



Bakke Norman Releases Guidance on Well-Drafted Employee Handbooks for Wisconsin Businesses

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NEW RICHMOND, WI - August 18, 2026 -

Bakke Norman has released new guidance highlighting the importance of well-drafted employee handbooks for businesses operating in Wisconsin. The insights, shared through the firm's blog on June 1, 2026, address how these documents serve as essential tools for establishing workplace expectations, ensuring legal compliance, and reducing potential disputes in an evolving regulatory environment.

Employee handbooks function as foundational resources that communicate policies clearly to both management and staff. For Wisconsin employers, a thoughtfully prepared handbook helps promote consistency in handling issues such as attendance, leave requests, conduct standards, and complaint procedures. Without clear written guidance, businesses risk inconsistent application of rules that can lead to claims of unfair treatment or discrimination.

The guidance emphasizes that handbooks should reflect Wisconsin-specific legal requirements alongside federal obligations. Topics often covered include equal employment opportunity policies, anti-harassment procedures, wage payment practices, overtime classifications, personnel record access, and accommodations for disabilities. Policies tailored to the business's industry, size, and operations prove more

effective than generic templates, which may contain provisions unenforceable in Wisconsin.

Generic online handbooks frequently include policies drafted for states with significantly different employment laws, may omit Wisconsin-specific requirements, or include provisions that unintentionally expose an employer to liability. A handbook should reflect how the employer actually operates - not merely how another business operates.

Bakke Norman attorneys note that handbooks can strengthen an employer's position during disputes by demonstrating that expectations were communicated and followed consistently. For example, detailed policies on timekeeping, overtime approval, and confidentiality help defend against wage-and-hour claims or protect proprietary information.

Equally important is what an employee handbook should not say. Wisconsin recognizes the doctrine of at-will employment, but poorly drafted handbook language can unintentionally create contractual obligations or alter the employment relationship. Every handbook should include carefully drafted disclaimers stating that the handbook is not an employment contract, that employment remains at will unless modified by a written agreement, and that the employer reserves the right to modify policies as business needs change.

Regular review and updates remain critical as employment laws change. Issues involving remote work, technology use, social media, use of personal devices, and data protection require ongoing attention. Businesses that fail to align handbooks with current practices or statutes may face increased liability when policies are ignored or inconsistently enforced.

"An employee handbook represents more than an administrative formality," said Bryan Tillman, attorney at Bakke Norman. "When properly developed, it establishes uniform standards that support consistent management decisions and help protect the business while clearly setting employee expectations and fostering a positive workplace culture." However, even the best employee handbook provides little protection if supervisors fail to enforce its policies consistently. Managers should receive periodic training regarding the handbook's policies, documentation, expectations, and appropriate responses to employee complaints. Consistent enforcement is often just as important as the language contained in the handbook itself.

The firm's employment law practice supports clients in drafting, reviewing, and updating these documents to match their specific needs. Attorneys work with businesses across Northwest Wisconsin to customize policies for manufacturing, professional services, retail, and other sectors. This includes addressing considerations for exempt and non-exempt employees, independent contractors, and multi-location operations.

Tillman continued, "An employee handbook should evolve as the business evolves. As companies adopt new technology, expand into additional locations, or add new benefit programs, their handbooks should be

reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects current operations and continue to serve as a practical risk management tool.?

Bakke Norman's guidance comes at a time when many businesses in the region are navigating workforce challenges and regulatory updates. The firm's educational efforts, including blog publications on employment topics, aim to help clients stay informed of legal developments.

In addition to employment law, Bakke Norman provides comprehensive services across civil litigation, business transactions, debtor-creditor relations, personal injury, criminal defense, municipal law, tax law, estate planning, and probate. The firm's integrated team approach allows clients to address interconnected legal needs efficiently.

Founded in 1985 by Gary Bakke, George Norman, and Tom Schumacher, Bakke Norman began in the historic New Richmond Heritage Center. The firm has grown to include offices in New Richmond, Baldwin, Menomonie, and Eau Claire. This multi-location presence enables attorneys to serve individuals, businesses, and municipalities throughout Northwest Wisconsin.

The firm has been recognized as one of the Best Law Firms in America by U.S. News & World Report and maintains a commitment to high professional standards in its practice.

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For more information about Bakke Norman, contact the company here: Bakke Norman Tom Schumacher 715-246-3800 info@bakkenorman.com 1200 Heritage Dr, New Richmond, WI 54017

Bakke Norman

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