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Description automatically generated **Employee Handbook Introduction**

One of the easiest ways to ensure your team have easy access to all your policies and procedures is to provide them with their own personal Employee Handbook. This should contain everything that they might need to know to work for your business.

We toyed with providing a template for you, but in all honesty the only person who can develop a meaningful manual of what you are trying to achieve in your business is you. Because every business is different, and no-one knows your business as well as you do.

There are of course standard inclusions that we’d recommend, and we’ve listed below the key topics that most businesses will need their employees to not just know, but live eat and breathe.

**Introduction and General Information to describe the Company**

* Introduction to the manual (its purpose; what information can be found where; how it should be used; the fact that the information contained is confidential)
* Welcome message (the more you can personalise this the better!)
* Background to the business (when did it start; by whom; why; how has it changed over the years)
* What's the vision for the company (where do you see it going; what will it look like in 5 years’ time?)
* What are the steps you’ll need to take to get there? (Clear and tangible goals)
* What’s the business’s mission? (Why does it exist?)
* What are the values? (What is important to you and the business? What do you want to be known for?)

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This step is where many businesses fall down. The business owner knows what he wants and expects from the business and why, don't assume that everyone realises this. Unless this is shared with everyone, they will find it hard to all pull in the same direction.

When people don’t understand how and where their role fits into the bigger picture, they don't see the importance in what they do and perhaps less care is taken as they go about their roles.

If staff are not shown the vision, they can’t offer suggestions and insights that could be invaluable to the business achieving its goals.  It's those working at the coal face, that can often provide the biggest revelations to business owners. They know what customers want and don’t want.

Where people feel that they are involved in something with a cause, with a purpose behind it, they are generally more passionate, more committed and more invested in helping the business succeed.

**Practical and Cultural Information about General Working Practices**

* Working hours and overtime
* Break entitlement
* Attendance expectations
* Payroll information
* Code of conduct (what is and isn’t tolerated)
* Dress code
* Training and development opportunities available
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  Description automatically generatedPerformance expectations and evaluations
* Company values
* Company benefits (free or subsidised meals; additional day’s holiday for every x years worked; health insurance etc)
* Company equipment provided (mobiles; laptops etc)
* Holiday entitlement
* Sick pay entitlement
* Pensions information
* Expenses process
* Bonus information
* Notice period
* Parking
* Alarm/building access information

This section is not just reconfirming the practical elements to working with the business, although staff do need to be able to find this information.

This section is where your business personality should shine through. It's where your employees will take their lead about how they need to act when working with you and representing you.

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Think about the difference between Virgin Atlantic and British Airways. Both offer the same service, but one is very formal and corporate and the other is vibrant, quirky and innovative.

How do you want your customers to feel when they have experienced your service and how can you express this with your working practices so that your team also feel this and embody it when serving your customers?

**Company Policies and Procedures**

* Workplace Health and Safety policy
* Equal opportunities policy
* Harassment and discrimination policy
* Grievance policy
* Disciplinary policy
* Anti-bribery policy
* General data protection policy

The above policies are usually designed to incorporate legislation and we recommend that you seek professional HR advice to ensure that your business complies with the law.

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* Maternity and paternity policies
* Social media policy
* CSR policy
* Smoking, drugs and alcohol policy
* Visitor policy
* Work from home policy

We know this can all sound daunting. After all your business is all about people and providing the best experience, you can – not writing endless policies and documents. But there is help at hand and this doesn’t have to be expensive. The **Gig Economy** means that there are now numerous first-class HR professionals that charge by the hour to support companies for just this type of thing.

If you are a member of an organisation such as the [Federation of Small Businesses](https://www.fsb.org.uk/) **(FSB),** you will automatically have access to over a thousand documents, policies, templates and more, all of which have been checked by real lawyers.

Or you could consider a **subscription with one of the digital businesses** that offer packages of support documentation that you can download and tailor for your business. The advantage of this type of service is that it’s generally cheaper and, whilst you are a subscriber, you will always be notified of any changes in legislation that might affect your policies. Businesses that offer these services include: -

<https://simply-docs.co.uk/>

<https://www.business-in-a-box.com/>

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Description automatically generated<https://www.thelegalstop.co.uk/>

<https://www.mylawyer.co.uk/>

But of course it's important to check the terms and conditions and that the document style matches your own business style.

**Job Specific Information**

This will most likely reflect the **job description** that you created when advertising the position, although you will likely need to go into more detail for some roles.

The level of detail you provide for each role will depend very much on the level of freedom the roles within your business have. For example, in a restaurant it will be important that every dish of the same type looks and tastes the same for every serving. In which case, it would be helpful to be very specific about the menu, including detailed recipes, measures and pictures of each finished dish. In the same restaurant, the person responsible for the accounts just needs to provide timely and accurate figures for the restaurant manager. Their choice of tools, approach to preparing the figures and even method of presentation is less important and they wouldn’t therefore expect to have detailed step by step instructions on the process.

You may also decide that creating some short and sweet **‘how to’ videos** will help staff – whether it's with filling in time sheets on-line or using specific software, operating the till or even setting the alarm at night.

**Sign off Form**

It’s always worth having a form at the end of the manual that the employee signs to say that they have read and understood the handbook.

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Description automatically generatedIt’s also a good idea for you to periodically review the handbook and update it as is necessary, asking your employees to sign that they have read and received both the original and all updates.

**Who gets the handbook?**

It doesn’t matter how many or few hours your team work for you, having a handbook means that everyone knows what is expected of them; how and when and critically who to go to for assistance.

If your business relies on temporary staff, then it’s worth having an abridged version that they can quickly look through and get up to speed with. You may feel that it’s not worth paying a temporary member to go through a manual but remember they are also representing your business.

**What does your handbook need to look like?**

It can be anything you choose – as long as it contains all the information an employee will need in order to provide the best possible service to your customers.

It can be a hardbound text version; it can be very visual and colourful with pictures and images throughout; it can even be a series of videos you’ve created on your phone. The important thing is that you have one.