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# HR Guidelines Everyone Should Know

Human resources — HR — is the part of an organisation that looks after the people side of work: hiring, pay records, time off, workplace problems, training, and leaving. Many employees only meet HR when something has gone wrong, which is a shame and a risk, because the guidelines HR works by shape your everyday working life long before any crisis: how your hours and pay are recorded, what happens when you are ill, how a concern about a colleague is handled, what is written in your file, and what you are entitled to ask, see, and challenge. Knowing those guidelines is not about becoming a specialist. It is about not being a stranger in your own working life — understanding the basic rules of the system you already live inside, so you can use it fairly, spot when it is not being followed, and get help at the right time instead of the last minute.

This set helps every employee, and it helps managers just as much, because most HR problems begin as small manager or employee misunderstandings that a little knowledge would have prevented. It helps new starters, who are handed documents they sign without understanding. It helps people returning to work after illness, caring responsibilities, or a long break, who need to know what support and process to expect. It helps anyone who has ever wondered: Can they do that? Who do I ask? Should that be in writing? Is it too small to raise? The answers are rarely secret. They are written in policies, handbooks, contracts, and — for the floor beneath all of those — the employment law of your country or state, which this set will point you toward without pretending to replace.

Why does this matter now? Because work has become more varied and more documented at the same time. People work hybrid patterns, across sites and time zones, through apps that record hours, messages, and output. More of your working life exists as records than ever before, and records decide outcomes when memories disagree. At the same time, many workplaces have thin or distant HR support, so the first person an employee asks is often their manager — or nobody. In that world, a basic, calm literacy in how hiring, pay, time, conduct, and concerns are supposed to work is a form of self-protection and a form of fairness. It helps good managers manage cleanly. It helps employees ask early, in the right words, to the right person.

An honest boundary, stated plainly at the start: this set teaches general guidelines and good practice, in plain language. It is not legal advice, it does not describe the law of any one place in detail, and it never replaces your own contract, your workplace policies, your HR department, a union or staff representative, or a qualified adviser for a specific situation. Where this set and your local rules differ, your local rules govern. What the set gives you is the map and the vocabulary — so that when you do speak to HR, a representative, or an adviser, you arrive understanding the shape of the process and the questions worth asking.

## What You Will Learn

- What HR actually does, and the difference between your contract, workplace policies, and employment law.

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- How hiring and starting work should run: offers, checks, contracts, and your first weeks.
- The records that matter about you — hours, pay, leave, and your personnel file — and how to check them.
- How time off, sickness, and flexible working requests are normally handled.
- How performance, conduct, and disciplinary processes are supposed to work, fairly and in order.
- How to raise a concern or grievance, and what a fair handling of it looks like.
- How equality, dignity, and protection from harassment and discrimination underpin every other guideline.
- What to expect when leaving a job, and how to leave your records and references in good order.

## Lesson 1 — The Basics: Contract, Policy, Law, and What HR Is For

Every workplace runs on three layers of rules, and confusing them causes half of all HR misunderstandings. The bottom layer is employment law — the rules set by your country or state that no employer can contract out of: minimum pay, maximum working time and rest, protection from discrimination, safe working conditions, notice periods, and similar floors. Law varies by place, which is why this set describes the shape rather than the figures, and why checking your own jurisdiction's official guidance matters. The middle layer is your contract: the agreement between you and your employer covering your role, pay, hours, place of work, notice, and the terms you personally accepted when you took the job. The top layer is workplace policy: the employer's own rules and procedures — how to book leave, report sickness, request flexible work, raise a grievance — which fill in the how of everyday life. Policies must sit inside the contract and the law. A policy that contradicts your contract, or a contract term that contradicts the law, is a problem worth raising, calmly and early, because errors at this level affect everything built on them.

