

BASICS OF ETHICS AND FAIR TREATMENT AT WORK

Human resource policies and procedures affect employees' jobs and their future employment potential. HR managers, which in the case of a small business can mean the business owner, must continually balance the need to ensure the business meets its objectives but also ensure that the business follows and maintains ethical employment practices and standards. Among these is a key concept relating to an employee's right to justice and fair treatment.

The Ethics of Behavior

Ethics are the moral principles that govern business behavior. It's critical for HR personnel to understand that compliance with federal and state employment regulations doesn't necessarily mean the business is practicing ethical behaviors. One problem is that while laws and regulations create definite standards of behavior, the concept of ethics is more subjective and perceptions about what constitutes ethical behavior often differs between individuals. To build an ethical behavior framework, HR employment practices must not only adhere to legal guidelines but also model and adhere to the business's core values.

HR Ethical Issues

The lack of or a loosely enforced small-business ethics policy often leads to business owners continually struggling with a multitude of common fair-treatment issues. These include — but aren't limited to — favoritism in hiring practices, employee training and promotion, and inconsistent disciplinary measures, which may lead to increased instances of workplace harassment. Other issues include a lack of confidentiality surrounding an employee's personal and performance information, wage discrimination and basing annual reviews on factors unrelated to an employee's role.

Trust and Mutual Respect

HR can foster an environment where justice and fair treatment is the norm by creating and living up to an expectation of trust and mutual respect. Trust is fostered when information-sharing is accurate, timely and complete, and when clear, specific and measurable goals are set for the business and its employees, and employees at all levels are encouraged to share their ideas and concerns. Mutual respect develops when dignity is a behavioral standard, when the business owner and management team encourage initiative and creativity, and when diversity isn't simply tolerated but appreciated and promoted.

Maintaining an Ethical Environment

HR has the power to influence the company culture. It often takes more, however, than creating and adhering to a company ethics policy. Ongoing and open communication is essential to maintaining an environment that promotes ethical behaviors such as justice and fair treatment. After setting ethical behavioral expectations, a next step is the establishment of a communication platform, such as an open-door policy and focus group meetings, that ensures a forum for discussing ethical issues exists.

Ethics, Fair Treatment, and Justice:

Managing human resources often requires making decisions in which fairness plays a big role. You hire one candidate and reject another, promote one and demote another pay one more and one less, and settle one grievance while rejecting another. How employees react to these decisions depends, to a large extent, on whether they think the decisions and the processes that led up to them were fair.

Fairness is an integral part of what most people think of as justice. A company that is just is, among other things, equitable, fair, impartial, and unbiased in the ways it does things. With respect to employee relations, experts generally define organizational justice in terms of its three components “ **distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal or interactive justice.**

Distributive justice refers to the fairness and justice of the decisions result (for instance, did I get an equitable pay raise?) **Procedural justice refers** to the fairness of the process (for instance, is the process my company uses to allocate merit raises fair?) **Interactional or interpersonal justice refers** to the manner in which managers conduct their interpersonal dealings with employees and in particular to the degree to which they treat employees with dignity as opposed to abuse or disrespect (for instance, does my superior treat me with respect?)

Companies where fairness and justice prevail also tend to be ethical companies. One study focused on how employees reacted to fair treatment. It concluded that “to the extent that survey respondents believed that employees were treated fairly” [they] reported less unethical behavior in their organizations.

MEASURES AND POLICY FOR EMPLOYEE SAFETY AT WORK

‘Health and Safety’ may be a term that is used in a dismissive way by many people as a blanket condemnation of what they see as unnecessary caution about everyday risks - but for employers and employees this is far from the truth.

There is a huge raft of health and safety regulations that are vital if employers are to keep their staff safe and able to work and it is also the employees’ responsibility to ensure that established rules, policies and procedures are followed.

