

DOCUMENT!

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a small business

guide

THE HR TRAIL, LLC

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Why? Ugh! Seriously!?! It takes too much time.

Trust me, I've heard them all. I work with small businesses who don't always understand the reasoning behind the infamous HR saying "document, document, document". As an entrepreneur in the human resources world, I hold a very high ethical standard. I simply must in my line of work. I have terminated business relationships because the client didn't see the value in HR and the advice that we, as HR professionals, give.

I get it. No one wants to be told to do additional work. Once you finish reading this, which I hope you do, you will understand why it is so important to document. Do you want to avoid potential accusations and lawsuits? We all do. Let's take the time to focus on a high-performance culture by demonstrating fair workplace and ethical standards.

So, what do we document? Everything. Well, almost everything. Documentation is not just for the negative, you also want to document the positive conversations as well. Even positive can come back to haunt you if not documented.

Timing is everything!

Let's face it, we do not have memories of an elephant (if you do, I'm jealous). Writing down a conversation or an incident is incredibly important to document almost immediately after the occurrence. As time goes on, we forget facts and tend to leave them out. When taking a witness statement in an investigation – make sure it happens immediately. Even a simple email to yourself will suffice because guess what – it's still documentation. Be timely and precise by documenting immediately especially in a sexual harassment case, performance and terminations.

What am I documenting?

Well, everything. So, when I say everything, I mean almost everything. We don't need a minute by minute breakdown of your day. These are the key items that you should document when it involves any of your employees:

- Performance
- Coaching
- Terminations
- Disciplinary Action
- Raises
- Coaching
- Any incidents such as discrimination, harassment, etc.

Let's dive a little deeper into each subject. Performance should be documented whether it be a formal written performance appraisal, a performance improvement plan or even a conversation regarding performance. The conversation does need documented. Just a simple note in the employee file will work. All documentation must include the date, time, name of employee and the manager's signature (an email will work from the manager). Disciplines would fall into this category as well. Same guidelines to ensure that they proper documentation is in place. This will come in handy later, if ever needed.

Raises? Yes. So, make a file where it includes when an employee received a raise with the date and why they received the raise. This could be very simple and be “performance”, “bonus”, “yearly raise”. Incidents such as sexual harassment, discrimination, drug abuse suspicion or any other incident needs to be very detailed. I mean to the exact time of the incident. This is very important when it comes to an EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) claim or investigation. If you haven’t been through one of these – be thankful. They are not fun. This is where detailed information, emails, witness statements, findings, etc. come in handy. Since the EEOC has increased the time period when an employee or former employee can make a claim it has increased the amount of time an employer should keep employee files. I highly suggest at least 10-12 years once an employee has left the company.

Terminations. Even if it is a resignation, be sure to put the resignation letter into the employees file. If the employee leaves prior to their original term date, note that in their file. These are very useful for unemployment cases.

Coaching. If your company has a mentoring or coaching program (or even if not) any conversations that get into some deep information are important to document. Even a bullet point list the employee name, date and time are great to have as a reference in an employee file. This could be used in positive manner later when it comes to reviews.

We are a very small business, why do we need to worry about this? Did you know that small business can be sued for millions and lose the case because they didn’t provide the documentation needed to support the case? Do you really want to risk everything all because you didn’t take the extra moment to document an incident?

I’m in your shoes. I am a small business owner with employees. I chose to document everything, not because of my millions of years of experience (okay not millions but you know what I am saying) but because I hold a high ethical standard in my business. I also don’t want to lose everything that I have worked so hard to build. We want to value our employees and give them every opportunity to succeed in our business or why would we hire them? Documentation doesn’t have to be a bad thing.

If you have managers or a leadership team, train them to document. Training's can be very simple and under 30 minutes when properly conducted. Once the employees (including management) see that documentation is valuable then they will respect the company for taking the proper steps to ensure that the company they are working so hard for continues to keep their hard-earned reputation.

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