

# Employee Handbook

2022 | The Golden Belt Telephone Assn., Inc.



This handbook is designed to outline and explain The Golden Belt Telephone Association, Inc.'s ("Association") practices and policies. This employee handbook should be regarded as a set of guidelines only. This handbook is not a contract. Neither the policies in this handbook, nor any other written or verbal communication by a company manager or supervisor are intended to create a contract of employment or a warranty of benefits. The Association reserves the right to revise, add, or delete or otherwise change without prior notice if it is determined to be in our best interest, except the at-will employment policy. The Association will endeavor to communicate any changes in a timely fashion, typically in a written supplement to the handbook or Employee communication. This handbook supersedes and replaces all prior employee handbooks, policies or procedures, written or verbal. If you have any questions about any of the policies or procedures in this handbook, please consult with your immediate supervisor, or general manager. Please understand that no employee handbook can address every situation.

## Employee At- Will

The Association's employees are 'at-will'. This means that the term of employment is of indefinite duration and may be terminated by the Association or by the employee at any time and for any reason, with or without cause or advance notice.

This handbook neither implies nor establishes a contract between the Association and employee. Any written or oral statement to the contrary by a manager, or other agent of the Association is invalid and should not be relied upon by any prospective or existing employee.

The Association retains the right to change, modify, suspend, interpret or cancel in whole or in part, any of the published or unpublished personnel policies or practices of the Association, without advance notice, in its sole discretion, without having to give cause or justification to any employee. Recognition of these rights and prerogatives is a term and condition of employment and continued employment.

## Equal Employment Opportunity

Employment decisions at the Association will be based on merit, qualifications, and abilities. The Association does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices and will not base decisions on any personal characteristics including race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, disability, sexual orientation, transgender discrimination, genetic or family history, military or veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Any employee with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace is required to bring these issues, in good faith, to the attention of their immediate supervisor or the next level of management, if the concern involves the immediate supervisor. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The report or complaint should be made to either:

- The employee's immediate supervisor,
- The next level of management above immediate supervisor, or
- The human resources director

## Productive Work Environment/ Non-Harassment

The Association is committed to promoting a productive environment that is free of unlawful discrimination and unlawful harassment. The Association will not tolerate verbal or physical conduct by an employee that harasses, disrupts, or interferes with another's work performance or that creates an intimidating, offensive or hostile environment.

Employees are expected to maintain a productive work environment that is free from harassing or disruptive activity. The Association will not tolerate any form of harassment including harassment based on the following categories: gender/transgender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, national origin, pregnancy, disability, military status, or sexual orientation, genetic or family history.

Each supervisor, manager, and employee have a responsibility to keep the workplace free of any form of harassment, and in particular, sexual harassment. As an example, sexual harassment (both overt and subtle) is a form of employee misconduct that is demeaning to another person and undermines the integrity of the employment relationship. No supervisor or manager is to threaten or insinuate, either explicitly or implicitly, that an employee's refusal or willingness to submit to sexual advances will affect the employee's term of conditions of employment. Other sexually harassing or offensive conduct in the workplace, whether committed by; supervisors, managers, non-supervisory employees, or non-employees (e.g., contractor, vendor, customer, etc.) is prohibited. This conduct includes but is not limited to:

1. Unwanted physical contact or conduct of any kind, including sexual flirtations, touching, advances, or propositions;
2. Verbal abuse of a sexual nature such as lewd comments, sexual jokes or references, and offensive personal references;
3. Demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or sexually aggressive comments about an individual's appearance;
4. The display in the workplace of demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or sexually suggestive objects or pictures, including nude photographs; and
5. Demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or sexually suggestive written, recorded, or electronically transmitted messages.

Any of the above conduct, or other offensive conduct, directed at individuals because of their gender/transgender, race, national origin, color, religion, disability, pregnancy, age, military status, sexual orientation, genetic or family history is also prohibited.

Any employee, who believes that a supervisor's, manager's, or other employee's or non-employee's (e.g., contractor, vendor, customer, etc.) actions or words constitutes unwelcome harassment, has a responsibility to report or complain about the situation as soon as possible. The report or complaint should be made to either:

- the employee's immediate supervisor,
- the next level of management above the immediate supervisor, or
- the human resources director

All complaints of harassment will be investigated promptly and in a manner that is as impartial and confidential as reasonably possible. Employees are required to cooperate in any investigation. A timely resolution of each complaint will be reached and communicated to the parties involved. Retaliation against any employee for filing a complaint in good faith or participating in an investigation is strictly prohibited.

Any employee, supervisor, or manager who is found to have violated this harassment policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination. The Association prohibits any form of retaliation against employees bringing forth complaints in good faith or providing information about harassment. However, if an investigation of a complaint shows that the complaint or information was false, the individual who provided the false information will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.