Within that structure, HR's job is to keep the people system working fairly and consistently: advising managers, keeping accurate records, running hiring and leaving processes, supporting absence and wellbeing, training, and making sure policies are applied the same way to everyone. Two misunderstandings about HR cause real harm, and this lesson clears both. The first is that HR is a court. It is not. HR administers processes and advises; decisions about your work usually belong to your manager, and formal outcomes follow stated procedures with named decision-makers. Expecting HR to overturn a manager by corridor conversation leads to disappointment and delay; using the proper process, with HR's guidance on how it runs, is how outcomes actually change. The second misunderstanding is that HR is either wholly your confidant or wholly the company's spy. The truth is professional and narrower: HR keeps confidences within the limits of safety, law, and the need to act. If you raise a safety risk, harassment, or illegality, HR cannot simply hold it as a secret — it must act, and a good HR professional will tell you that honestly at the start. Knowing that limit in advance lets you choose

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your words and your route wisely, including routes outside HR — a representative, an advice service, a regulator — where those fit better.

Your own part in the system is simpler than people fear. Read what you sign. Keep your own copies of your contract, offer letter, and any later letters changing your terms, somewhere outside work systems you might lose access to. Learn where the policies live and read the handful that govern your daily life: leave, sickness, hours, conduct, and raising concerns. And keep your basic details current — address, emergency contact, bank details for pay — because a surprising share of "HR problems" are stale records wearing a disguise.

## The Steps

1. Find and read your contract and offer letter. Keep your own copies outside work systems.
2. Learn the three layers — law, contract, policy — and which layer governs the question you have, before you ask it.
3. Locate your workplace policies and read the core five: leave, sickness and absence, hours and pay, conduct and discipline, and raising concerns.
4. Check your basic records are current: contact details, emergency contact, and pay details.
5. Before any HR conversation, know what HR can and cannot do: it runs and advises on process; it does not decide by corridor conversation, and it cannot hold safety or illegality as a secret.
6. For anything beyond general guidance, use your jurisdiction's official employment guidance, your HR department, a representative, or a qualified adviser.

## A Worked Example

When Paula starts a new job at a logistics firm, she does what most people do: signs the contract on her first morning, files it mentally under "done," and throws herself into the work. Four months later her manager tells her the team's shifts are changing and her contracted rest day will move. Paula's first reaction is helplessness — until a colleague asks a simple question: "What does your contract actually say?" Paula retrieves her copy from HR, reads it properly for the first time, and finds her hours and rest day are stated terms, with a clause allowing changes only by agreement with four weeks' notice. Armed with the layer structure from this lesson, she raises it correctly — not as a complaint about her manager, but as a contract question to HR: the change may be legitimate, but it needs the agreed process and notice. HR confirms the clause, the manager restarts the change properly with notice and consultation, and the new rota lands a month later without resentment on either side. Nothing about Paula's manager was villainous; he had simply never read the clause either. The contract, read by one person at the right moment, did the work that argument could not.

## Common Mistakes

- **Signing without reading, and keeping no copy.** Your contract decides real disputes. Read it, keep it, and keep it somewhere you control.

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- **Treating policy as optional decoration.** Policies are the employer's own stated process. When they are not followed, that gap is itself a legitimate, calm point to raise.
- **Expecting HR to act as a court or a secret-keeper.** Both expectations fail people. Know the real role and choose your route accordingly.
- **Assuming a rule you heard in another job or another place applies here.** Law varies by jurisdiction and contracts vary by employer. Check your own layers.
- **Letting basic records go stale.** Wrong pay details, old addresses, and missing emergency contacts cause a steady stream of avoidable crises.