Steps for safe work environment program :

Create a Plan for Improving Health and Safety

As an employer, you must identify hazards in your workplace and take steps to eliminate or minimize them. Develop a safety plan. Tell your employees what you will do to ensure their safety and what you expect from them. Make sure your employees have access to a first aid kit.

Hazards can include: a cleaner working with heavy duty cleaning products, a mechanic working with large machinery or a warehouse manager stacking heavy boxes.

Inspect Your Workplace

Regularly check all equipment and tools to ensure that they are well maintained and safe to use. Also check storage areas and review safe work procedures. Are boxes in your storage area stacked in a safe manner? Are your employees instructed how to lift heavy goods without injuring themselves? Do your employees know where the fire exit is and where they should gather if there is a fire?

Train Your Employees

Proper training is necessary for all employees, especially if there is a risk for potential injury associated with a job. Provide written instructions and safe work procedures so they can check for themselves if they are unsure of a task or have forgotten part of their training. Supervise your employees to ensure that they are using their training to perform their job properly and safely.

By not providing the correct training for your employees you are not only endangering the safety of your employees but you will be held liable for the incident which could have serious consequences.

Keep an Open Dialogue

Meet regularly with your staff and discuss health and safety issues. Encourage them to share their ideas and thoughts on how to improve safety in the workplace. You might even consider providing first aid training for staff so they are prepared to deal with emergency situations.

Investigate Accidents

Even if an incident does not result in a serious injury, conduct an incident investigation to help determine why an incident happened so you can take steps to ensure that it will not recur.

Maintain Records

Keep records of all first aid treatment, inspections, incident investigations, and training activities. This information can help you identify trends in unsafe conditions or work procedures. You can find health and safety log book on the WorkSafeBC website which includes easy-to-use checklists and blank forms.

Make Improving Health and Safety a Key Part of Business

Safety shouldn't be an after-thought; it's just as important to a successful business as customer service, inventory control, and financial planning. A commitment to health and safety makes good business sense because it's the one way to protect your greatest resource — your people.

Measures for safe work environment:

Slips and trips:

Workplaces are busy with potentially many people moving from place to place during the course of the working day. Whether it's an office or a warehouse, a shop or a factory, this means that any hazards could mean that someone could trip up and seriously hurt him or herself. That's why it's important to keep floor areas free from obstructions with clear 'thoroughfares' for people to move around in.

Fire safety

Related in some ways to this is fire safety. If a fire ever did break out in a place of work it's vital that everyone would be able to easily reach the fire exit, often when visibility may be poor. It's also vital to let everyone know the evacuation procedure, to have the correct extinguishers available and to ensure that members of staff are trained in how to use them.

Lifting

Recent researches shows there were over half a million reported cases of musculoskeletal work injuries and many of these related to lifting heavy objects incorrectly. So it is important that all staff are fully trained in safe lifting – and not just in factories and warehouses. Even the office environment presents a risk of injury if members of staff are involved in moving any heavy objects such as desks or boxes of copier paper.

Sight

There are a number of recommendations that relate to the safe use of computer screens as prolonged use can cause tired eyes and headaches. In fact employers have a legal obligation to provide a free sight test for any employee who requests one and who spends a significant part of their day on the computer. It's therefore recommended that you ensure that employees who do a great deal of screen work have frequent breaks in the day to give their eyes a rest.

Hearing

Long term exposure to high levels of noise can cause permanent hearing damage. The level at which this becomes a concern is at around 85 decibels or more and there are also regulations about the maximum sound levels permitted. If yours is a noisy environment it is the employer's responsibility to ensure noise levels stay within the permitted limits and to provide all necessary ear protection.

For employees who feel that their hearing may be being affected by work you might also like to offer them expert hearing tests where their hearing can be assessed and, if necessary, hearing aids can be supplied.

As we've said, health and safety at work is a huge topic and there are many other areas to be considered. Larger companies often have their own experts in-house and there is no shortage of independent consultants who are happy to help SMEs to comply with the law. But whatever the size of your company it's vital for both your and your employees' benefit that you keep fully abreast of all legislation.