## Americans with Disabilities Act

The Association is committed to complying with all applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA). The Association does not discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant, with regard to terms or conditions of employment, because of such individual's disability or perceived disability so long as the employee can perform the essential functions of the job. Consistent with this policy of nondiscrimination, the Association will provide reasonable accommodations to a qualified individual with a disability, as defined by the ADA, who has made the Association aware of his or her disability, provided that such accommodation does not constitute an undue hardship for the Association.

The Association has sole discretion on the feasibility of the requested accommodation and will consider various factors such as, but not limited to, the nature and cost of the accommodation and the accommodation's impact on the operation of the Association. The ADA does not require employers to make the best possible accommodation, to reallocate essential job functions, or to provide personal use items such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc.

## Telephone And Internet Use During Working Hours

Limited calls and long distance may be charged to the employee. All Internet or voice mail use is considered Association records. The Association has the right to access, disclose or delete any of these records. An employee must have management approval before any password or lock being placed by them. Violations may have disciplinary action taken or possible termination.

## Personal Appearance

The Association, in seeking to project a professional public image, adopts the following guidelines.

Your personal appearance reflects on the reputation, integrity, and public image of Golden Belt Telephone, Assoc., Inc. All employees are required to report to work neatly groomed and dressed. You are expected to maintain personal hygiene habits that are generally accepted in the community, including clean clothing, good grooming and personal hygiene, and appropriate attire for the workplace and the work being performed. This may include wearing uniforms or protective safety clothing and equipment, depending upon the job. Use common sense and good judgment in determining what to wear to work.

The Association, in accordance with applicable law, will reasonably accommodate Employees with disabilities or religious beliefs that make it difficult for them to comply fully with the personal appearance policy unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the Association. Contact your immediate supervisor to request a reasonable accommodation.

The Association's outside employees are required to wear blue, black, white or grey shirts and coats that have the Association's logo on them. If a hat or cap is worn it shall have the Association's logo on it and approved by management.

Association office employees have the option of wearing business casual attire. Business casual is defined as dress or casual slacks, shirts, blouses, sweaters, dresses, or skirts or capri; at an appropriate length for an office environment which is below the knee. Shoes should be dress or casual (non-athletic type). Shorts are not acceptable. Jeans and a local team or industry t-shirt are permitted on casual Fridays. Clean jeans (no holes or overly faded jeans allowed) may be worn with shirts, sweatshirts, or sweaters; offensive logos and language are not allowed. Athletic shoes are acceptable on casual Fridays. Shorts are not permitted.

This policy cannot cover every situation that may arise. The supervisor has the right to send an employee home to change into acceptable attire. Failure to comply with the personal appearance & dress code guidelines may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

## Introductory Period

All new employees begin work on a probationary status for the first ninety (90) days. Both parties will make the decision whether or not employment is to continue by the end of this period.

The Association attempts to maintain a job description for each position. If you do not have a current copy of your job description, you should request one from your immediate supervisor.

Job descriptions prepared by the Association serve as an outline only. Due to business needs, you may be required to perform job duties that are not within your written job description. Furthermore, the Association may have to revise, add to, or delete from your job duties per business needs. On occasion, the Association may need to revise job descriptions with or without advance notice to the employee.

If you have any questions regarding your job description or the scope of your duties, please speak with your immediate supervisor.

The job description is also the basis of the compensation and performance review systems of the Association.

## Employment Authorization Verification

New hires will be required to complete Section 1 of federal Form I-9 on the first day of paid employment and must present acceptable documents authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services proving identity and employment authorization no later than the third business day following the start of employment with the Association. If you are currently employed and have not complied with this requirement or if your status has changed, inform your immediate supervisor.

If you are authorized to work in this country for a limited period of time, you will be required to submit proof of renewed employment eligibility prior to expiration of that period to remain employed by the Association.

## Access To Personnel File(S)

The Association maintains a personnel file on each employee. The information in the employee's personnel file is permanent and confidential. Personnel files are the property of the Association and access to the information they contain is restricted. Only immediate supervisors and management personnel of the Association who have a legitimate reason to review information in a file are allowed to do so. The personnel file includes such information as the employee's job application, resume, records of training, documentation of performance appraisals, salary increases, and other employment records.

Employees who wish to review their own file should contact the General Manager. With reasonable advance notice, employees may review their own personnel files in the Association's offices in the presence of an individual appointed by the Association.

## Workplace Privacy & Right To Inspect

Association property, including but not limited to phones, computers, tablets, desks, workplace areas, vehicles, or machinery, remains under the control of the Association and is subject to inspection at any time, without notice to any employee, and without their presence.

You should have no expectation of privacy in any of these areas. We assume no responsibility for the loss of, or damage to, your property maintained on Association premises including that kept in lockers and desks.

## Days And Hours Of Work

The regular workweek is forty (40) hours from Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. On call employees are on call from 5:00 p.m. Friday until 8:00 a.m. Monday. Hourly on call employees will be paid overtime for each hour worked over the weekend. On call employees will be paid a minimum of two (2) hours for Saturday and two (2) hours for Sunday overtime whether they work four (4) hours or not.

Employees on call are expected to be able to work within one (1) hour of notification.

