

HOW TO COMMUNICATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Air Canada recently gave an example of the importance of knowing how to communicate policies and procedures to staff, as the airline advised its flight attendants that they weren't permitted to wear poppies to commemorate Remembrance Day on their uniforms. Hours later, a company vice-president reversed course and informed staff that the wearing of poppies would be supported. A company spokesperson informed the media that the uniform policy had been updated to avoid future confusion.

To prevent your policies and procedures from becoming front page news or creating a firestorm on social media that will negatively impact your employer brand, it is important to know how to communicate policies and procedures to staff effectively.

Whether you've developed an employee handbook, a policy manual, or some other form of documentation of your company's HR policies, it is crucial to communicate the contents of these documents to your staff. Your staff should be advised why it was created, what the purpose is and how the document will be used in the company. This also applies when updates to policies are being made.

We also advise incorporating employee feedback, opinions and ideas about what to include in the document, preferably prior to its creation. Asking employees up-front for their input about what they would like to see included is the first step to communicating company policies and procedures. Communication with employees should start well before the formal document is completed. While not every workplace is unionized, had Air Canada discussed the poppy policy with the union representing the flight attendants prior to its implementation, the airline could have saved itself significant heartache. The union would surely have provided the necessary feedback to prevent the implementation of this policy.

Develop your communication strategy first, before you start documenting your company policies and procedures. It is important to keep employees informed of the process to encourage their interest, buy-in and input.

Keep the following recommendations in mind for how to communicate policies and procedures to staff:

1. Inform employees up-front

At the start of the project, let employees know that the company will work on developing (or updating) Company policies and procedures. Explain why the information is important and relevant, and what impact it will have on them.

2. Ask for feedback

To encourage employee involvement and buy-in, ask employees for their ideas about what they think should be included in the employee handbook or policy manual. Incorporate as much of the employee feedback as possible. Involve employees in drafting particular sections of the policy document if it makes sense.

3. Introduce final product

Conduct a meeting with all staff to introduce the completed handbook or manual and review its purpose.

Reinforce its importance and how it should be used.

4. Ask employees to review employee handbook or policy manual

Provide employees a chance to ask questions. Distribute the completed handbook or manual to staff, either in a hard copy or advise them how to access the document electronically. Ask employees to provide feedback on improving the document.

5. Provide training where required

Some policies and procedures may require more extensive and intensive training to ensure that employees understand how the policy applies to them, so provide employee training, as required. Training does not have to be provided all at once. You can schedule training sessions on an on-going basis or on an as-needed basis.

6. Request employee sign-off

It is important for staff to read the document to become familiar with the company's policies. Request each employee sign-off on having read the document. A copy of the sign-off should be placed in the employee's personnel file.

The manual or handbook is a living, breathing document. It should be reviewed and updated regularly – about once a year – and should incorporate any employee suggestions for improving the document. Remember that the handbook/manual also acts as an employer branding document which communicates to employees what it's like to work for your company. It should be written in a tone and format that suits your company's culture and personality. Following these recommendations, you'll be well on your way to communicate your policies and procedures to staff effectively.

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