

# SNOW START UP

ISSUE #4: FOCUS ON **WORKFORCE**

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As we head toward winter, it's easy to overlook important tasks and processes related to hiring, onboarding and retaining employees. This Start Up features tips to keep you ahead of the curve and compliant on HR-related issues.

## MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

### Structured, consistent employee onboarding is essential

Don't set a new employee up for failure by not providing them with the tools to hit their goals. It's day one of a new job. The new employee turns up to work and follows you around to watch how things are done for the next few weeks. Onboarding complete, right? Wrong.

Onboarding is the start of the employee journey. It starts with the first impression of your company and, like all first interactions, should be the best possible impression. Unfortunately, many companies fail to make the most of this opportunity. Maximizing an employee onboarding process leads to higher employee engagement and contributes to overall company culture.

#### Be prepared

**1** No one is ever more excited than on their first day of work; and not having basic, essential tools is the quickest way to take the wind out of a new employee's sails. Show you care about a new hire by ensuring every relevant detail is as perfect as possible. These may include having ready a company email, phone, business cards, clothing or uniform, computer username and password, or vehicle. If they work in an office, make sure it is ready with a computer, chairs, nameplate and office supplies.

Not being prepared at best creates a panicked scramble that wastes productivity and at worst tells a new employee that

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#### ONBOARDING TO-DO LIST

- Create a checklist to make sure all the materials and equipment that employees need to do their jobs are in place before day one.
- Structure and schedule out the first week or two of onboarding to make sure employees meet with those they will be working with consistently (their manager and other key contacts) and are trained on essential functions of their jobs.
- Check in with the new employee throughout the process to ask how they are doing with learning the details of the job and acclimating to the culture.
- Make sure someone in your organization owns the onboarding process to keep it on track.



# BY THE BOOK

Company handbooks keep all parties on the same page by outlining standards and behaviors that are expected for everyone in the business



Employee handbooks are a great way to explain company policies and procedures. They provide employees with an overview of the company, the working practices and environment, and outline the standards and behaviors expected of everyone within the business.

Not having an employee handbook, or having one that you downloaded from some obscure website or got from a buddy, is one of the riskiest things you can do for your business. So, make sure you create a customized guide that fits the culture and needs of your business.

## Focus on continuous improvement

Employee handbooks should be carefully and uniquely drafted to reflect your company's policies and procedures.

As you craft the handbook, however, be wary of putting rigid policies in place that address almost every fathomable situation. Having policies in place that are too specific can make it hard for employers to be flexible in dealing with real situations. Policies that are too broad can have the opposite effect and make it hard for businesses to hold employees accountable.

Similarly, having an employee handbook that doesn't reflect a company's policies is almost worse than having no handbook at all. If the company does not follow its policies, then it can lose its ability to enforce them at a later date. This often comes up when an employee is terminated. If the employee was terminated according to the handbook policies or procedures but had never been disciplined according to the handbook, the employee could use that in their defense should they decide to sue the company.

## TIP: BE DISCIPLINED BUT NOT TOO DISCIPLINED

It is important to have some form of discipline policy in place for employees. Identify what types of actions are subject to discipline and the general consequences for those actions. Do not have an extremely detailed list of consequences for each specific infraction or number of infractions. Doing this removes the employer's ability to be flexible in a given situation and consider factors that aren't addressed in the handbook or weren't contemplated when it was created.



Review your handbook regularly so that important changes to the law can be incorporated. Just because a policy is listed in the employee handbook does not mean that the policy is legal. It is also important to regularly review the employee handbook so that it conforms to any company policy changes.


Refreshing and updating your employee handbook should be outsourced to a professional unless you have a full-time human resources manager. These integral materials should be regularly revisited with entire teams and departments and should be part of an annual company-wide review.

Source: Jared M. Nusbaum, Zlimen & McGuiness, PLLC.





## EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE ISSUES REQUIRE POLICY, CONSISTENCY AND HONESTY

 Every business has had a “problem employee” – someone who can’t get along with coworkers, violates company policies or ignores directions. Problem employees drain productivity and morale, so it’s important to have a method for managing them. The following steps can help you hold employees accountable for problematic behavior and offer a path to handling terminations.

### Have an employee handbook

Your employee handbook should specify which workplace behaviors are appropriate and which are not. Just make sure these are standards you’ll actually enforce. New employees should review the handbook before beginning work and sign a statement saying they received and understand the handbook.

### Address problem behavior directly

When you witness or hear about problem behavior, investigate what happened. Depending on the severity of the issue, your investigation might be as simple as playing back the event in your mind or talking to coworkers who witnessed it. For serious events – such as those that damage property or cause injuries – conduct an in-depth review. Since the consequences will be more severe, you want to make sure you’re holding the right people accountable.

Your next step will be to determine if there was a violation of a policy listed in the employee handbook. It’s unfair to discipline employees for something they didn’t know was wrong. You want to be able to show that they knew the behavior was prohibited, even if it seems obvious.

Once you’ve conducted interviews and decided if there was a violation of company policy, meet with the employee promptly. This doesn’t need to be a formal meeting – depending on the severity of the incident, it could just mean taking the employee aside for a minute on the job site. Identify the problem behavior, explain why it’s not acceptable and that discipline may result.

### Document everything

It’s easier to see where you are in the disciplinary process – and to make decisions about retention or termination – if you have clear employee records.

You might have the employee sign a document acknowledging the information previously mentioned. If they refuse to sign the document, explain that it will still go in their personnel file. You can add it to the file with a note that the employee “refused to sign but reviewed the information with me during the meeting.” You may want to keep witness statements and other investigation materials separate from the personnel file. Be sure to check your state’s laws on which items must be included in a personnel file.

