Outline of a Law Office Manual

I. Preliminaries

A. Introduction to the firm
   1 History of the firm
   2 Mission/vision/value statement
   3 Organization of the firm: list of partners, associates, and support staff; organizational chart; committees

B. Law as a profession and a business
   1 Commitment to quality
   2 Importance of clients to our success
   3 Importance of support staff to our success
   4 Membership and ongoing education requirements

C. Office Policies
   1 Office hours
   2 Work hours; breaks
   3 Overtime
   4 Time and attendance records
   5 Absences for illness; sick leave; medical notes
   6 Absences for personal reasons
   7 Leaves of absence
   8 Parental leave
   9 Statutory holidays
10  Vacations: entitlement, scheduling
11  Lateness
12  Job descriptions
13  Orientation
14  Training
15  Evaluation
16  Probationary period
17  Promotions and demotions
18  Grievances and dispute resolution
19  Discipline
20  Layoff for economic reasons
21  Termination for cause
22  Parking
23  Keys to premises
24  Smoking
25  Employment of relatives
26  Solicitations and distribution of literature
27  Outside employment and other activities
28  Use of Technology
II. Emergency procedures

A. Security and Safety of Employees and Office

B. Emergency contacts

1. Police/Fire/Ambulance
2. Building Security
3. Identification of firm emergency contacts

C. Accidents, Medical Emergencies, Work Injuries

1. First Aid training

D. Disaster Plan and Recovery

E. Data Protection

III. Employee Relations

A. Importance of employees to our firm

B. What we expect of employees

1. Loyalty; conduct outside working hours (being a good ambassador for our firm)
2. Hard work; productivity; quality; timeliness
3. Support of co-workers
4. Professionalism: confidentiality; ethicality; good judgment; honesty; trustworthiness; tact; courtesy; respect for clients, co-workers and anyone else you deal with on our behalf; personal appearance, grooming and dress
5. Personal problems, phone calls, use of office facilities and resources
6. Performance evaluation

C. Delegation to and supervision of support staff; teamwork

1. Who may delegate to whom
2. Who reports to whom
3 Asking for help
4 Offering help
5 Taking responsibility for team leadership
6 Supporting leaders as a team member
7 Prioritizing work; emergencies
8 What to do if you feel you are being taken advantage of
9 Suggestions welcomed

D. Salaries, wages, benefits

1 Definitions of full-time, part-time, temporary, casual
2 Overtime
3 Bonuses
4 Profit-sharing
5 Salary reviews
6 Job-related courses
7 Community college and university courses
8 Medical, dental, pension plans
9 Life, LTD insurance
10 Employee assistance plan
11 Discounts on legal services
12 Memberships in job-related organizations
13 Staff social functions: Christmas party; summer picnic

Return to Top
E. Payroll

1. Pay days
2. Pay slips
3. Deductions: IT, EI, CPP, AHCIP; benefits; other
4. Advances

IV. Client relations

A. Importance of clients to our firm

B. Support staff dealings with clients

1. Level of formality or familiarity
2. Confidentiality
3. Helpfulness

C. Receiving clients

1. Comfort
2. Reading material
3. Coffee
4. Smoking
5. Greeting clients: level of formality or familiarity
6. Housekeeping
7. Announcing clients; escorting clients to lawyers' offices
8. Clients without appointments
9. Non-clients without appointments
10. Troubled members of the public
11 Troublesome members of the public
12 Long waits
13 Client confidentiality: overheard phone messages; indiscreet conversations; exposed documents

D. Client satisfaction feedback
1 Why it is important
2 Procedures for obtaining
3 Procedures for reviewing

E. Non-engagement letters; disengagement letters

V. Confidentiality

A. Importance of confidentiality in a law firm

B. Confidentiality policies
1 Client information
2 Firm information
3 Departure from the firm
4 Personnel records
5 Home phone numbers
6 Overnight confidentiality
7 Phone, fax, and e-mail security
8 Security procedures
VI. The Telephone

A. Importance of the telephone to our business

B. Phone answering: Receptionist

1. Switchboard hours
2. Answering machine
3. Voice mail – who has codes, function instructions
4. Greeting callers: tone of voice; level of formality or familiarity; grammar and diction; asking name; asking business
5. Urgent calls
6. Troubled callers
7. Home phone numbers
8. Complaints
9. Announcing callers
10. Keeping track of lawyers’, staff’s whereabouts
11. Keeping reception informed of whereabouts
12. Keeping reception informed that holding calls
13. Locating lawyers and staff
14. What to say when: lawyer with client; on the phone; holding calls; in a meeting; out of the office; in court; out of town
15. Alternate call-takers
16. Taking messages: time; date; name of caller; get it spelled; return phone number; taking notes
17. Do not lie
C. Phone answering: other than receptionist
   1 Greeting (give your name)
   2 Transferring calls
   3 After-hours greeting
   4 After-hours messages

D. Telephone manners
   1 How to announce yourself on behalf of the firm
   2 How to leave a message without disclosing confidential information
   3 Tone of voice

E. Long-distance charges
   1 Tracking long distance charges
   2 Firm credit card
   3 Accepting reversed charges calls

VII. Communication Systems.
A. Importance of these systems to our firm

B. Mail, Messenger Services, Couriers, Electronic Communications
   1 In-coming: receiving; distributing
   2 Out-going: who we use; capturing disbursements
   3 Court runner
   4 Process server
   5 Admission of service on court documents

