



Fall Is a Good Time to Review Your HR Policies

In the past, as summer ended and students returned to class, autumn was a signal for employers and employees to sharpen their collective focus on their businesses and careers and settle back into a routine. After the flexibility required of employers over eighteen plus months, as well as all of the workplace changes and new considerations brought on by the pandemic, it's not surprising that HR policies need to be revisited. Employers need to review their policies carefully and see where these have changed dramatically in light of what the workplace now looks like; or, if those policies just need some mild updating and reinforcing. Training is another important function of HR.

Overall, Mr. John Dustin, President of J.E.D. Insurance & Financial Service Agency, Inc., believes very strongly that employers must make such a review a top priority. "This is the season to review HR policies and make sure that you understand COVID rules, and that you understand offers and termination," he declares. Adding to that statement, he vocalizes a list of equally important questions that employers cannot afford to approach casually. "When you have a disgruntled employee, how do you handle them? Do you put them on a warning system or is it better to just terminate the relationship? And who do you use to assist you? Do you have an attorney on staff, or do you go to outside counsel? Do you have an HR company that you work with? Do you have policies and procedures that protect you?" He emphasizes that none of these questions should be addressed when there is a real-time issue to be dealt with. Instead, planning is critical. Having dedicated HR professionals provides protection and reduces owners' and managers' anxiety.

To accomplish this, John advocates partnering with HR professionals, for a few valid reasons. First, they understand what needs to be included in a company's HR manual. Second, often what happens in smaller companies, is usually either a manager or the controller, or the

bookkeeper inherits the responsibility. This is a risky and dubious practice. As he explains, "It's such a challenge because it's complicated. The people in these positions are not trained in this ever-changing area and might not be especially adept at handling this type of complexity." Some of the challenges that John is referring to include hiring and onboarding procedures, responding to employee-related COVID issues that surface, as well as managing retirement plans. Each of these issues needs an understanding of how to impart such information to employees, some of which calls for a very delicate exchange. A third reason why collaborating with an HR professional is beneficial, is because they are aware of state statutes and can take it one step further by applying logical creativity in helping to develop a company's HR manual, specific to that individual enterprise.

HR professionals are dedicated, full-time, to protecting a company's human resources standards and agenda. Though, as John points out, in addition to maintaining a positive work environment among existing employees, a heightened awareness of how a company can stay competitive in its respective vertical and in its geographical area is a major preoccupation. Staying informed as to market changes influences the hiring process and the company's bottom line. "Reliance on social media platforms to find quality candidates, get leads, and see what other companies are offering helps an HR professional advocate to senior management what a business needs to do to stay relevant," John begins. "I've seen companies lose employees over something like insurance. They might pay 50% of the health insurance, but a competitor down the street pays 70%." While the multitude of these online job search tools offers value in terms of publishing employment industry data, in John's estimation, he believes that the best place to find a quality candidate is from a personal reference. The reason he gives is that it comes down to trust. There is a labor shortage and competition is fierce.

John makes another important distinction within the human resource profession and why smart business owners choose to work closely with them. "You can get an HR professional to help with policies and procedures, but they don't litigate. And then when you have a problem, you need to go to defense counsel litigators. For a small business owner, these are the types of professional resources you need in your back pocket from onboarding to potential litigation down the road," he stresses.

And whether a company is a larger company with its own HR department and in-house counsel or a small business that partners with outside HR professionals and employment attorneys, both types of businesses must comply with the mandates and standards from the Department of Labor, ERISA, and unemployment insurance. "Each of these governing bodies represents an important area within the employment sector, and it's incumbent upon the business to comply with these standards. For example, the Department of Labor requires businesses to provide harassment training once a year. An HR professional will be mindful of that and make sure that the requisite training occurs," he cites.

Indeed, there are many considerations a business of any size needs to address on a regular basis to maintain a solid HR policy and to remain current. With either subtle nuances or dramatic changes to the market, social policy, or another variable that impacts employees and, ultimately, the smooth functioning of a business, HR professionals are invaluable resources to business owners when the latter takes the time every year—as in fall for instance—to review their HR policies.

#workplacechanges #hrpolicies #training #toppriority #offers #termination
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#personalreference #trust #defensecounsel #litigators #departmentoflabor #erisa
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