

Restaurant employee handbook

Eleven policies plus a state and local addendum, ready to print and sign

1. Welcome and how we work

Set the tone in a few sentences: who we are, what we expect, why this document exists. Keep the line below on the page: this is a template, not legal advice.

Restaurant name: _____

Owner / operator: _____

Effective date: _____

- This handbook is a template, not legal advice. Have an employment lawyer licensed in your state review it before it goes to an employee.
- It follows US federal law; state and local rules go in the addendum at the back.

2. Employment basics

State at-will status where your state allows it, define classifications and the probationary period, and add the equal employment opportunity statement.

- At-will employment statement, where your state allows it
- Employment classifications: full-time, part-time, seasonal, tipped, exempt or non-exempt
- Introductory or probationary period and what it means
- Equal employment opportunity statement
- Work eligibility verification (I-9) required before the first shift

3. Pay, tips and tip credit

Spell out the cash wage, the tip credit, and the tip pooling rule exactly as the DOL states it; this is the section that gets challenged.

- Pay day and pay method (direct deposit, pay card, check)
- Overtime: time and a half after 40 hours in a workweek
- Tip credit notice, the five points DOL Fact Sheet 15 requires: cash wage, credit amount, that the credit cannot exceed tips actually received, that the employee keeps all tips apart from a valid tip pool, and that the credit does not apply unless the employee was told all of it
- Tip pooling: with a tip credit, only employees who customarily receive tips participate; managers and supervisors never keep employees' tips, including through the pool, and keep only a tip handed to them directly for service they alone provided
- How tips are reported and taxed

4. Scheduling, breaks and attendance

Meal and rest breaks are state law, not federal; write your state's rule in the addendum, not here.

- How and where the schedule is posted, and how many days ahead
- How to request a shift swap or time off
- Call-out procedure: who to call and how many hours before the shift
- No-call, no-show policy and the consequence

- Meal and rest breaks: see the state and local addendum for your state's rule
- Clock in and out accurately; no clocking in for someone else

5. Conduct and appearance

Cover uniform, phones and tardiness in one line each, then give harassment reporting its own real process.

- Uniform and grooming standard
- Personal phone use during a shift
- Tardiness policy
- Zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination, how to report it, and that retaliation is prohibited (EEOC)
- Confidentiality of guest and business information

6. Food safety and hygiene

List the symptoms an employee must report before a shift, straight from the FDA Food Code, not a paraphrase.

- Report vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, or fever with sore throat before the shift (FDA Food Code)
- Exclusion or restriction when diagnosed with a reportable pathogen, until cleared
- Handwashing: when and how
- Food handler card or certification required, and who pays for it
- No bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat food

7. Safety and incidents

Every cut, burn or fall gets reported the same shift, on paper, whether or not it seems serious.

- Report cuts, burns, and slips to a manager immediately
- First aid kit location
- Workers' compensation: what it covers and how to file a claim
- Equipment safety: no one runs a slicer, fryer or knife station before training
- Emergency procedures: fire and evacuation

8. Guest service standards

Name your own greeting time and complaint process here; this is the one section that's entirely yours.

- Greeting and acknowledgment time standard
- Handling a complaint: listen, apologize, fix it, tell a manager
- Who can authorize a comp or discount, and the limit
- Lost and found procedure

9. Alcohol service

State your certification requirement, your ID-check age, and who backs up a server who refuses service.

- Alcohol service certification required (name your state's program)
- Check ID for anyone who appears under your state's card-check age
- Refusing service to a visibly intoxicated guest: how, and who backs the call
- No employee drinks while on shift

- Manager sign-off required to comp or void an alcohol sale

10. Discipline and separation

List the steps you'll actually follow, name the offenses that skip straight to the last one, and state how final pay works.

- Progressive steps: verbal warning, written warning, final warning, separation
- Offenses that skip straight to separation: theft, violence, harassment, a serious safety violation
- Final paycheck: timing follows your state's law, not a federal default
- Return of uniform, keys and equipment

11. Acknowledgment

This is the one page that actually matters in a dispute; keep it signed, dated, and on file, separate from the rest.

Employee name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Manager: _____

12. State and local addendum

List what changes by state: minimum wage, tip credit, paid sick leave, meal breaks, and predictive scheduling; fill this from your state labor department's site, not a national average.

- Minimum wage
- Tip credit and cash wage
- Paid sick leave
- Meal and rest breaks
- Predictive or fair workweek scheduling
- Local ordinance (city or county, if any)

Topic	Our rule	Source