Top Tips to changing your Employee Handbook

Why?

Your Employee Handbook can often be one of the first documents new starters see and therefore one of their first impressions of what it's like to work for you.

What should be an opportunity to give an insight into your great culture and ways of working, unfortunately, are often overly long, complicated and full of negative language about all the things that might happen if they don't follow the rules!

If you're interested in ripping up your handbook and starting again, but don't know where to start, these top tips will focus on some simple steps to help get you there.

1) Prepare your HR team

Hold an informal meeting/workshop with your HR team

- Challenge them around the EACH model (Employees as Adults, Consumers and Human Beings) – or watch these two videos - EACH and Employment Policy

- Discuss and debate the current policies and procedures and the pros and cons of your current approach:

  - Does it assume that the majority of our people/managers can use good judgement?
  - Does it assume that the majority of our people will behave as decent human beings?
  - Putting ourselves in the shoes of our people, how does the handbook make us feel?
  - Does it allow us to flex decisions based on individual circumstances?
  - Does it have every possible scenario built in which is making it complicated for people/managers to interpret?

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- Is it written using human language?
- Does it contain policies that we don't really need?
- Does it contain policies which we assume are a legal requirement and should we challenge that?

2) Get some feedback from your people

Get some feedback on how your people feel about the policies and procedures using a short online survey or running a few focus groups. Share the handbook and ask these questions:

- How does our current handbook make you feel?

- Which policies and procedures in the handbook frustrate you and why?

- How confident do you feel about interpreting the handbook without guidance?

3) Make some changes

Using the insight you have gained:

- Create a handbook as a 'welcome guide' – think of it as a marketing document (perhaps get your marketing team involved!)   Add branding and language that reflects your culture. Include interesting information about your history, goals and what people can expect from you in terms of career development and perks as well as practical support on 'how things work round here'.

- Replace as many policies as you can with statements that assume people can use their judgement, for example, replace a dress code policy with a one-line statement e.g. "Dress for your day". But, don't be tempted to add "and what we mean by this is no shorts, flipflops…etc"!

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- Decide on the core policies you need and use pdf links to keep the handbook short and simple.

- Make sure the policies are up to date (use your local best practice provider for templates).

- For your leaders consider creating a [Guide](#) to develop their knowledge and confidence rather than coming to HR for every decision – perhaps you could run learning sessions on different topics e.g. absence management, having difficult conversations, recruitment etc..

- Your statements in the handbook can be light and even humorous but accept that the policies are often and for good reason serious documents, so keep them factual (they are what they are).

- If you feel not quite ready to let go of some, keep them, but perhaps store somewhere less prominent.

4) Get some inspiration

See how this organisation developed a [handbook](#) which brings to life their culture and ways of working, but also covers the compliance and essential policies elements to keep your people and organisation safe (for this handbook policies were taken from CIPD HR Inform).

[Thrive Tribe](#) are a young and vibrant organisation, so if you're writing your own think about your audience and the tone and language that will work for your people.

Good luck!