



A Good Employment Policy Involves More Than Just Hiring

Business owners frequently ask, “What can I do to avoid a wrongful termination charge by an employee?” The easy answer: “Don’t hire the wrong person for the job.” The reality is, one day every business owner will face the unpleasant task of having to terminate an employee for one reason or another.

How can a business retain good employees and avoid terminations?

Diligence when hiring is the first step

Always check a candidate’s background, references, and driving record if driving will be a part of the job. Have two management level people involved in all hiring decisions. A second set of eyes reviewing an applicant helps ensure that the hiring decision is based on the candidate’s qualifications and work experience, rather than one person’s opinion of an applicant’s personality.

What happens after the handshake?

So, the ideal candidate walked in your door, everything checked out, and you hired yourself a new employee. Of course, you will train and orient your new hire. And, once you feel confident that he or she has the abilities and knowledge to perform the job, it’s back to business as usual again, right? Not so fast.

Did you know new employees face more job-related risks? According to the most recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost twenty-eight percent of workers injured on the job have been with their employer for less than twelve months.

Training and orientation are essential for new employees. But don’t just stop with the basics. Provide ongoing opportunities to learn more about the business and improve skills to help keep employees motivated. Mentor those who show initiative and promise for developing into future leaders.

Why are new workers more likely to be hurt? One reason is new employees are often unaware of how they can be injured in the workplace. They may not understand how to safely perform the job—especially what not to do.

Employers may not include safety in new employee orientation because they believe “common sense” will keep workers from committing unsafe acts. Unfortunately, a lack of knowledge—not a lack of common sense—is more often the problem. Including safety training in employee orientation can help your new employees gain the knowledge they need to avoid injury.

It’s Our Business to Protect Yours®

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Some important tips:

- Explain safety rules before assigning jobs. Employees are more likely to follow rules if they understand the reasons for them. Give each employee a copy of the rules for future reference.
- Encourage employees to ask questions if they don't understand what they are being asked to do.
- Point out workplace hazards and discuss how to avoid injury, including what not to do.
- Make sure employees understand never to operate machines unless trained and authorized to do so.
- Explain how lockout devices prevent injuries, and why not to remove them.

Knowledge and effective communication are the keys to accident prevention. Always encourage discussion—it promotes understanding. Put these principles to work and give your employees the tools they need to work safely!

Help them help themselves

Give feedback to employees on their job performance, but don't just limit it to scheduled reviews. Don't assume everything is fine just because an employee doesn't complain. Employees want to know they are doing a good job. A simple compliment on how an employee handled a situation will reinforce desired behavior and tell employees their efforts are appreciated. Give occasional rewards. When corrective action is needed, use a positive approach with specific recommendations. This can help avoid embarrassment or resentment and possible future allegations of unfair treatment.

What to do when termination seems inevitable

Always base decisions to reprimand or terminate employees on documented facts and observations, not on emotional responses to a situation or on personal judgments. Sometimes “just the facts” may not provide enough information and employees may not be forthcoming about problems. For example:

An employee began to arrive late to work and often seemed distracted. His co-workers were tolerant, but the manager was strict about punctuality and became irritated by the employee's tardiness. Actually, the employee liked his job and was meeting performance expectations. The problem was that an elderly parent had recently moved into his home and required special care in the morning. In this case, a simple schedule change could solve the problem and help relieve the employee's stress. It would also demonstrate the manager's willingness to make accommodations for a good employee.

Sometimes it is necessary to terminate an employee because of poor performance even when good hiring procedures were followed and the employee started out on the right foot. Make certain all terminations are fact-specific. Is the decision consistent with how “similarly situated” employees have been treated in the past?

Consider having two management personnel involved with the termination. Should the terminated employee ever dispute what took place, you have a witness to verify what was said. You may want to implement the “two to hire, two to fire” strategy. It may be an effective risk management technique for your business.