

Use company handbook to keep policies up-to-date

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When **Ann Freeman** bought [River City Security Services](#) four years ago, she inherited the company's old employee handbook.

"They had a policy and procedures handbook that was very basic and it had lot of addendums," said Freeman, president and CEO. "Our approach is this book should help you be better employees. We want them to be successful. In an agency like ours, your success is based on those men and women out there [interacting with the] client, the clients' customers and the general public."

She worked with **Bob McKenzie**, president of [McKenzieHR](#), to update the employee handbook, which has policies and procedures that are applicable to most businesses as well as policies that are industry-specific.

"We are not a company that has a lot of suits in the office. We are a boots-on-the-ground, service-oriented company," Freeman said. "Our men and women are on-site with the client. Our company and industry have certain policies, but at the same time, we have to allow for client policies and procedures to be recognized and adhered to."

Small businesses with just a handful of employees will likely have different policies and rules from a large corporation, but any employee handbook should be easy to read.

"It has to be something that employees can understand easily," McKenzie said. "Start with a history of the company, the values of the company, the mission, the vision, those kinds of things right up front. Have something very positive about the company, about you being here, what the expectations are — something that creates enthusiasm on the part of the reader."

Different types of industries and different sized-companies will have very different handbooks.

For a small business, "your policies will be much simpler than a large corporation," said **John Dickinson**, managing partner of the Jacksonville office of [Constangy, Brooks & Smith](#) LLP.



Furthermore, “If the work force is white collar, for example, it would be written in a different fashion [than for blue-collar industries]. But whenever you write a handbook, you write it to the reader.”

It’s important to have a human resources professional or employment law attorney review the handbook for accuracy and have it updated annually to ensure the company is in compliance with any changes in relevant law.

Most businesses should include an at-will employment statement, an Equal Employment Opportunity policy, a safety policy and harassment, bullying and violence in the workplace policies.

There should be an attendance policy and for employers with more than 50 employees, a Family and Medical Leave policy along with an explanation of how it relates to the attendance policy. There should also be a wage and hour policy and a clearly defined workweek.

“It can be any [consecutive] 168 hours,” McKenzie said. “And with regard to wages and overtime, you can’t say, ‘We don’t pay overtime that isn’t approved.’ It doesn’t work that way.”

Also consider adding a formal code of conduct, a fraternization policy, an open-door policy, a discipline policy and an alternative dispute resolution policy.

Companies should include a drug and alcohol abuse policy as well. “You can get a nice reduction on your workers’ compensation premium if you have such a policy relating to substance abuse and drug and alcohol testing, when you do it and under what circumstances,” Dickinson said.

There should also be a benefits section that includes a general statement about any insurance coverage and holiday, vacation and other paid time off. Also include a confidentiality agreement and a technology policy relating to the use of company computers, cell phones and other devices, along with a policy on the use of e-mail, the Internet and social media sites.

It’s also a good idea to include a provision relating to personnel records. “The personnel file is a company record and is confidential; Florida does not require that the personnel record be accessible by the employee,” Dickinson said.

During orientation, new employees should be trained on the policies. There should be an acknowledgment page where employees attest to the fact that they have read and understand the policies. Keep this document in the personnel file. As it is reviewed and updated, those addendums should be acknowledged as well. It’s a good idea to give employees a copy of the handbook and keep one accessible at work.

Because Freeman’s employees are at clients’ workplaces, they also have a ‘Policy of the Month’ to keep things fresh in the workers’ minds. “Sometimes we just have a desk or an office with a bulletin board,” she said. “We take sections of the handbook and post them as a reminder. It just

gets people discussing policy and reminding them, whether it's a business ethics policy or it may be vacation."