

Building Your Law Firm Policies and Procedures Manual

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No, it's not exactly on everyone's fun list. Nevertheless, you need to build a law firm policies and procedures manual for your law firm. It's an essential part of successfully running a law firm for at least three reasons.

First, it will ease the training of new staff members. They'll have a reference, so they won't have to keep asking the same questions again and again. Second, policies and procedures will reduce the amount of variance there is between one staff member to another. Finally, it will allow your law firm to be in compliance with various state and federal agencies that require written procedures.

Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Company of North Carolina published an excellent guide entitled "[Office Procedures Manual: Risk Management Practice Guide of Lawyers Mutual.](#)" There is quite a bit of detailed information in the guide. Much of the information below can be found in the guide.

Law Firm Policies and Procedures Manual: Introduction Section

Your law firm policies and procedures manual should be divided into two sections: office policies and office procedures. The office policies section covers rules and regulations and deals with topics such as employment, behavior and, inclement weather procedures. The office procedures section covers administrative functions and includes file management, conflicts of interest checking, managing the trust account, calendaring and routine activities like opening mail and answering the phone.

As far as writing the manual, be careful with word choice. This is a publication that demands quick reading, almost scanning, so you should avoid lengthy wordiness. Just make it short, simple and to the point.

Using an outline format helps with this process. Maintain a positive tone throughout rather than a list of "thou shalt not" commandments. Make sure the law firm policies and procedures manual use the same "voice" throughout. It's also important to organize content, grouping like with like topics. Finally, have a review process in place.

To begin, consider having the following to establish the positive tone the manual should take:

1. Welcome Letter
2. The Law Firm's Missions, Goals, and Philosophy.

This is a good place to establish a positive tone the manual should take. As the guide points out, this is also a good place to make your readers glad they chose your law firm at which to work.

The introduction section of your law firm policies and procedures manual should include the following:



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1. Layouts and access points of the law firm, whether it is an office suite or stand-alone building.
2. Job descriptions and responsibilities.
3. List the location of equipment and basic maintenance procedures for the equipment.
4. List supplies and instructions on ordering more supplies.

Law Firm Policies and Procedures Manual: Policies Section

The guide states that “Wording is crucial in this section to ensure you do not limit your rights as an employer. In some cases, policies manuals have been determined to be contracts between employers and employees. Speak in general terms and avoid words such as ‘guarantee’ when referring to firm actions.”

Start out with general employment policies. This is where the bulk of compliance with state and federal laws come into play. Cover topics such as equal opportunity employer, non-discrimination, confidentiality, as well as the office procedure for harassment.

Under the employment section of your law firm policies and procedures manual, be sure to cover classifications of employment, information about personnel files and confidentiality and disciplinary and termination terms.

The conduct section will cover general behavior policies. This includes dress code, online behavior, a media policy, web browsing and uses of office equipment and supplies. Include instructions on personal space organization so that confidential papers are not scattered on someone’s desk in the event of another client happening upon seeing these papers. Employees should always be aware of confidentiality.

Work hours should also be spelled out in this section, in addition to the benefits offered by your law firm. Leave policies should be outlined under this section, including policies for jury duty, military leave, bereavement, school leave and holidays.

Law Firm Policies and Procedures Manual: Procedures Section

This section of your law firm policies and procedures describes to employees how to perform their job duties. Employees can also reference it for instructions on how to perform their colleague’s duty in case of an absence.

Security is the first order of business under this section. Today, there is a huge concern for electronic document security as well as security from hackers in general. Outline procedures for keeping documents safe and give employees information about [avoiding being a victim of email hacking](#).

Security procedures also need to be outlined for handling hard copy documents. Confidential papers need to be shredded and not put in the general recycle container or trash bin. Outline the procedures for shredding documents.

Emergency and [disaster](#) procedures need to be addressed. This includes having a list of contacts and a muster point named in case of building emergencies. This section should also address how to handle office accidents and injuries.

The procedures section is where behaviors regarding firm representation go. How to answer the phone, how to greet visitors, and how to not to discuss client business out in the open.

Written procedures on engaging, declining and disengaging representation go here, as well as proper communication with clients and visitors. In addition, etiquette and timeliness of correspondence fall under this section.

How to open and close files go here, as well. To keep the office in order regarding deadlines and meetings, include a detailed description of the law firm calendaring procedure.

Finally, document how billing, trust accounts, and time-keeping are to be handled.

It’s also a good idea to include standard forms as an appendix to your policies and procedures manual.

Summary

Yes, it seems like a lot of work. That’s because done right, building an effective law firm policies and procedures manual is a lot of work. But the outcomes are critical, especially in terms of time savings, accuracy, consistency, and saving the law firm from lawsuits and federal violations. The work is well worth the effort.

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