

Truth is, a handbook needs an honesty policy

They say honesty is the best policy. For HR, having an honesty policy is good, too.

Nearly one in five U.S. workers (19%) admit to lying at the office at least once a week, according to a CareerBuilder survey. Many are getting caught. A quarter of hiring managers say they've fired an employee for being dishonest, according to the survey.

It's much easier to discipline and terminate an employee in such cases when you have a general honesty, ethics or misrepresentation clause in your employee handbook. *Reason:* It comes in handy if you're looking for a solid reason to discharge a worker who just isn't being up front with the company, but technically may not have violated a specific work rule.

The top 5 reasons employees lie at work

1. Appease a customer (26%)
2. Cover up a mistake or failed project (13%)
3. Explain absence or late arrival (8%)
4. Protect another employee (8%)
5. Look better in front of a supervisor (5%)

Source: CareerBuilder survey

Recent case: A Minnesota company's ethics policy required employees to attest that they "will not exploit the trust of the public or my co-workers." Adherence to the policy is a component of each performance appraisal.

When the company hired Amber, she asked about domestic-partner insurance coverage. She was handed an application. It explained that *same-sex* domestic partners were eligible for health insurance coverage.

Amber added her live-in boyfriend and filled out the form indicating they were "domestic partners."

Later, when she was about to take FMLA leave to give birth, someone noticed that her domestic partner was a man. Amber denied lying when she filled out the form but was still fired for breaking the honesty policy.

She sued, claiming the firing was interference with her right to FMLA leave.

The employer argued that no one could misunderstand the instructions that said domestic-partner benefits were for same-sex couples. Therefore, it had a legitimate right to fire Amber for dishonesty.

The court agreed with the company and also said it didn't matter if Amber believed she hadn't lied. The employer had investigated the matter in good faith and concluded Amber lied. That was sufficient. (*Hanson v.*

Sample policy: Employee honesty

"We expect all employees to conduct themselves in an honorable fashion. Honesty is an important company attribute. Therefore, any misrepresentation of facts or falsification of records, including personnel records, medical records, leaves of absence documentation or the like will not be tolerated. The same honesty standard applies to any company investigation. Any violations will result in corrective action, up to and including termination."