

# Employee Handbook

How-to Guide for Employers

This document is intended as a reference guide to provide non-union businesses operating in BC's Tourism & Hospitality industry with an overview of what should be included in an employee handbook. While efforts have been made to ensure that this document is as comprehensive as possible, it is important to recognize that policies, procedures, and structures will vary between businesses. Users are responsible for ensuring that their employee policies meet the needs of their organization and are compliant with current employment-related legislation.

Interested in receiving a Sample Employee Handbook? Contact your [go2HR Regional HR Consultant](#) to request a copy.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
What is An Employee Handbook?.....	2
Why is an Employee Handbook Important?.....	2
What is the Difference Between an Employee Handbook and a Policy Manual?.....	2
How to Use an Employee Handbook.....	2
What to Include in an Employee Handbook .....	3
What Not to Include in an Employee Handbook.....	3
Creating Your Employee Handbook.....	4
Step 1: Determine the Contents of your Employee Handbook.....	4
Step 2: Write Missing Policies/Procedures .....	5
Step 3: Compile your Information .....	5
Step 4: Ensure Government Compliance.....	6
Step 5: Share your Finished Employee Handbook.....	6
Conclusion.....	6
Additional Resources.....	6
Appendix A: Build an Employee Handbook Checklist .....	0
Appendix B: Policy Example/Template .....	0

# Introduction

## What is An Employee Handbook?

An employee handbook is a document created by an employer to communicate employment and job-related information that employees must know including the company's values, policies, and guidelines. It can also be used as a compliance tool, especially if you do not have or intend to have a Policy Manual. Sometimes known as an "employee manual" or "staff handbook", employee handbooks are given to new hires after their acceptance of an offer letter, helping to set expectations of employees and proper workplace procedures, and can be used as a compliance tool.

## Why is an Employee Handbook Important?

Starting a new position in a new company can often seem overwhelming, with new faces, information, and policies to learn. But, providing new hires with an employee handbook early on in their employment (think: first day) is a great way to make sure that the employee has all the necessary information and has a resource to constantly refer back to if they have any questions.

It is a valuable reference tool that gives employees information to help them understand employment expectations, handle issues, reference policies, and learn what's acceptable in the workplace. By providing an employee handbook, you can establish professionalism in the workplace and help create a dependable workforce.

## What is the Difference Between an Employee Handbook and a Policy Manual?

Employee handbooks and policy manuals can seem similar, but they are two very different things. An employee handbook tells your employees what to expect and should be written in easy-to-understand language. A policy manual, on the other hand, is a document typically used by managers/supervisors, that supports an employee handbook and provides information and guidance on how to apply policies and procedures, and may include more technical information.

For example, if you have a tuition reimbursement program, in your employee handbook you will tell your employees you offer a tuition reimbursement program, but you don't need to outline the nitty gritty details in your handbook. You should save the practical information such as how to apply for tuition reimbursement, and what the program expectations are, in the policy manual.

The information in your employee handbook should match the information in your policies, but it should be a taster rather than the complete policy. That said, a Policy Manual is not required. And, in the absence of a policy manual, your employee handbook needs to include your business' policies in order to be compliant.

## How to Use an Employee Handbook

Each new employee should be provided with a copy of your employee handbook upon hire to allow for an efficient and consistent onboarding. But, employee handbooks not only serve your new staff, they serve your old staff as well because they can be used as a reference tool. And, they provide a baseline for you as the employer for what you expect of employees. Ensuring policies,

procedures and working practices are enforced fairly, thus eliminating confusion and misalignment within your team.

## What to Include in an Employee Handbook

Employee handbooks typically include three categories of content:

1. **General information** including items such as your company's mission statement, core values, policy summaries and more.
2. **Cultural information** including items such as vacation time/ holidays, hours of work, appearance & grooming, rewards and recognition, etc.
3. **Business Specific information** including items such as company policies, disciplinary procedures, code of conduct, bullying and harassment, etc.

Every business will have different needs, but here is an overview of what you should include in a standard employee handbook:

- Welcome Message
- Company History
- Company Vision, mission and values
- Company policies/procedures
- Employee compensation and benefits information
- On the job information (dress code, smoking, etc.)
- Leaves
- Performance
- Career Development
- Health & Safety
- Security
- Employee Relations
- Employee Departure

For a checklist to help you build your Employee Handbook, please see Appendix A.

## What Not to Include in an Employee Handbook

Just as important as what to include in an employee handbook is what not to include. Do not include blanket policies on criminal convictions, withholding final pay until company property is returned, refusing to pay unauthorized overtime/early punch-ins, requiring a doctor's note for every sick day, prohibiting lawful off-duty conduct, prohibiting employees from discussing their pay with coworkers, and English-language-only policies.

