

12 EMPLOYMENT STOCKING STUFFERS

As the year winds down and businesses tie a bow on their final quarter, it's the perfect time to take stock of the workplace practices that keep businesses running smoothly and out of trouble. The holiday season often brings unique employment risks, from pay and scheduling issues to year-end policy updates and the occasional Grinch-like dispute. These "stocking stuffer" reminders offer a quick, proactive way to ensure your policies, procedures, and agreements are ready for 2026, helping your team start the new year confident, compliant, and focused on what matters most.

1

Check Your List (and Check It Twice) – Update Your Handbook

The classic advice about checking your list twice isn't just for gift-giving—it's essential for handbook compliance. State and federal laws on leave entitlements, disability accommodations, harassment prevention, and remote work arrangements evolve constantly, and an outdated handbook is a liability wrapped in red tape. Make your handbook review a yearly tradition.

2

Avoid Overtime Overload – Audit Exempt/Non-Exempt Status

Just like untangling a string of holiday lights, reviewing employee classifications now can prevent bigger knots later—especially when roles and responsibilities have shifted during the year. Holiday raises, evolving duties, and new federal and state rules can affect exemption status. A clean classification review lessens wage and hour surprises later.

3

Mind the Mistletoe – Refresh Harassment Prevention Practices

As celebrations and year-end gatherings fill the calendar, mind the mistletoe and ensure training is current. Remind managers of expectations and review your reporting procedures. A quick holiday refresher helps keep festivities cheerful—and your workplace respectful—well into the new year.

4

Wrap Up Your PTO and Holiday Pay Policies

As the year comes to a close, it's time to wrap up your PTO and holiday pay policies with the same care you'd use to avoid giving a bad gift. Clarify how holiday hours count towards overtime, verify PTO rollover rules, and ensure actual practices match written policies and state requirements. Tidying up these details keeps your holiday payroll neatly packaged and avoids unwrapping unpleasant compliance surprises in the new year.

5

Don't Get Stuck in the Snowdrift – Revisit Independent Contractor Use

If contractor roles changed or expanded during the year, re-confirm the relationship still meets current classification standards to avoid costly misclassification claims. The line between employee and independent contractor keeps shifting like snow in a winter storm. Classifying a worker as an independent contractor instead of an employee may be the worker's preference or an easier route for the employer administratively, but misclassification can result in unpaid wages, liquidated damages, tax penalties and interest, and retroactive employee benefits and insurance complications. Digging out from a misclassification claim is far more costly than getting it right the first time.

6

Tune Up the Sleigh – Review Offer Letters and Employment Agreements

Efforts to ban and limit employee mobility restrictions have grown. Verify restrictive covenants, confidentiality clauses, and onboarding templates are road-worthy and align with updated legal requirements and recent trends. A quick tune-up now helps ensure they glide smoothly into 2026 without any unexpected bumps on the holiday route.

7

Tighten the Bow on Your Records – Wage and Hour Documentation

As you tighten the bow on your year-end records, double-check timekeeping accuracy, bonus and incentive calculations, meal and rest break tracking, and payroll practices to prevent wage and hour claims from popping up like an unwelcome holiday surprise in the new year.

8

Warm Up Your Leave and Accommodation Processes

As the weather cools, it's a good time to warm up your leave and accommodation processes to ensure they're ready for the holiday rush. The holiday season increases time off requests, so confirm managers recognize interactive-triggers and that your procedures comply with state and federal standards to prevent missteps that melt away the holiday calm.

9

Don't Let a Dispute Ruin the Holidays – Implement or Update Your Dispute Resolution Agreement

Ensure you have an arbitration or dispute resolution agreement and that it clearly defines the forum, applicable rules, and scope of covered claims. Dispute resolution agreements can provide customizable solutions for resolving employee disputes. A well-drafted agreement helps avoid Grinch-like surprises and provides a predictable process if disputes arise.

10

Don't Get Caught on the Naughty List – Document Performance Issues in Real Time

Santa keeps his list all year, and so should you. When performance issues arise, document them in real time with specific dates, incidents, and observable behaviors. The gift you give yourself this season is a clean paper trail that protects your organization from claims that adverse actions were pretextual or discriminatory.

11

Avoid a Lump of Coal – Complete Employment Authorization Documents on Time

Don't let your holiday cheer turn into new year penalties. Employers who fail to timely and fully complete and retain employment eligibility paperwork can face civil monetary penalties. Make I-9 compliance a priority by reviewing existing forms and ensuring your onboarding team is satisfying these obligations.

12

Time-and-a-Half Bells are Ringing – Calculate Overtime Compensation Correctly

The holidays bring extra shifts, year-end pushes, bonuses, and plenty of opportunities to get overtime calculations wrong. Make sure your payroll practices are merry and bright by double-checking that all non-exempt employees receive proper overtime compensation. Averaging workweeks, paying straight time, or incorrectly presuming an employee who receives a salary is not entitled to overtime pay are other common mistakes.



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