## Lesson 2 — Starting Well: Offers, Checks, and Your First Weeks

A job properly begins before your first day, and the guidelines around starting exist to protect both sides from the most common early disasters: the job that is not the job described, the pay that is not the pay discussed, and the start delayed or derailed by paperwork nobody explained. The offer is the foundation. A sound offer states, in writing, the role, the pay, the hours, the place of work, the start date, and any conditions the offer depends on — commonly, proof of your right to work, references, or checks required for the role, such as background or health checks where the work genuinely requires them. Read an offer the way you would read any agreement: slowly, completely, and before you resign from a previous job where you have one. If anything differs from what was discussed — a figure, a day, a duty — raise it before accepting, while correcting it costs nobody anything. Verbal promises that never reach the written offer have a way of evaporating, and the time to discover that is before you sign, not after.

Checks and documents follow the same principle: they should be explained, relevant, and proportionate. An employer is entitled — often required — to confirm you are who you say you are and may work in the role. You are entitled to know what is being checked, why, and what happens to the information. If a check feels unrelated to the work, asking "Could you explain how this check connects to the role?" is a reasonable, professional question, and a sound employer will answer it without offence. Keep copies of everything you provide and everything you are given in return, including the job description as advertised. Descriptions drift over time, and the original is the reference point when, a year later, your duties have quietly doubled.

Your first weeks have a structure too, even in workplaces too small to name it: induction. A proper induction covers how you are paid and when, how hours are recorded, how to report sickness or absence, who to go to with a problem, the safety essentials of the workplace, and the standards of conduct expected — the policies from Lesson 1, encountered as lived practice. If your workplace offers little induction, you can build your own by asking the short list of questions this lesson provides; nobody competent minds a new starter asking how pay, hours, sickness, and problems work, because those questions signal exactly the reliability employers want. Many roles also carry a probationary or introductory period — a defined early stretch, with stated length and stated expectations, during which progress is reviewed more closely. Know whether you have one, how long it runs, and what a review during it looks like. A probation handled properly includes feedback early enough to act on; a probation that produces a surprise verdict at the end, with no earlier warning, is a process failure you are entitled to question

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through the routes in Lesson 4.

## The Steps

1. Read the written offer fully before accepting. Compare every term — role, pay, hours, place, start date — with what was discussed, and raise differences before signing.

2. Note any conditions the offer depends on, and complete them promptly. Ask what each check is for if it is not explained.

3. Keep copies of the offer, the contract, and the job description as advertised, outside work systems.

4. In your first week, confirm in writing if needed: how and when you are paid, how hours are recorded, how to report sickness, and who your first contact for problems is.

5. Find out whether your role has a probationary period, its length, and how and when you will be reviewed during it.

6. Ask for feedback early rather than waiting for a formal review — especially in probation, early correction is a gift, not a threat.

## A Worked Example

Devon is offered a supervisor post at a care service. In the interview, the manager mentions a salary and a four-day week. The written offer, when it arrives, states the same salary but a five-day pattern with "weekend working as required." Devon notices because this lesson taught him to compare. He replies politely, in writing, before accepting: the interview discussed four days, the offer says five — could they confirm which is correct? The service checks, discovers the offer letter was generated from the wrong template, and reissues it with the four-day pattern and a clear statement of the one weekend in four that the role genuinely includes. Devon accepts the real job, on real terms. Consider the alternative history, which plays out in workplaces every week: Devon signs unread, resigns his old post, discovers the five-day pattern in week two, and begins his new job in a dispute about the most basic fact of it — with his manager believing, honestly, that he accepted those terms. One comparison and one calm email, sent before signing, prevented the entire story.

## Common Mistakes

- **Resigning before reading the written offer.** Verbal warmth is not a term of employment. Read, compare, then move.

- **Accepting unexplained checks without a question.** Most checks are legitimate and required. Asking how a check connects to the role is still your right, and good employers expect it.

- **No copies kept.** Contracts, offers, and job descriptions left only in work systems vanish exactly when access does. Keep your own.

- **Guessing at pay, hours, and sickness reporting.** These are facts, available for the asking in week one. Guessing produces errors that look like carelessness.

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- **Treating probation as a secret test.** It has a length, expectations, and reviews. Know them, and ask for feedback while there is time to use it.

