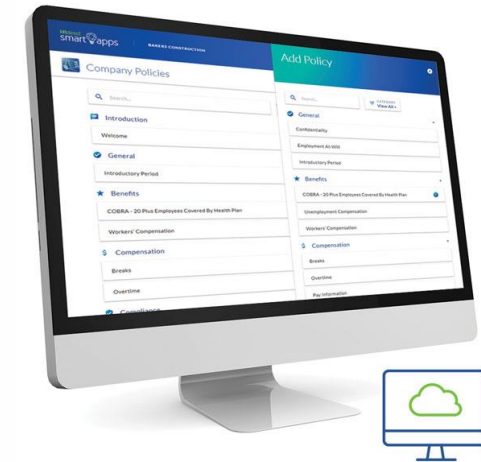
Case in Point (cont.)

- **Putnam County Board of Education:** A school board terminated a maintenance electrician when he asked to take time off to care for a parent with a serious health condition. Investigators found that the school board retaliated against the employee for requesting leave that was FMLA-protected and unlawfully terminated his employment. They also determined that the school board failed to provide any of the required FMLA notices regarding employee rights under the law.
- The worker was awarded \$50,000 in lost wages.

Solution to Protect Your Business

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- Publish one or all policies at one time
- Track your policies
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