If future violations occur, document the same things. For repeat offenses, stress that the problem has occurred before, the employee has been warned and the employee has failed to change their behavior. This puts you in a position of legal strength, after having followed your policies, demonstrated clear disciplinary actions, and done what you can to be a reasonable and fair employer.

### FOR PROBLEM BEHAVIOR, IT’S A GOOD IDEA TO DOCUMENT:

- What happened.
- The policy that was violated (and the fact that the employee knew about the policy).
- That you explained the problem to the employee.
- That the employee agreed to refrain from that kind of behavior in the future (and, if necessary, the steps the employee will take to ensure that the behavior doesn’t recur).

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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they weren’t worth the effort to think about the week before they started. On the occasion that an employee may be hired to begin work immediately, time should be scheduled to take care of essential tasks as quickly as possible.

### Be welcoming

2

Feeling like an outsider is never fun, and companies that don’t provide a dedicated person to introduce a new hire to company personnel prolongs the uncomfortable situation of feeling left out. Schedule introductions to avoid having to search for key company employees or to try to fit it in between meetings. Making an employee feel welcome sets the tone that they are a valued part of the team.

### Be thorough

3

Any new hire will require extensive training on company processes and procedures. No matter how training is delivered, whether by written manuals, video training or one-on-one instruction, ensuring that training is sufficient to orient an employee is critical. This may require continuous refinement for future employees; but as questions are raised, add them to future training materials so they are covered for future employees.

### Be available

4

New hires will have lots of questions. It may be impossible to predict whether questions will be related to job responsibilities, company processes, company culture, reporting structure, employee paperwork, compensation package or any other area. As a result, it is necessary for a variety of people to be available to answer these questions. Schedule various representatives to check in with a new employee several times during the first day, week and month to receive questions by inviting them through conversation.

### Be consistent

5

Great companies don’t end onboarding — they simply transition the supportive, welcoming approach to high-performance coaching. These companies empower their leaders to sit regularly with direct reports, have clear and collaborative discussions, and drive accountability through regular feedback. So long as an employee is on board with a company, onboarding should never end.

# GO 1x1 TO FUEL CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



That once-a-year formal review is so 1990. Ongoing, informal conversations between supervisors and their direct reports is becoming the norm as owners and managers realize a more frequent cadence of check-ins can be benefit not only the employee but also the company as issues are brought to light more quickly.

Employers still providing traditional annual performance reviews might be surprised to learn that only 14% of employees strongly agree that their reviews inspire them to improve, just 29% strongly agree their performance reviews are fair and only 26% strongly agree that they are accurate.

For employees, annual performance reviews are like walking into the unknown: sitting down for a long meeting with a manager they may not have talked to in a while, trying to remember what goals they set months ago, defending mistakes they can't fix and figuring out how to bring up pay in a way that isn't awkward.

## Less honking, more dialogue

When was the last time you had a candid conversation with your direct reports about their performance, expectations or priorities?

**Create a dialogue.** More frequent engagement with and feedback from your team are more beneficial than yearly reviews.

**Empower your leaders.** Teach your managers how to provide that natural feedback and empower them to deliver it.

**Focus on the positive.** Reward positive efforts and coach to avoid negative ones from recurring. It is critical to clarify expectations, express appreciation and redirect misplaced efforts on a daily basis.

# 74%

of employees report receiving a review once per year or less often according to Gallup's "Re-Engineering Performance Management".

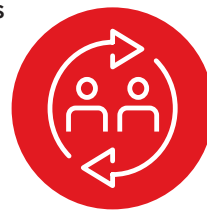
## Foster positivity and respect

Build a culture that encourages respectful and open feedback about company leadership from the crews. The results often lead to improvements in company operations and processes. So, it's vitally important that we 'check the pulse' of the team as frequently as is feasible.

Feedback from every level of your company will tell you a lot about what's going well and areas that might need improvement. Every fall, have a snow meeting with field staff to go over the upcoming season and refresh on standard procedures as well as new implementations. These new implementations are generally things that were learned from the previous year and are almost always the result of suggestions from the prior

## TIP: ENCOURAGE OPEN CONVERSATION

Set up a review system that drives conversation about the work environment instead of always about the individual employee and wages. You may discover great ideas that can lead to great employee satisfaction and company efficiency.



year's team. When the crews see that you take their suggestions seriously, it engages them much more and they are far more willing to share their honest opinions. For leaders and managers, keeping an open mind, making it fun, and practicing good listening skills will be key.

During the season, foster dialogue with the crews after each event to get their feedback. This allows them to feel comfortable telling leadership about issues or problems without fear of being punished for their honesty. This doesn't mean that route managers and their employees shouldn't have a more formal conversation at the end of the season. Once they feel safe and know there are no negative repercussions for bringing ideas to the table, they're much more willing to talk openly in a one-on-one setting.

## Flip the script

Consider sending a quarterly review questionnaire to your team for them to evaluate ownership/management performance and bring up areas of concern that can be addressed in a future team meeting. Always ensure your employees understand this is a space of freedom to express their thoughts and concerns without repercussion.

## Get ahead of compensation auto-tune

To get ahead of the inevitable and likely constant questions about compensation, consider allowing the crews to see your wage scale for field staff. Setting up a review system that drives conversation and sets expectations about the work environment and how the individual relates to the team can help. Make it easier on yourself by investing time and energy into your workforce and understanding the view of the company through their eyes; you will be surprised at how much energy you can harness by more frequent and thoughtful communications with your teams.

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