

# How to Start Building an Employee Manual

written by vickyp | April 4, 2014



*Take these 7 steps to build a comprehensive employee manual*

Employee manuals serve several purposes. In addition to being a convenient way to provide new employees with vital information, they ensure that consistent information is disseminated, can serve as important guides for decision making, help you find information quickly, and enable you to locate gaps in your content. However, building them can be an overwhelming process.

Because of the daunting challenges of both building and maintaining comprehensive employee manuals, many organizations do not take time to pull together information into one location. However, you can benefit immediately by creating a manual that your employees can reference as needed. A well-constructed employee manual may also act as evidence that you have provided your employees with legally required information.

## **7 Steps to Building an Employee Manual:**

1. **Identify all the pieces:** Identify the sections you want to include in your manual. Put together a table of contents that you can use as a guide.
2. **Determine current content status:** Locate the components of the manual already at your disposal – you may have many of the components already. Identify pieces you may need to update and those you need to create from scratch. For example, you may already have a computer use policy at your company. Make sure it is updated to reflect any restricted websites.
3. **Create a plan and collect your resources:** Build your manual by collecting resources, contacting people responsible for providing content, and generating a timeline for development. Keep in mind that your manual may require weeks or months to develop if you cannot work on it full-time.
4. **Prioritize your 'must have' gap fillers:** Begin by including components of your manual that are required. Table those that can wait. If you work in a manufacturing industry, you may prioritize a policy which requires the use of PPE over a computer use policy. For a small office, perhaps the dress code policy is less important than a scheduled lunch break policy. Find out what is important to you. However, remember that there may be policies which you must

include by law, depending on your jurisdiction. For example, in Ontario you are required to have health and safety policies, workplace violence and harassment policies, and AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act). You can read more in the Insider article, [8 Things You Need To Know About Employee Handbooks](#).

5. **Ask For Help:** You do not have to invent (or reinvent) the wheel on your own. Reach out to people in your organization or seek the advice of a professional business consultant. You may also find existing resources and templates you can use (the HR Insider has 100s of policies and other resources available for use).
6. **Obtain stakeholder feedback:** Beginning with managers and supervisors, and including representation from other employees, obtain feedback on pieces of the manual as you build it.
7. **Create a review process:** Do not wait to review your manual annually. Review and update a different section quarterly. Obtain ongoing feedback from your employees. Identify what needs updating. Create a team that includes representatives from management and employees to review the manual regularly.

### Sections of an Employee Manual

Create a unique manual for your unique purpose. You may have an onboarding or orientation manual, a policies and procedures manual, an employee benefits manual and so on. While it may be that these different manuals evolved from the activities of different departments, it is important to ensure consistency and accuracy of information across the organization. That is why it is useful to create a master manual that can be modified easily.

1. **The introduction:** Often this includes a message from the senior leader, a copy of the organizational chart and information on the company vision, mission, principles or other overarching company culture content.
2. **Outline of roles:** This can include a general outline of the roles of company leadership and management; it can also include an outline of the role of the specific manager relevant to a given department/team/employee and an outline of the employee's role.
3. **Expected conduct:** This includes a code of conduct and information on your progressive discipline (including demotion, suspension and termination), and your appeals process.
4. **Work structure:** Logistics and day-to-day routines; the start and end times of workplace operations, lunch breaks, rest breaks, and other timelines.
5. **Compensation:** Including information on pay periods and methods of receiving pay, deductions, overtime and compensation for overtime, how raises or pay grade steps proceed and how seniority is ranked.
6. **Benefits:** You may include health/dental/vision insurance, sick leave and vacation time, family care leave options, and transportation stipends, if applicable.
7. **Holiday Leave:** Include all holidays observed by your organization and specify office closures.
8. **General Practices and Administrative Guidelines:** Use of company equipment, storage and confidentiality of personnel files, information and communications practices, and office closures/guidelines in the event of inclement weather or emergencies.
9. **Healthy Workplaces Guidelines:** This includes information on workplace initiatives and resources, including EAP programs.

Approaching this process one step at a time by breaking it down into manageable tasks and obtaining help will make the process more manageable.