## Lesson 3 — Pay, Hours, Leave, and Your Records: The Everyday Essentials

More HR contact concerns the everyday essentials than any dramatic event, and most of it is preventable by one habit: check your own records while checking is boring. Start with pay. Every pay period, read your pay statement — not just the amount that arrived, but the breakdown: hours or salary, overtime, deductions, and the year-to-date figures. Errors in pay are common, usually honest, and far easier to correct in the month they happen than six months later when rotas have been shredded and memories have faded. If a figure looks wrong, raise it promptly, in writing, with the specific line and your own record of hours beside it. Keep that record yourself: a simple log of shifts worked, overtime agreed, and leave taken. When two records disagree, the person with a calm, dated, personal log is in a different conversation from the person with a feeling. The same habit covers hours and rest. Working-time rules — maximum hours, rest breaks, days off — exist in law in most places and in your contract and policies everywhere; know yours, and treat persistent breaches as a record-keeping matter first: log them factually, then raise them with facts in hand.

Leave follows a pattern everywhere, even though amounts vary by law and contract. You have an entitlement, a way to request, a way it is recorded, and a balance you can check. Check the balance. Disputes about "how much leave I have left" are among the most common and most avoidable in working life. Sickness and absence have their own etiquette of process: notify as early as your policy requires, through the channel it names, with an honest estimate; provide any certification your policy requires for longer absences; and expect, in a well-run workplace, a return-to-work conversation that is supportive in purpose — checking you are fit, noting any adjustments needed — rather than an interrogation. If illness or a health condition affects your work over time, say so early enough for support and possible adjustments to be arranged; workplaces can only adjust for what they know, and Lesson 4 covers how such conversations should be handled. Flexible working — changed hours, compressed patterns, remote days — is requested, in most systems, as a formal written request stating the change you want and when, which the employer considers under a stated process and answers with reasons. Whether the law in your place gives a right to request or a right to the change itself varies; the good practice does not: put it in writing, propose how the work would still be covered, and keep the answer and its reasons.

Underneath all of this sits your personnel file: the record the organisation keeps of your employment — contract, checks, reviews, training, absence, correspondence about changes. In many places you have a legal right to see your own file or the personal data held about you, and everywhere you have the right to ask how to see it. Use that right calmly and specifically when you need it — before a review, after a dispute, when a fact about you seems wrong — and ask for factual errors to be corrected. A file you have read cannot ambush you. A file you have never seen can, and occasionally does, contain a wrong date or a misfiled letter that matters years

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later.

## The Steps

1. Read every pay statement in full — breakdown, deductions, year-to-date — in the month it arrives. Query specific lines in writing, promptly.
2. Keep your own dated log of hours worked, overtime agreed, and leave taken and approved.
3. Know your leave entitlement, check your balance regularly, and follow the stated request process.
4. Report sickness as early as your policy requires, through its named channel. Provide required certification and attend return-to-work conversations openly.
5. Make flexible working requests in writing: the change, the start date, and how the work stays covered. Keep the answer.
6. Ask how to see your personnel file, read it at sensible moments, and request correction of factual errors.

## A Worked Example

For three months, Amina, a retail assistant, notices her pay feels light but tells herself the deductions must explain it. In the fourth month, following this lesson, she finally reads the full statement and compares it with the notebook where she logs her shifts. The pattern is plain: her Sunday hours are being paid at the weekday rate, though her contract states a Sunday premium. Because she has her own dated log and three statements showing the same line, her conversation with her manager takes ten minutes and no courage at all: here is the contract line, here are the statements, here is my log. The payroll team checks, agrees, corrects the rate, and back-pays the difference for the whole period. Amina's manager, far from resenting the query, asks her to show two new starters the notebook habit. The moral is not that employers cheat — this one had made a template error — it is that the system corrects itself quickly for people who check early with records, and slowly or never for people who raise a vague feeling a year later with nothing in hand.

