

The Hard Truth

Are Policies Really Necessary Since Employees Don't Follow Them Anyway?

We all have them. But, do we really know what policies we have or where they are? Are the users following them? Do we take action when the policy is broken or turn a blind eye? Are policies necessary?

For the protection of the organization and the employees the answer is yes. Policies are necessary and it is imperative that we manage them.

Every business, no matter the size or industry, needs to be diligent in ensuring their company's security by protecting intellectual property, valuable data, and identifying legal compliance for all related federal, state, and local statutes. Policies and procedures are the best way to set forth rules and regulations and to outline disciplinary issues.

Policies provide certainty in an organization for management and staff as to what is appropriate in the work place in terms of behavior and conduct. A well-developed and communicated policy can prevent conflict and reduce costs of management. Policies need to be specific and clear so there is no room for misunderstanding, and most importantly, must be followed at all times by all employees. There cannot be special privileges for some employees. Exceptions lead to workplace disputes that can cause poor customer service and declining workplace productivity. In addition, policies offer little defense against legal actions if the policy is not enforced equally.

Policies should and must be well communicated and distributed. Distribution should include these areas:

- Employee handbook
- New employee orientation packet
- Organization newsletter
- Announcements at organization functions
- Training
- Internal memos
- Post on bulletin boards
- Brown - Bag meetings
- New project initiatives
- Planning sessions

A policy is successful if it is widely understood and generally followed. To achieve policy success:

- Involve employees in the development of the policies
- Have the full commitment from management to promote the policy
- Establish a timeframe and strategy for the development of the policy
- Create a Respectful Workplace Committee (RWC)
- Communicate and publicize the policies
- Educate employees and new employees on the policies
- Keep the policies up to date and relevant

One important thing to note is that no matter how well the policy is documented and communicated; there will always be employees who don't follow them. That is the hard truth. You must enforce the policy by taking disciplinary action at all times when the policy is not followed. If you don't enforce the rules you are putting yourself and the organization at risk.

Note: For more on policies, Phara McLachlan will be speaking at the IAITAM Conference on "Policies - The 'Law' Behind Process."



The following steps support the development of policies that are relevant, enforceable and understandable.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT STEPS	
EDUCATE	Establish that there is a general issue that effects everyone, though it can affect some employees more directly than others. Do some research and include information on how the issue impacts all the employees' day-to-day job functions. Next, explain why the issue is important and how establishing a policy is a prudent step to decrease unnecessary exposure in the workplace. Relating this background information helps employees who are not directly involved understand the issue better.
DEVELOP	The next step is to create a functional, practical and useful policy. Open dialog between opposing viewpoints should be encouraged. A committee should be formed to discuss any issues and develop the appropriate policy for the organization. Policies from industry leaders can be used as a template and altered to fit the organizations particular need.
IMPLEMENT	Once a need is determined for a particular policy and it has been developed, the next step is implementation. Rollout of the policy requires transition time. There will be some adjustment for employees, which is why it is very important that employees understand the reasons/need for the particular policy.
EVALUATE	Once implemented, policies should always be reviewed periodically to monitor their effectiveness and relevance. Having a policy in place without follow up is not sufficient. Policies will always need fine-tuning. Have in place a procedure for periodic review. Create a Policy Review Board/Team.

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