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HANDBOOK UPDATE: INCLUSIVE POLICIES & PRACTICES

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By: [Danielle Goebel](#)

The employee handbook is a unique opportunity to make a statement about company values and establish the employer as an ally, rather than an adversary. Proactive policies described in inclusive language can go a long way in showing that the company is in tune with shifting cultural norms and has a shared interest in protecting against discrimination.

For example, gender-neutral language should be used throughout the handbook. This is a simple but meaningful change that can send a strong message of inclusivity to any transgender or gender non-conforming employees. Gender-specific policies, such as dress codes, should be updated to apply to all gender identities in the same fashion.

Similarly, a clear statement of the procedure for reporting discrimination and explicit assurance that reporters will not suffer retaliation is key in the modern “me too” era. Because the appropriate process for investigating complaints will vary based on the employer and the particular situation, the handbook should leave room for flexibility on the part of the employer with regard to how to conduct the investigation itself. Nonetheless, the handbook should provide some basic information to employees including assurance that all reports are investigated and taken seriously.

A good handbook can be a helpful tool in setting the tone for the workplace, but it can only go so far. An open-door policy for concerns is essential to provide employees a place to share concerns or ask questions. Likewise, sensitivity or sexual harassment training can be effective in educating employees about workplace expectations.

If this information could be helpful to your or your business please consider attending our upcoming seminar, '[Updates on Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace](#)' or contact [Marjorie Obod](#) or a member of our [labor & employment department](#).