## Common Mistakes

- **Checking only the amount that arrived.** The breakdown is where errors live. Read the lines, not just the total.
- **Relying on memory for hours and leave.** Feelings lose arguments that dated logs win. Keep the notebook.
- **Raising a pay query late and vaguely.** "My pay's been wrong for ages" starts an investigation. A specific line, month, and figure starts a correction.
- **Treating return-to-work conversations as punishment.** Their stated purpose is support and adjustment. Meet them openly — and note it if one is run as an interrogation instead.
- **Never reading your own file.** Wrong dates and misfiled letters surface at the worst moments. Read it while nothing depends on it.

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# Lesson 4 — Performance, Conduct, and Raising Concerns: Fair Process, Step by Step

The serious end of HR — performance problems, conduct, discipline, and grievances — frightens people mostly because it is unfamiliar. Fair process in this area follows the same recognisable shape almost everywhere, and knowing the shape in advance is most of the protection. Performance first. If your work is not meeting the standard, a fair process tells you so clearly and early, with specifics: what the standard is, where your work falls short, what support or training is available, what improvement is expected, and over what period it will be reviewed. Informal support and coaching come before formal warnings in any system worth the name, and formal steps, where they happen, come in order, in writing, with chances to respond at each stage. You are normally entitled to be accompanied at formal meetings — by a colleague or a representative, depending on your rules — to see the evidence relied on, and to appeal an outcome you believe is wrong. A performance process that arrives as a total surprise, with no earlier specifics and no chance to improve, fails its own standards, and saying so — calmly, in writing, naming the missing steps — is a legitimate and often effective response.

Conduct and discipline follow the same architecture. An allegation is investigated before it is judged; investigation and decision are, in good practice, handled by different people; you are told the allegation clearly, given the evidence, and heard before any sanction is decided. Sanctions, where the facts support them, are proportionate and in the stated order — most systems begin with warnings before dismissal is possible, except in cases of the most serious misconduct. Suspension, where it happens, is a neutral holding step in a fair system, not a punishment or a verdict. At every formal stage the same trio of rights recurs: notice in writing, accompaniment, and appeal. Learn that trio and you can navigate almost any process, in almost any workplace, without panic.

The mirror image is the grievance: your formal route for raising a serious concern about how you have been treated — by a manager, by colleagues, by a decision. Good practice is to try the informal route first where it is safe: many grievances are misunderstandings that a direct, early conversation settles better than a procedure. Where informal is unsafe or has failed — and always for matters like harassment or discrimination, which Lesson 5 covers — the formal grievance is a written statement of facts: what happened, when, who was involved, what effect it had, and what outcome you seek. It is then heard by someone not involved in the matter, with accompaniment, and answered with reasons, with an appeal available. Two disciplines protect you throughout any of these processes. Put things in writing, factually and without heat, and keep your own copies and dates of everything. And continue, so far as you possibly can, to do your job and behave impeccably while a process runs: nothing strengthens a fair case like a record of professionalism under strain, and nothing weakens one faster than conduct that hands the other side a second, easier case.

## The Steps

1. Expect performance concerns to arrive early, specifically, and with support and a review period. If yours arrives as a surprise verdict, name the missing steps in writing.

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2. In any formal meeting, use the trio: written notice beforehand, a companion or representative with you, and your right of appeal afterwards.

3. In a disciplinary matter, expect investigation before judgement, the allegation and evidence shared with you, and a hearing before any decision.

4. Try the informal route for concerns where it is safe. Where it is not, or it has failed, write a factual grievance: what, when, who, effect, and the outcome you seek.

