

Staff Matters Human Resource Policies – Do I Need Them?

Do you have at least one employee? If you do, you need some policies in place.

Policies protect both you and your employees. Employees need to know that you are following the employment standards and human rights legislation. You need to communicate what you expect from your employees.

In this article we will briefly explain ten basic policies you should have in place but you can add other policies because your business is unique and will have some needs that are different from other businesses. For example, Denise Pallesen of Nutter's Bulk & Natural Foods in Cranbrook has put in place a product knowledge training policy due to the nature of her business.

"We require that all our employees take part in Nutter's training within their first three months with us. As soon as they've completed the training they automatically get a raise," says Pallesen. "Having them in a training program ensures that they have the product knowledge and education to answer our customer's questions and to help them find the right products for their needs."

The HR policy document you create is based on the needs of you and your employees. You might end up with few pages or a small book depending on how large and complex your company is. Once you have your policies written, make sure your employees get a copy to read at their orientation and that they sign off saying they have read and understood the document.

Here are ten basic policies¹ you will need to make sure you've covered off the areas dictated by legislation such as sexual harassment, workplace safety, vacation entitlement, statutory holidays and hours of work.

1. **Harassment Policy**

If you don't want harassment or bullying in your workplace, then say so. Forbid workplace harassment but also include how an employee can lodge a complaint if it happens and what the disciplinary action will be for the offender.

2. **Personal Information Privacy Policy**

Everyone in your business must understand how your company protects the personal information of customers and employees.

3. **Use of Technology in the Workplace Policy**

Make sure your employees understand your expectations and boundaries around using email and the internet for their personal use while they are at work.

4. **Severance Policy**
In case you ever need to fire or layoff staff members you will need a Severance Policy to protect against court actions for wrongful dismissal. The severance formula must meet statutory employment standards for notice of termination (or pay in lieu).
5. **Disciplinary Process Policy**
Use your Disciplinary Process Policy to respond to employee misconduct. If the process is written down, employees know what to expect for disciplinary measures and it will help you to remain fair in your treatment of different employees.
6. **Attendance Policy**
It should set out the employees' basic obligation to attend work as scheduled. This is a complex area of policy since you need to understand the reasons for absenteeism so you can make sure you are not discriminating or that you are sensitive in accommodating disabilities.
7. **Overtime Policy**
Make sure your employees understand when they can and cannot claim overtime hours. You must of course, comply with the statutory employment standards requirements but you may chose to allow more than the minimum requirement.
8. **Conflict of Interest Policy**
You should have a policy prohibiting employees from engaging activities where the employee might inappropriately gain a personal benefit by taking advantage of the employment relationship. The policy should encourage employees to be open about any potential conflict of interest; also, clearly state the disciplinary measures which will be imposed in response to a conflict of interest.
9. **Code of Conduct Policy**
Your reputation is important to your success. A code of conduct policy is intended to provide guidelines for the professional, ethical, legal and socially responsible behaviour that is expected of employees.
10. **Workplace Health and Safety Policy**
This policy is intended to ensure employees are informed of their obligations relating to workplace safety issues. For instance, the policy should state the employees' obligations to: take reasonable care in the workplace; carry out her work in accordance with established safe work procedures; use and wear the required protective equipment; not engage in horseplay; not be impaired by drugs, alcohol, or other causes; and promptly report any circumstances which pose a safety risk.

Policies can definitely be overwhelming, and you need to be aware of your business needs and the environment that you want to create. For instance, some companies initiate a "no scent" policy, which limits perfumes and other products in the workplace. This is usually because of a respect for allergies, but you may not require this policy for your own business, particularly if you don't have any customers coming through your doors. This could be something you decide on with your employees, to give them some ownership and accountability of their culture and environment.

Rhonda Johnson, owner of Batstar Adventure Tours & Batstar Café in Port Alberni has put in place policies from dress code for the Batstar Café staff to strict procedure on what to do if a client is injured during a kayak or hiking tour.

“Policies are good for everyone. If you have rules and apply them, everyone is happier. They create a sense of system and order which I think people like,” says Johnson. “For the long term value of your business, decisions need to be policy based rather than individual based, so if the owner is away and something happens, policies are applied. It gives the business independence and long term value. With policies in place a business can stand alone because not everything is in the employer’s head.”

The above mentioned policies will go a long way in avoiding litigation, so long as they are professionally drafted and comply with all legislation. You should get assistance from your lawyer or an HR consultant, especially if you are unsure of any of the minimum standards required.

Many employers go above and beyond the minimum requirements, in order to help attract and retain the best employees, particularly in the areas of vacation and sick leave entitlement. You can use this as a powerful negotiating tool when recruiting new talent.

What is most important of course is to let your employees know why you are initiating or have HR policies. They will let employees know what to expect from the company, and what the company expects from them.

Women’s Enterprise Centre is the go-to place for BC women business owners for business loans, skills training, business advisory services, resources, publications and referrals. Call us at 1.800.643.7014 or email info@womensenterprise.ca from anywhere in BC.

ⁱ Descriptions of the 10 policies are excerpts from Robert Smithson’s “Legalese” column. Robert Smithson is a labour lawyer with Pushor Mitchell Lawyers in Kelowna, BC.

ⁱⁱ For more information on minimum employment standards, visit the B.C. Employment Standards website at http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/e/96113_01.htm. Good examples of HR policies can be found online but remember; this is not a cookie cutter process, beware of policies that are not for B.C. as legislation is different in each province. You can also access sites that advertise policies for a fee such as <http://www.firstreference.com/bcpp.asp>.