

EMPLOYMENT · PREVENTION

THE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK AUDIT CHECKLIST

A working document for owners, executives, and HR leaders.

WHY AUDIT

The handbook is evidence, whether you like it or not

When an employment claim lands, the handbook is one of the first documents everyone reads: the agency, opposing counsel, and eventually a judge. A current, consistent, actually-followed handbook shuts down claims early. A stale or contradictory one becomes the plaintiff's best exhibit. This audit takes an afternoon and is the cheapest employment-law work a company can do.

PART ONE

Foundations

- **At-will language** appears prominently, and nothing elsewhere in the handbook (or in offer letters) contradicts it with promises of continued employment or fixed procedures.
- **Acknowledgment pages** are signed and actually on file for every current employee, including remote hires.
- **A single current version** exists. Old versions are archived and dated, not floating around shared drives.
- **The disclaimer** states the handbook is not a contract and can be changed.

PART TWO

The policies that generate lawsuits

- **Anti-harassment policy** gives two or more reporting channels (never only the direct supervisor) and promises no retaliation.
- **Discipline policy** preserves flexibility. Rigid step systems create arguments that a skipped step equals wrongful termination.
- **Leave policies** reflect current federal and Michigan requirements and match what managers actually do in practice.
- **Wage policies** cover overtime authorization, timekeeping expectations, and pay-period rules in plain language.
- **Technology and confidentiality** policies set expectations for company systems, data, and trade secrets, and align with any separate agreements.

PART THREE

Consistency, the part everyone fails

Most handbook problems are not missing policies. They are gaps between what the handbook says and what managers do. Audit the practice, not just the paper:

- Pull the last five terminations. Was the documented process the written process?
- Pull the last three accommodation or leave requests. Were they handled the way the policy describes?
- Ask three managers how they would handle a harassment report. If the answers differ, train before you get tested.

WHEN TO GET HELP

The escalation line

If the audit surfaces contradictions between documents, policies that have not been reviewed in several years, or practices that drifted far from paper, a counseled revision is a small project compared to defending the claim the gap invites. That is exactly the work our employment practice does.

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