

How Often Should You Update Your Employee Handbook?

Let me keep it simple: you should be reviewing your handbook at least once a year.





Even in California, where the laws change constantly, I still stick to a once-a-year major update cycle. That said, if a big compliance change drops mid-year (looking at you, 2023 Paid Sick Leave expansion), then yes, I'll make an immediate update. But I don't do full rewrites every time something shifts. That's chaos.

Here's how I handle it in real life:

- Annual review and update: usually once a year, typically tied to the calendar or fiscal year.
- Running list of changes: I keep a live Google Sheet or Asana checklist where I log policy tweaks, new processes, or legal updates as they come up. That way I'm not scrambling to remember what changed 11 months later.

Immediate updates only if required: If there's a new law that directly impacts how we operate and has legal implications for our policies, I'll push out an update and make sure staff gets it ASAP.

Example: When California bumped the minimum paid sick leave requirement from 24 to 40 hours, I didn't wait for the next review. I updated it right then.

WHY THIS MATTERS



Your handbook is only useful if it reflects what's actually true about how you run your workplace. It's a reference point, a compliance tool, and honestly, your backup plan when something goes off the rails. But only if it's current.

Real story:

I once worked with a team that launched a hybrid work model and never touched the handbook. A few months later, someone stopped showing up to in-person meetings and the manager had nothing in writing to hold them accountable. That “we’ll fix it later” moment turned into a whole thing.

Lesson learned.

My advice:

- Review your handbook once a year: non-negotiable.
- Track small updates in real time, so you don't miss anything when it's time for the overhaul.
- If the law changes and it affects your org? Update now, not later.

Be honest: how are you handling handbook updates these days? Once a year? As-needed chaos mode? Somewhere in between? Check out our handbook outline to help out with your handbook update.

Please note: this sample outline is used to show how a handbook can flow

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Table of Contents

1. Welcome to our Company!
 - a. Background/History
 - b. Handbook Purpose
2. EMPLOYMENT
 - a. Equal Employment Opportunity
 - b. Employment at Will
 - c. State and Federal Law Compliance
 - i. Taxes
 - ii. Unemployment Insurance
 - d. Background Checks
 - e. Personal Information
 - i. Updating information
 - ii. Personnel File
 - f. Reasonable Accommodation
 - g. Anti-Harassment Policy
 - h. Introductory Period
 - i. Internal Promotions/Transfers
 - j. Employment Classifications
 - k. Employment Status
3. Compensation
 - a. Equal Pay Statement
 - b. Pay Periods
 - c. Timesheets
 - d. Pay Adjustments
 - e. Overtime
 - f. Breaks and Rest Periods
 - g. Meal Period Waivers (California Only)
 - h. Expense Reimbursement
4. Benefits
 - a. Health Benefits
 - b. Privacy of Health Information
 - c. Holidays
 - d. Paid Time Off

1. Leaves
 - a. Paid Leaves
 - i. New Child Leave
 - ii. Bereavement Leave
 - b. Unpaid Leaves
 - c. Personal Leave of Absence
 - d. FMLA
 - e. California Leaves
 - i. CFRA
 - ii. Paid Family Leave
 - iii. Pregnancy Disability Leave
 - iv. State Disability Leave

1. Military USERRA Leave
2. Jury Duty Leave
3. Voting Leave
4. Organ and Bone Marrow Donor Leave (California Only)
5. Work Environment
 - a. Hours of Operation
 - b. Safety
 - c. Workers Compensation
6. Workplace Policies
 - a. Code of Conduct
 - i. Conflicts of Interest
 - ii. Confidentiality
 - iii. Accepting Gifts
 - iv. Electronic Use Policy
 - v. Social Media Policy
7. Performance
 - a. Attendance Policy
 - b. Performance Evaluations
 - c. Progressive Discipline
8. Separation of Employment
 - a. Resignation
 - b. Termination
 - c. Payout of PTO
 - d. Return of Company Property
 - e. Final Paycheck
 - f. COBRA Insurance

Other policies to include:

Vehicle Policy

Travel Policy

Grievance Procedure

Inspection and Searches

Immigration Reform Act (4-14 employees)