

15 Things Every Employee Code of Conduct Must Include



Workplaces are like mini-societies run by their own sets of rules and regulations. These laws are—or at least should be—codified in a central volume known as the employment manual, aka HR manual, employee handbook, and umpteen similar names. Although there are lots of ways to organize the employment manual, one of the best and most common methods is to divide it into 2 volumes:

- Employee conduct; and
- Wages, salaries, and benefits.

Let's take a look at the employee code of conduct.

The 15 Key Policies of the Employee Code of Conduct

The code of conduct must address and reflect the unique circumstances of your workplace and the industry you're in. But while no 2 organizations should ever have the same code, there are 15 policies that every employee code of conduct should include:

1. Attendance Policy

The first and most fundamental rule of any workplace is that employees show up for work every day.

Policy Tips:

- Establish clear standards of attendance;
- Describe the consequences of violations;
- Distinguish between absences that are "culpable," i.e., deliberate or

within an employee's control, and "non-culpable absences" caused by factors beyond the employees' control such as illnesses and injuries;

- Say that accommodations will be made for non-culpable absences attributable to conditions that constitute a disability under human rights laws.

2. Punctuality Policy

A cousin to the attendance policy, the punctuality section of the code of conduct must require workers to be on time and explain how tardiness will be dealt with.

Policy Tips:

- Define what being punctual means;
- Make allowance for lateness beyond the employee's control, especially when it results from a physical or mental condition that may be deemed a disability under discrimination laws.

3. Conflict of Interest Policy

In addition to attendance and punctuality, all employers have the right to expect employees to show loyalty to the organization. That's why every employee code of conduct must have a conflict of interest provision.

Policy Tips:

- Require employees to act in the organization's best interests at all times;
- Ban employee conduct that creates or even creates the appearance of a conflict of interest;
- List examples of common situations that may suggest a conflict between the employee's personal interests and loyalty to the organization, e.g., working for a competitor or dating a client or subordinate.

4. Employee Gifts & Entertainment Policy

The code of conduct must establish rules on whether and what kinds of gifts, gratuities and other benefits employees may accept from a client, vendor or other third party with which the organization does business.

Policy Tips:

- Ban employees from asking for or accepting gifts that may create or at least suggest a reciprocal obligation on the part of employee or organization;
- Require employees to report to their supervisor or manager if they receive any such offers;
- Consider making an exception allowing employees to accept gifts of nominal value such as pens with a client's name or calendars.

5. Confidential & Proprietary Information Policy

The code of conduct must include rules requiring employees to keep the organization's proprietary information confidential.

Policy Tips:

- Define the proprietary information that must be kept confidential;
- Ban employees from not only disclosing but using proprietary information for personal gain;
- Require employees to be discrete with proprietary information to avoid inadvertent disclosure;
- Require employees to return all proprietary information and refrain from using it when their employment ends.

6. Computer Use Policy

A computer use policy is an essential part of any employee code of conduct.

Policy Tips:

- Define the computer equipment the policy covers;
- Make it clear that the organization owns the equipment;
- Require employees to use the equipment only for work purposes;
- Clearly state that you will monitor employee use of the equipment and that employees should have no expectation of privacy in the information contained in the equipment.

7. Social Networking Policy

In this cyber age, a policy governing employee social networking is an absolute must.

Policy Tips:

- Define the social networking activity the policy covers, e.g., blogging, tweeting, video posting, file sharing, etc.;
- Ban employee social networking during work time and use of organization equipment for social networking not related to work;
- Ban employees from using social networking to communicate any harmful information about the organization, its business, clients, or employees—let them know that social network communications are **not** private.

8. Dress Code

The employee code of conduct should list the rules governing proper dress for the workplace.

Policy Tips:

- Dress codes must be based on legitimate business considerations and not simply morals or matters of taste;
- Be specific and clear about what is and is not permitted and avoid subjective rules like “employees must dress in a professional manner”;
- List the items that are and are not permissible;
- Make accommodations for dress or grooming decisions dictated by religious practice, e.g., turbans, long robes, facial hair, etc.

9. Workplace Smoking Policy

Thanks to the indoor smoking bans in effect throughout Canada, you need to include a no-smoking policy in your code of conduct.

Policy Tips:

- Indicate where smoking is not allowed—indoor workplaces and perhaps in company vehicles;
- Indicate where smoking is allowed—designated smoking room, outdoors, etc.;
- State that violations can lead to discipline up to and including termination.

10. Substance Abuse Policy

The code of conduct needs to establish clear, legally sound and enforceable restrictions on alcohol and drug use in the workplace.

Policy Tips:

- Specifically define the substances your policy covers—alcohol, illegal drugs, legal drugs, etc.;
- Explain that the policy is based on workplace safety and why it's necessary to protect safety;
- Be aware that testing and discipline for drug and alcohol use raise complex legal issues under human rights, privacy and other laws.

11. Workplace Violence Policy

Make sure your code of conduct addresses the issue of workplace violence.

Policy Tips:

- Express your organization's commitment to provide all workers a violence-free workplace;
- Define what you mean by "violence" and "workplace";
- Say that acts of violence at work will not be tolerated and that those who commit them will be held accountable;
- Tell employees how to report acts or threats of violence;
- Explain how such reports will be investigated;
- Explain what support you will provide to workers who are victims of violence.

12. Workplace Harassment Policy**Policy Tips:**

- Express your organization's commitment to provide all workers a harassment-free workplace;
- Define what you mean by "harassment" (or "psychological harassment" if you're in Québec);
- Indicate that harassment includes sexual harassment—or, if it doesn't, make sure you have a separate policy that does cover sexual harassment—and define what sexual harassment is;
- Say that acts of harassment at work will not be tolerated and that those who commit them will be held accountable;
- Tell employees how to report acts or threats of harassment;
- Let employees know that they also have the right to file a discrimination complaint with the provincial Human Rights Commission if they're harassed on the grounds of race, religion, sex, age, or other characteristic

protected by the human rights laws.

13. Diversity & Non-Discrimination Policy

Policy Tips:

- Express your organization's commitment to provide a diverse, equal opportunity workplace in which all employees are treated with dignity and respect;
- Say that all hiring and employment decisions will be based on merit rather than race, religion, etc.
- Indicate that discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated and that personnel who engage in such conduct will be held accountable.

14. Accommodations Procedure

The code of conduct should lay out a procedure for employees to follow to seek accommodations for disabilities, religion, sex, pregnancy and other characteristics protected by the human rights laws.

Policy Tips:

- Indicate that reasonable accommodations will be made to the point of undue hardship;
- Explain how employees should request accommodations;
- Explain how such requests will be processed and the criteria used to decide whether to make the requested accommodation;
- Require employees to cooperate in the accommodation process, including by providing medical information necessary to determine what accommodations are necessary.

15. Disciplinary Procedure

Last but not least, every code of conduct should explain the disciplinary process used to enforce the code.

Part 2 of this will look at the essential provisions of an Employee Wage, Salary and Benefits Policy.