As a business owner with limited time, you'll also want to create a handbook that does not require constant updating. Don't put all the details in, allow yourself some flexibility. Best practice would be to review your handbook annually and if you make an update to a policy, you'll want to ensure the handbook reflects the change right away.

## Creating Your Employee Handbook

Now that you know all about Employee Handbooks, its time to pull things together. Whether you're create a new employee handbook or update an existing employee handbook for your business, the following sections will walk you through the key pieces of information to include and how to create the policies/procedures you need. Additionally, go2HR has a variety of resources available for your use including policy templates, and an [Employee Handbook template](#) that you can update/modify for your business as needed.

### Step 1: Determine the Contents of your Employee Handbook

Take the time to plan the contents of your employee handbook before diving in. This will ensure you include all necessary materials to make your handbook effective. See below for examples on what to include (complete checklist included in Appendix A).

General Information	Cultural Information	Business Specific Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Welcome message</li><li>•Company History</li><li>•Vision</li><li>•Mission</li><li>•Values</li><li>•Employment Equity</li><li>•Privacy, Confidential Information &amp; Intellectual Property</li><li>•Probationary Period</li><li>•Employee Signoff (signifying receipt and acknowledgement that the employee understands and will abide by the contents included)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Employment Status</li><li>•Hours of Work</li><li>•Overtime</li><li>•Meals &amp; Breaks</li><li>•Attendance</li><li>•Payroll Information</li><li>•Tips &amp; Gratuities</li><li>•Time Sheets/Records</li><li>•Group Benefits</li><li>•Annual Vacation</li><li>•Statutory Holidays</li><li>•Appearance &amp; Grooming</li><li>•Cash Handling</li><li>•Performance Review Process</li><li>•Career Development</li><li>•Employee Recognition Programs</li><li>•Employee Events</li><li>•Internal Committees</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Code of Conduct</li><li>•Health &amp; Safety Policy</li><li>•Health &amp; Safety Orientation &amp; Training</li><li>•Health &amp; Safety Committee or Joint Health &amp; Safety Representative</li><li>•Reporting Accidents, Injuries and other Safety related concerns</li><li>•Respect in the Workplace/Bullying and Harassment</li><li>•Fire Safety &amp; Emergency Response</li><li>•Safety &amp; Security</li><li>•Smoking Policy</li><li>•Drug Free Workplace Policy</li><li>•Leaves: Illness or Injury, Family Responsibility, Bereavement, Maternity/Parental, Other Unpaid Leaves, Time Off to Vote</li><li>•Conflicts of Interest</li><li>•Progressive Discipline</li><li>•Employee Departure</li><li>•Employment of Relatives</li><li>•Social Media Use</li><li>•Cell Phone Use</li><li>•Company Equipment &amp; Information Technology</li><li>•Personal Devices</li></ul>

## Step 2: Write Missing Policies/Procedures

In the process of creating your employee handbook, you might have realized that you haven't formalized your policies/procedures or that you still need to consider what some of your policies/procedures should be. Don't worry, many businesses don't think concretely about this until they have to explain them in writing. To write a company policy/procedure:

1. Identify the need for the policy – a company policy should act as a solution to an existing/past problem.
2. Determine the policy content and its goals – for example, if you're creating a policy to address an attendance problem, the end goal would be fewer employee absences.
3. Ensure your policy is compliant with BC employment standards – seek legal counsel if required.
4. Craft your policy, include:
  - Purpose statement
  - Policy details and explanation
  - Effective date
5. Communicate the policy to existing employees. Let them know:
  - What the policy entails
  - Why it was created
  - When it goes into effect
  - Who employees can come to with questions

For a policy template, see Appendix B or visit go2HR's [HR Toolkit | go2HR](#) or [contact your go2HR Regional HR Consultant](#) for additional support (at no cost).

## Step 3: Compile your Information

Using go2HR's [Employee Handbook template](#), add your business' information into the appropriate sections. Don't be afraid to add personality into your guide.

1. **Use a tone that matches your culture.** Your handbook's tone mirrors everyday work life at your company. A consultancy firm with strict professional standards will probably write its handbook in a professional, formal tone. Conversely, tech companies might use a more casual tone.
2. **Keep it short and simple.** Use as few words as possible and avoid jargon, technical terms and complicated words.
3. **Focus on the positives.** Even when you are indicating a prohibition (e.g., no smoking indoors) explain why it's important and how it adds value to your business. Keep your language welcoming and instructional, rather than authoritative.
4. **Speak to your audience.** Avoid using passive voice or addressing abstract entities (e.g., "the employee.") Use "you" and "we" to make your handbook more personable and accessible.
5. **Add humor when possible/if appropriate.** Your handbook isn't meant to be hilarious, but adding a few humorous lines (or pictures) will make it more pleasant to read.