5. Keep your own copies and a dated timeline of everything in any process.

6. Keep doing your job professionally while a process runs. Your conduct during it becomes part of your record.

### A Worked Example

Robert, a warehouse operative with nine years' service, is called without warning to a meeting and told his picking accuracy is "no longer acceptable" and a formal warning will follow. He is shaken — nobody has mentioned accuracy to him before. Instead of arguing in the room, he asks for the specifics in writing and takes a day to think. What he receives is thin: no figures, no dates, no record of any earlier conversation. Following this lesson, Robert writes a short, factual reply. He notes the absence of any prior specifics, support, or review period; asks for the accuracy data relied on and the standard it is measured against; requests an accompanied meeting; and — importantly — asks what support, such as a refresher on the new scanning system introduced that spring, is available. The tone of the process changes immediately. HR reviews the file, agrees the informal stages were skipped, and the matter restarts properly: Robert receives his figures, which show his errors cluster entirely on the new scanners, receives the refresher training two colleagues had already been given, and his accuracy returns to standard within the review period. No warning is issued. Robert did not win by being loud or by refusing the process. He won by knowing the shape the process was supposed to have, and asking — in writing, with dates — for exactly that shape.

### Common Mistakes

• **Treating a first informal conversation as a verdict.** Early feedback is the system working. Engage with it while improvement is cheap and informal.

• **Attending formal meetings alone and unprepared.** Use accompaniment, ask for evidence in advance, and take the time you are allowed to prepare.

• **Arguing in the room, writing nothing.** Feelings evaporate; written, dated, factual replies change processes. Confirm every important conversation in writing.

• **Grievances written as accusations instead of facts.** What, when, who, effect, outcome sought. A factual grievance is heard; a heated one is managed.

• **Letting your own conduct slip during a process.** The process becomes two cases, and yours is the easier one to decide.

## Lesson 5 — Equality, Dignity, and Leaving Well: The Ground Everything Stands On

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Every guideline in this set stands on one foundation: people at work are entitled to be treated with equality and dignity, and workplaces are required — by law in most places, and by their own stated values everywhere — to protect that. In practical terms this means decisions about hiring, pay, promotion, training, and discipline must not turn on protected personal characteristics — the exact list varies by jurisdiction but commonly includes race, sex, disability, age, religion or belief, and family status among others — and it means every employee is entitled to work free of harassment: unwanted conduct that humiliates, intimidates, or creates a hostile environment, whether it comes from a manager, a colleague, or a customer the employer allows to continue. Bullying that is not tied to a protected characteristic may fall outside the legal label in some places, but no decent policy treats it as acceptable, and the routes in Lesson 4 exist for it. If you experience or witness treatment of this kind, the guidance is consistent: record facts with dates, keep any messages, tell someone through a route you trust — HR, a senior manager outside the chain, a representative — and know that raising such concerns in good faith is itself protected in most systems. Retaliation for raising them is a further wrong, and should be reported as one.

Dignity also has a quieter, daily form that this set wants to leave with you, because most people experience workplaces through it far more than through formal rights. It is the manager who gives criticism privately and praise publicly. It is personal information — health, family, circumstances shared in confidence with HR or a manager — staying where it was shared. It is adjustments for disability or health needs being arranged as ordinary administration rather than favours, and religious and cultural needs being met with the same practical respect. You cannot legislate for every one of those moments, but you can recognise them, practise them if you manage anyone, and name their absence, calmly and specifically, when it matters. A workplace's real equality policy is what happens to the least powerful person in it on an ordinary Tuesday.

Finally, leaving. Jobs end — by your choice, by the employer's, by the end of a contract — and a fair system handles endings with the same order as beginnings. Know your notice: what you owe and what you are owed, from your contract. Expect final pay to be calculated and explained, including accrued leave, and check it with the same statement-reading habit from Lesson 3. References follow local custom and law, but the safe expectations are that a reference should be truthful and fair, and that you may ask what form yours will take. Return property, hand over your work properly — the handover is your last professional act and the one colleagues remember — and leave your records in order, including confirming your address for any final documents. If you believe an ending was unfair, the same disciplines apply: facts, dates, writing, accompaniment, appeal where the process offers one, and prompt advice, because challenges to dismissal usually carry strict time limits. Leaving well is not weakness or surrender. It is the final demonstration of the professionalism this whole set describes — and it keeps every door behind you in the condition you would want to find it, should you ever need to knock again.

