

How to Best Deal With Employee Complaints

Conflict happens in a work environment. It doesn't matter your industry. People will have disagreements and problems when they share office space and work together. The conflict can be coworker disputes, complaints about a supervisor, sexual harassment, concerns about company policy or a misunderstanding about the employee's job description.

These conflicts can lead to employee complaints. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the complaints, especially in the #metoo era, businesses must not minimize them. When complaints go unresolved, they can create larger complications and potentially lead to lawsuits.

Set up a formal process for complaints

Employees must feel safe when reporting a complaint. They're less likely to report a situation if they are worried about retaliation. You should give them options. One option might be outsourcing the complaint process. Employees can make a complaint anonymously, and those complaints can be forwarded to the appropriate person. These might be necessary in situations of sexual harassment or workplace intimidation.

You also need a central point of contact for employee complaints within the company. Employees must be able to contact that person and make a complaint. While these conflicts can be minor situations, the contact person must have the ability to handle delicate situations.

Keep an open door policy

The person who handles complaints must have an open-door policy. You can't make it difficult for an employee to schedule a meeting or force employees to correspondence through email. The person must make himself or herself available for employees to drop in. The complaint process can run smoothly when it's informal, and employees know that the person's door is open.

Get the who, what, why, where and when

In order to understand the seriousness of a complaint, you need the facts. That means you must gather information and determine what happened and why it happened. You don't want the employee's feeling about the situation. You want details. Once you have a better understanding of the facts, you can determine the best course of action.

Make sure to leave a paper trail

Take notes during a meeting with an employee or supervisor. You need to make sure you have written evidence that not only backs up your actions. You need to write down the complaint from the employee as well as the information gathered from the people who were part of the situation.

The notes should accurately document the facts. You also want the employee to submit something in writing. You don't want a decision based on a people's recollection.

Act quickly

You can't procrastinate. You need to act quickly on a complaint. People can easily forget the details of a situation. As well, when you act quickly, you validate the concerns of the employee who made the complaint. That is an important part of the process. Acting quickly also protects the company legally. You don't want the company getting sued due to your inaction.

Be careful about notifying the supervisor or manager

When an employee makes a complaint, especially about a supervisor, you need to be careful what information you divulge. The employee might have legitimate concerns, and it could be sensitive in nature. You need to divulge as little information as possible to the supervisor or other employees to protect the company and the employee.

Get to know your management/supervisory team

You should meet with supervisors and the management team on a regular basis. You want to develop a relationship with them. This helps them develop trust in you and your decisions. You don't want to be some unknown figure when a serious situation arises.

Hold regular employee meetings

Just as you need to regularly meet with management, you also need to meet with employees on a regular basis. You need to inform employees about the process, and the fact that your company has a policy in place for complaints. They need to understand the types of complaint that the company can handle, and the various actions that can be taken.

Realize that incidents can be minor

Many incidents are very important to employees, but they are not necessarily a major problem for the company. You must be able to filter through the emotion and determine if the incident was something that really needs to be acted upon. You need to ask the employee what actions he or she believes are necessary. You can decide if that is a reasonable request after you determine all the relevant information. You don't want to make a decision too quickly.