## Step 4: Ensure Government Compliance

BC Employment Standards must be followed by every business. To ensure your compliance familiarize yourself with the key aspects of the [BC Employment Standards Act](#). Including overtime, statutory holidays, vacation time, pay, termination, etc.

Information you include in your handbook and throughout your company policies need to comply with BC employment standards, [BC Human Rights](#) (discrimination, employment decisions, etc.), and [WorkSafe BC](#) (coverage, injury and investigating reporting, etc.). Additional information you are required to be in compliance with can be found [here](#) on the BC Government website.

## Step 5: Share your Finished Employee Handbook

It is important to ensure the employee handbook is easy to find for everyone. Post the handbook in various locations, email a copy to your staff, and/or keep hardcopies available – whatever works for your business. For new employees, provide a copy on or before their first day.

## Conclusion

Employee handbooks are incredibly effective in maintaining a positive workplace culture and integrating newcomers into the team in an efficient and consistent manner. An employee handbook sets clear expectations for all employees to ensure everyone within the organization can remain on the same page. In doing so, employee handbooks help to establish a culture where issues can be dealt with fairly and consistently. Employee Handbooks are an effective tool you can use to provide key information about your business to new employees.

## Additional Resources

For additional information and resources, visit: [www.go2hr.ca](http://www.go2hr.ca) and [HR Toolkit | go2HR](#)

## Appendix A: Build an Employee Handbook Checklist

Use the following checklist as a tool to help you build your employee handbook. Include all the relevant items from the list below.

General Information		
✓	Item	Description/Link
	Welcome Message	Small paragraph welcoming your new hire to the business
	Company History	Key facts new employees should know to help them better understand your culture
	Vision	Statement that describes your business' aspirational long-term goal
	Mission	Core purpose of your business
	Values	The standards and guidelines that drive your business operations
	Employment Equity	Statement regarding your business' equal treatment and opportunity for all employees and applicants
	Privacy, Confidential Information & Intellectual Property	Describe how you handle privacy, confidential information and intellectual property
	Probationary Period	<a href="#">Link to BC Employment Standards</a>
	Employee Signoff	Signifying receipt and acknowledgement that the employee understands and will abide by the contents included. If you will be using your Employee Handbook as your Policy Manual as well, ensure you include the acknowledgement for compliance purposes.
Cultural Information		
✓	Item	
	Employment Status	Full time, part time, seasonal or on call?
	Hours of Work	Business operating hours/when you require employees to arrive and end their shift
	Overtime	How you handle overtime. Refer to <a href="#">BC Employment Standards</a> as required
	Meals & Breaks	When and how long employees get for meals and breaks. Refer to <a href="#">BC Employment Standards</a> as required
	Attendance	What you require around attendance
	Payroll Information	When you process pay/pay frequency
	Tips & Gratuities	How tips and/or gratuities are distributed
	Time Sheets/Records	How employees submit hours worked to payroll



	Group Benefits	If applicable outline your benefits/include plan information direct from provider
	Annual Vacation	<a href="#">Annual Vacation - Province of British Columbia (gov.bc.ca)</a>
	Statutory Holidays	<a href="#">Statutory Holidays - Province of British Columbia (gov.bc.ca)</a>
	Appearance & Grooming	Is a uniform provided, do you have a dress code, etc.
	Cash Handling	How you accept, count, track and dispense payments received
	Performance Review Process	<a href="#">Performance Review Process – go2HR</a>
	Career Development	How you support your employees in learning and improving their skills for their current or future roles
	Employee Recognition Programs	<a href="#">Recognition &amp; Rewards – go2HR</a>
	Employee Events	List/describe your employee events if applicable
	Internal Committees	List/describe your internal committees if applicable
<b>Business Specific Information</b>		
✓	Item	
	Code of Conduct	<a href="#">Code of Conduct – go2HR</a>
	Health & Safety Policy	<a href="#">Developing a Health &amp; Safety Program – WorkSafe BC</a>
	Health & Safety Orientation & Training	<a href="#">Health &amp; Safety Orientation Checklist – go2HR</a>
	Health & Safety Committee or Joint Health & Safety Representative	<a href="#">Joint Health &amp; Safety Committees – WorkSafe BC</a>
	Reporting Accidents, Injuries and other safety concerns	<a href="#">Reporting &amp; Investigating Workplace Incidents – WorkSafe BC</a>
	Respect in the Workplace/Bullying and Harassment	<a href="#">Bullying &amp; Harassment – WorkSafe BC</a>
	Fire Safety & Emergency Response	Describe how you maintain fire safety and plan in case of emergency
	Safety & Security	Describe how you ensure the general safety of your employees
	Smoking Policy	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B
	Drug Free Workplace Policy	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B <a href="#">Substance Abuse and Impairment in the Workplace – WorkSafe BC</a>
	Leaves: Illness or Injury, Family Responsibility, Bereavement, Maternity/Parental, Other Unpaid Leaves, Time Off to Vote	<a href="#">Leaves of Absence – Province of British Columbia (gov.bc.ca)</a> <a href="#">Time off work for Voting – Elections BC</a>
	Conflicts of Interest	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B
	Progressive Discipline	<a href="#">Progressive Discipline Process – go2HR</a>
	Employee Departure	<a href="#">See Departure Section of Employee Human Resource Industry Toolkit – go2HR</a>