## The Steps

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1. Know that hiring, pay, promotion, and discipline must not turn on protected characteristics, and that work free of harassment is an entitlement, not a favour.

2. If you experience or witness such treatment: record facts with dates, keep messages, and report through a route you trust. Retaliation for reporting is itself reportable.

3. Treat others' personal information as it should be treated: shared only where it was given to be shared. Practise private criticism and public praise.

4. Before leaving, confirm your notice from your contract — what you owe and what you are owed — in writing.

5. Check your final pay statement in full, including accrued leave, and query errors promptly with your own records in hand.

6. Hand over your work completely, return property, confirm your address for final documents, and ask what form your reference will take.

7. If you believe an ending was unfair, seek advice promptly — time limits for challenges are usually strict.

## A Worked Example

When Ingrid resigns from her administrative post after six years to move nearer family, she decides to leave as a demonstration of everything in this set. She gives notice exactly as her contract states, in writing, with her last date calculated and confirmed with HR. She builds a handover file across her notice period: where records live, which tasks recur monthly, which contacts matter, and the state of every open item — the file she wishes someone had once left her. Her final pay statement arrives and she reads it in full; it omits two days of accrued leave, and because her own log from Lesson 3 exists, one short email with dates corrects it. She asks, politely, what form her reference will take, and learns it will confirm dates, role, and her training record. On her last day her manager — not an easy man — tells her the handover file has already saved her successor twice. A year later, when a post opens at the same organisation in her new town, Ingrid's name is mentioned in the first conversation. Nothing about her leaving was dramatic, and that is precisely the point: in a system that runs on records and reputations, the orderly ending is an asset that keeps working for you long after the last day.

## Common Mistakes

- **Treating harassment as something to endure quietly.** Record it, keep evidence, report it through a trusted route. Silence protects only the behaviour.
- **Sharing colleagues' personal information as conversation.** Health, family, and circumstances shared in confidence stay in confidence. Gossip here is a dignity failure, not a social skill.
- **Resigning in a heated moment without checking notice.** Endings have terms. Read them first; a calm, correct notice protects pay, references, and return routes.
- **Skipping the final pay check.** Final statements contain errors at the same rate as any other — and after leaving, correction is slower. Check it while you still have access and records.

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- **Burning the handover.** A poor handover is the last impression colleagues keep. A good one is remembered, and repaid, for years.

## Try It

Spend one hour this week on an HR health check of your own working life, using nothing but this set. First, locate your contract, your offer letter, and the core policies — leave, sickness, hours and pay, conduct, and raising concerns — and read the contract properly, perhaps for the first time. Write down anything that surprises you. Second, check your records: read your last pay statement line by line against your own log of hours if you keep one — and if you do not keep one, start it today, in a notebook or a note on your phone, with this week's hours. Note your current leave balance and whether it matches your own count. Third, write down the three answers every employee should be able to give without hesitation: who is my first contact for a problem, how do I report sickness, and how would I raise a formal concern if I ever needed to? If any answer is "I don't know," find it now, while finding it is a small task instead of an urgent one.

Finish by choosing one improvement from anything the check revealed — copies of documents moved to a safe place, a stale emergency contact updated, a policy finally read, a pay line queried in writing — and do it this week. The goal of this set was never to make you an HR specialist. It was to make you a person who cannot be ambushed by their own working life: who knows the layers, keeps the records, recognises a fair process, and asks early, calmly, and in writing. Do the check once, keep the habits, and most HR matters in your future will be what they should be — administration, handled in daylight, instead of emergencies handled in the dark.

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