
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

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- 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

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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

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- 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

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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

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- 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

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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

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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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- 3 Cheques
- 4 Noting dates in diaries and flagging for lawyers' attention
- 5 Distribution to lawyer
- 6 New matters received by mail

D. Outgoing mail

- 1 Envelopes to be appropriate size
- 2 Return address
- 3 Postage
- 4 Postal codes
- 5 Getting mail signed
- 6 Enclosing cheques
- 7 Enclosing documents
- 8 Enclosing documents that need a signature
- 9 Revisions
- 10 Copies to file
- 11 Registered mail

E. E-mail

- 1 If you invite it, check it
- 2 Use of E-Signatures
- 3 Use of task and time management tools in e-mail

F. Serving documents

- 1 Process servers we use
- 2 Instructions to process servers
- 3 Capturing disbursements

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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

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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

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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

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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

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- 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

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- 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

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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

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