

Setting a company cell phone policy for the modern workplace



Cell phones are a major part of our lives. From entertainment to socializing to conducting business, cell phones play a key role. Your employees will likely need to use cell phones during the course of their work, and in some cases, you may decide to provide a company-issued device to support them.

It's important to set clear guidelines on the appropriate use of cell phones. They can be helpful tools for research, communication, and more. However, they can also be distractions, threats to confidentiality, and vessels for misconduct like harassment if clear guidelines are not put into place.

Employee cell phone policy options

Not all employees necessarily need company phones, but some members of your organization probably will. Executives or managers that need to be reachable by their staff at all times will need them. Similarly, salespeople may benefit from company phones if they need to be reachable by text to clients or if they need to be reached while traveling or driving around on sales visits.

You have a couple of options to consider for your company cell phone policy:

Company-issued devices

The classic approach is to provide a dedicated company-owned cell phone for business calls and business use only. This device is separate from the team member's personal phone, and the company has more governance of the use of the cell phone.

Pros:

- **Higher security for confidential data.** Keeping proprietary or confidential data on company-owned devices is often safer. The IT department can ensure that appropriate security settings and measures are present. The phone will be returned upon termination, decreasing the likelihood that employees retain, accidentally or intentionally, any company data following their separation from the company.
- **Greater access to employees.** Employees may not always answer their personal phones on their days off. After all, most of us screen our calls and send unknown numbers to voicemail. However, those carrying a company phone will know that the incoming call is business-related and likely urgent if it's coming on their dedicated company line. Company phones are also helpful for the many companies now offering remote work policies. You'll need access to staff members working remotely who don't have an office line anymore.
- **Less distractions during business hours.** Personal messages and notifications coming in while an employee is using their work phone can cause distractions throughout the workday. If your general cell phone usage policy is that personal text messaging and internet activity is not allowed outside of break time, it may be hard to enforce if an employee is able to use their personal phone for work activity.

Cons:

- **Costly.** The company will incur the cost of purchasing the mobile devices as well as the full cost of the phone bills. Devices will also need to be upgraded periodically.
- **Employees may not like carrying two phones.** Carrying around two phones can be bulky, so many employees do prefer just to use one for both work and personal communications.

BYOD

Many companies are utilizing a bring your own device (BYOD) model now. Under this policy, employees are reimbursed, usually through a monthly stipend, for the use of their own device for work-related activities. Reimbursement of mobile phone costs is not always required, but it is a nice perk for staff. In some states, such as California, reimbursement is required if an employee must use their personal cell phone and plan in the course of their work duties.

Pros:

- **Employees get to choose their device.** Many people have strong preferences when it comes to technology. A staff member may feel strongly about using an iPhone or Android or want certain features only available in some models. A BYOD model lets everyone use the device that best suits their

preferences.

- **Lower costs.** The monthly stipend may or may not cover the full cost of the phone plan, but regardless a BYOD policy is generally less costly for employers. With company-issued phones, the employer needs to pay for the device itself and likely upgrade it every couple of years. Most employers do not pay for the phone itself when operating under a BYOD model.

Cons:

- **Less secure.** Employees are using this device as they would a normal personal device. That means they're downloading things, potentially opening questionable spam emails, and probably giving their partner or family members the passcode to unlock the device. Data stored on a BYOD device is less secure than on a work-only device.
- **Privacy concerns.** Many BYOD agreements give employers the right to inspect the device. This may not sit well with some employees. However, giving up these rights could hinder investigations into a data security breach or other concerns. The BYOD policy should state who owns the data on a BYOD device, but there are concerns for both parties. You should also have a clear policy on who can access this data or review the device if the company is allowed to inspect it or access personal data.

Personal use of company cell phones

If you follow a BYOD model, employees will generally use the same phone for personal and professional use.

If you offer company-issued phones, you can decide whether or not to allow employees to use their business phones for personal usage. Many companies forbid employees from making personal calls on their company phone. However, calling is generally not as big of a concern now, as most cell phone plans feature unlimited minutes, so no additional charges are incurred for personal calls or text messages.

Allowing some casual internet browsing or use of the phone during breaks or an employee's lunch hour is part of some company's technology policies. If employees are allowed to conduct personal business on work phones, there should be a disclaimer that the employer may review their activity or the contents of their phone including saved files or text messages.

Use of personal cell phones for business purposes

If company cell phones are provided, it is a good idea to discourage employees from using their personal cell phones for business use. Occasional work phone calls or texts to let a manager know that they're running late are fine. However, storing company information or emails on a phone that does not have the proper security measures in place is not ideal.

Be sure to include in your company's confidentiality policy what information, if any, may be stored on personal devices. Often, BYOD policies and agreements will include confidentiality and security measures and provide the employer with some rights to the information on the cell phone. If you are issuing separate company devices, you will have little to no rights over the employee's personal phones (some activity may be viewable if they use a company-provided internet connection like the office wifi).

Company-issued cell phone policy template

[Company Name] may issue company cell phones to employees who have a frequent and legitimate business need for them. Employees should understand that the phones are the property of [Company Name] and intended for business use only. Employees must return all company property, including company cell phones, upon the termination of employment.

Cell phones, company-issued or personal, should not be used when they could pose a security risk, safety risk, or distract from work tasks. The following guidelines apply for cell phone use:

- Do not use a cell phone while driving or operating equipment. Pull over to answer calls or use hands-free options.
- Do not use your personal cell phone for personal social media activities, browsing the internet, or playing games during work hours.
- Avoid using company cell phones for personal tasks.
- Refrain from storing confidential company information on personal devices.
- Do not use cell phones to record confidential information unless permitted by management, and with proper security settings in place.
- Do not use phones during meetings or in a manner that is disruptive to the work environment.

Misuse of company-issued cell phones may result in disciplinary action. Employees found to be improperly using their company phones may lose the privilege of having a company phone. Any employee that is found to be using the phones in a dangerous, illegal, or harassing manner will face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Additional resource: Updating your handbooks and company policies? Check our guide to [employee handbooks](#).