C. Incoming mail
   1 Who picks it up; who is the alternate
   2 Opening; date-stamping; sending copies to clients
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VIII. Files

A. Importance of filing to our firm

B. Opening new files

1. New file information form
2. Limitations
3. Conflict of interest check
4. File folder: colours; information on tabs; information inside files; brads
5. File index; file number
6. Client index; client number
7. Accounting information
8. Engagement letter
9. Contingency agreement filing
10. Assigning files to a lawyer; transferring files to a different lawyer

C. Files and filing

1. Filing: routines and deadlines to ensure filing done; order in which items are to be filed; filed material to be nailed down
2. Retention of draft materials; disks
3. Copies of drafts on correspondence brad
4. Organizing complex files: subfiles; binders
5. "Out' cards
6. Removal of files from the office
7. Responsibility for condition and location of files
8. File closing; re-opening
9. Retention and long term compressed storage
IX. Conflicts of interest

1. Importance of conflict of interest system to our firm
2. Definition of conflict of interest
3. Description of conflict system
4. Entering client and other information into conflict system
4. Conflict checks

X. Deadlines

A. Importance of managing deadlines to our firm

B. Limitations diary

1. Rules re new files
2. Rules re existing files

C. Appointments and appearances diarization

1. Duplicate diary system (lawyer and assistant)
2. Picking up dates from incoming correspondence
3. Having a primary and backup diary system (lawyer and assistant)

D. File diarization

1. Entering new files in the system
2. Assigning diarization dates
3. Pulling files; bring forward list
4. Rediarization
5. Periodic (monthly?) review of all files in system
6. Periodic (weekly?) cleaning of lawyer’s and secretary’s desk
XI. Financial Management of Firm

A. Timekeeping

1. Trust Account/Trust Safety requirements
2. Lawyers’ timesheets / Staff timesheets
3. Posting time
4. Receipts
5. Disbursements
6. Petty Cash or Advances
7. Reimbursement of expenses
8. Billing Procedures

B. Accounting

1. Description of accounting system and where ledgers and records are kept
2. Trust accounting: receiving trust money; depositing; issuing trust cheques; certification of trust cheques; trust ledgers; trust statements for clients; trust reconciliations
3. Disbursements: capturing; posting; billing policy
4. Other charges: amounts; capturing; posting
5. Preparing accounts to clients
6. Collections procedures: aged A/R lists; reminders; cessation of work
7. General accounting: receiving cash; receiving cheques; issuing cheques; posting the general ledger; general account reconciliation
8. GST
9. Petty cash
10. Reimbursement of out-of-pocket and travel expenses
11. Bank address and account numbers; location of safety deposit box
XII. Office Supplies

A. Stationery, supplies, and forms

1. Location
2. When to order and how to purchase
3. Personal appropriation

B. Paper sizes and types

C. Envelope sizes and types

XIII. Taking dictation

1. Where and when to pick dictation up
2. Transcribing dictation
3. Where and when to deliver transcribed dictation to lawyer
4. Composing letters based on minimal instructions; form bank

XIV. Paper production

A. Importance of the paper we produce

1. Quality of appearance; content
2. Proofreading
3. Revisions
4. Prior drafts

B. Correspondence

1. Letter format
2. Fonts
3. Copies to clients; file; other parties
4 Return envelopes
5 Diction; spelling (spelling check); appearance
6 Tone; contractions
7 Opinion letter review

C. Documents
1 Appearance
2 Format
3 Cover
4 Proof-reading; spelling (spelling check)
5 Using precedents

D. Memos
1 Format of legal memos, interoffice memos, memos-to-file
2 Distribution
3 Preservation
4 Memos to file re phone calls; instructions received by telephone

XV. Conference & Signing Rooms
1 Booking
2 Housekeeping
3 Confidentiality

XVI. Equipment
A. Computers
1 Logging on and logging off
2 Computers to be left on and computers to be turned off overnight
3 System administration: who assigns and keeps passwords
4 Servicing
5 Training
6 Software allowed
7 Printer supplies and service
8 Organization of hard drives
9 Security of client and firm information
10 Precedent retention
11 Executed document retention
12 Personal use
13 No outside disks (risk of viruses)
14 Backup procedures: frequency; where to store; testing restoration

B. Photocopying & faxing

1 Procedures
2 Charges to clients
3 Quality of photocopies
4 Key operator
5 Servicing photocopier and fax
6 Ink or toner supplies
7 Personal use

XVII. Client documents & property

A. Storage

B. Indexing

C. Safeguards
D. Returning Material to Clients

E. Diarization for Destruction of Archived Materials

XVIII. Our lease

1. Access during normal office hours
2. After-hours access
3. Landlord's rules and regulations

XIX. Library

1. Publications
2. Circulars
3. Use by firm personnel and non-firm personnel
4. Charge policies for clients
5. Organization

XX. Miscellaneous

1. Temporary assistance
2. Outside or Third Party services (ie: copying companies, process servers)
4. Reporting error and omission claims
5. Security of property: client; firm; personal
6. Community and Charitable Activities
7. Kitchens