	Employment of Relatives	Describe guidelines for employing relatives
	Social Media Use	Describe rules for use of social media
	Cell Phone Use	Describe rules/requirements around cell phone use (business provided vs. personal)
	Company Equipment & Information Technology	Describe proper use of company equipment
	Personal Devices	Describe rules/requirements around use of personal devices

## Appendix B: Policy Example/Template

An example of a Policy has been provided below which can be used as a template when creating your own policies. Another example, would be to create a Policy Statement. A sample Policy Statement can be found [here](#) on WorkSafe BC's website.

### Sick Leave Policy – Sample Template

Policy Name:	Sick Leave	Policy Number	
Effective Date:	(date policy created/put into place)	Review/Revision Date:	(date policy last reviewed and updated)

#### Introduction:

[COMPANY] eligible employees are provided up to 5 days of paid sick leave for illness or injury per calendar year of employment, and 3 unpaid sick days. All provisions of this policy are compliant with the *Illness or Injury Leave* section of the BC Employment Standards Act (ESA).

#### Purpose:

This policy has been established in accordance with the ESA Illness or Injury Leave.

#### Scope:

This Sick leave policy applies to all employees who have been employed with [COMPANY] for at least 90 consecutive calendar days including employees who are casual, temporary, seasonal, part-time and full-time.

---

#### Procedures:

- Sick days can be used for personal illness or injury that prevents the employee from reporting to work
- Employees must notify their Manager as early as possible that they will be taking a sick day by phone, e-mail or text *[or all 3, if any method is acceptable]*, preferably prior to the start of their shift/work day.
- In the event that an employee is unable to notify their Manager prior to the start of their scheduled shift, they must contact their Manager as soon as possible to advise that they are unable to attend work due to personal illness or injury.
- Sick days may be used consecutively all at once or one at a time. Employees can take up to 5 paid sick days and 3 unpaid sick days of job-protected leave per calendar year.
- Employees may specify if they would like to use paid or unpaid sick days.

#### Employer Use

- In the event that an employee reports to work and the Employer determines that they are unfit for work due to illness or injury, the Employer may send the employee home. The

employee would be compensated for the day as outlined under *Calculations of Wages for Sick Days* section below.

### Proof of Illness

- The Employer may request, at their discretion, reasonable proof of illness or injury from the employee. The employee is required to provide proof as soon as practicable once it is requested. *[Reasonable medical proof could include notes from a physician, nurse, pharmacist or other medical professional, or notes from other healthcare professionals including a counsellor, therapist, mental health practitioner, physiotherapist or chiropractor].*

### Partial Days

- In the event that an employee requires a partial sick day, they will be paid in accordance with the calculations for a sick leave day.
- A partial sick leave day qualifies as an entire day, under ESA.

### Calculation of Wages for Sick Days

- The amount of wages per sick day will vary based on the pay formula required under ESA, which determines the number of hours to be paid for the sick day.
- The employee will be paid their regular hourly rate, as per their employment contract, times the number of hours.
- The amount of hours paid for a sick day is based on the following formula, not on the total hours of the shift that the employee was scheduled to work. *[For example, if the averaging shows the employee should be paid 8 hours, but the shift was only for 4 hours, the employee is entitled to be paid 8 hours]*
- Regardless of employee status (casual, part or full-time), the average day's pay is calculated by the following formula based on the 30 calendar days prior to the leave date:

$$\text{Total Wages} \div \text{number of days worked or earned wages} = \text{Average day's pay}$$

Use the total wages earned in the 30 calendar days before the first day of the sick leave, including: salary, commission, statutory holiday pay, and paid vacation. Do not include overtime pay or payment from benefit plans.

*[Example of pay calculation: Employee X called in sick for a 3 hour shift. Employee X is paid \$16.00 per hour, and worked 20 days in the 30 days prior to the leave date. Each shift varied with a total number of 131 hours worked.]*

$$131 \text{ hours} \times \$16.00 = \$2,096 \text{ total wages} \div 20 \text{ days worked} = \$104.80 \text{ (average day's pay)}$$

Should you have any questions about this policy, please speak to **[PERSON or YOUR MANAGER or POSITION]**.

---

**Relevant Resources:** [Illness or Injury Leave - Employment Standards Act](#)  
[Illness or Injury Leave FAQ - go2HR](#)