## Payment And Withholdings

The Association seeks to pay its staff in a fair and equitable manner consistent with the worth of the job. It also intends to comply with all laws regarding employment, pay, and benefits.

The Association is required by law to deduct certain items from payroll, such as federal, state, and local taxes, insurance, and retirement benefits. Employees are required to keep the Association informed at all times of any changes in marital, dependent, beneficiary, or tax status.

In the event of employment severance, the General Manager and Board of Directors will determine if any severance pay is warranted, and if so, how much. The Association will make every effort to provide a safe and functional working environment for its employees, recognizing that the nature of its business does present hazards and risks for some jobs.

## Entering Time

Golden Belt Telephone, Assoc. Inc. is required by applicable federal, state, and local laws to keep accurate records of hours worked by certain employees. To ensure that the Association has complete and accurate time records and that employees are paid for all hours worked, nonexempt employees are required to record all working time using GBT Reach software. Exempt employees may also be required to track days or time worked. Speak with your immediate supervisor for specific instructions.

Notify your immediate supervisor of any pay discrepancies, unrecorded or mis-recorded work hours, or any involuntarily missed meal or break periods.

Falsifying time entries is strictly prohibited. Falsifying time entries includes working "off the clock." If you falsify your own time records, or the time records of co-workers, or if you work off the clock, you will be subject to discipline up to and including termination. Immediately report to your immediate supervisor or next in chain of command any employee, supervisor, or manager who falsifies your time entries or encourages or requires you to falsify your time entries or work off the clock.

## Overtime

If you are nonexempt, you may qualify for overtime pay. All overtime must be approved in advance, in writing, by your immediate supervisor.

At certain times the Association may require you to work overtime. We will attempt to give as much notice as possible in this instance. However, advance notice may not always be possible. Failure to work overtime when requested or working unauthorized overtime may result in discipline, up to and including discharge.

Unless otherwise required or exempted by law, overtime pay of one and one-half times your regular rate of pay is paid for any hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a workweek. Holidays, vacation days, and sick leave days do not count as time worked for computing overtime.

## Accommodation For Nursing Mothers

The Association will provide nursing mothers reasonable break time to express milk for their infant child(ren) for up to one year following the child's birth. If you are nursing, you will be provided with a space, other than a restroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from co-workers and the public.

Break time should, if possible, be taken concurrently with any other break time already provided. If you are nonexempt, clock out for any time taken that does not run concurrently with normally scheduled rest periods, and such time will be paid in accordance with federal law.

You are encouraged to discuss the length and frequency of these breaks with your immediate supervisor

## Meal & Rest Periods

The Association strives to provide a safe and healthy work environment and complies with all federal and state regulations regarding meal and rest periods. Check with your immediate supervisor regarding procedures and schedules for rest and meal breaks. The Association requests that Employees accurately observe and record meal and rest periods. If you know in advance that you may not be able to take your scheduled break or meal period, let your immediate supervisor know.

## Benefits

The Association makes payments on behalf of its employees to government agencies that provide for:

- Social Security Retirement
- State and Federal Unemployment Insurance
- Worker's Compensation for Work-Related Injury

In addition, it offers to employees with 1,000 hours of work per year, insurance policies or plans that either fully or partially protects the person in the following areas:

- Life insurance
- Disability insurance
- Pension or Retirement

Employees with 1,800 hours of work per year will be offered Health insurance in addition to the policies or plans listed above. Details may be obtained from the immediate supervisor, or the policies or literature provided to the Association.

## Sick Leave

GBT allows its employees to earn 12 sick days per calendar year or 8 hours per calendar month. Notify your supervisor as far in advance as possible if you are going to use sick leave. There may be occasions, such as sudden illness, when you cannot notify your supervisor in advance. In those situations, provide notification of your circumstances as soon as possible.

You may use sick leave benefits for dental or doctor visits or to care for immediate family members (spouse & children- including natural, adopted, foster or stepchildren) who are sick. Unused sick leave that is accumulated above 520 hours will be paid out at 25% over the 520-hour threshold on an annual basis. You may be required to use available sick leave during family and medical leave, disability leave or other leave.

Sick leave accumulation will be capped at a total of 65 days (520 hours) per year.

## Vacation

Vacation is time off with pay designed to reward the employee for length of service and provide time for rest and recharging. Days are awarded as mentioned:

Employees with more than sixteen (16) years of service may elect to be compensated at their regular rate for the fourth week of vacation instead of taking the time off.

Management has the right to award time off if needed to recruit talent.

Years of Service	Days Awarded
0-12 Months	0
1 Year to 2 Years	5 days
2 Years to 11 Years	10 days
11 Years to 12 Years	11 days
12 Years to 13 Years	12 days
13 Years to 14 Years	13 days
14 Years to 15 Years	14 days
15 Years to 16 Years	15 days
16 Years to End of Employment	20 days

Requests for the timing of vacations will be honored to the extent that continuity of service is maintained. Management does have the right to refuse vacation if conditions warrant. Vacation days do not accumulate and will be forfeited if not taken in the year following the date they are awarded.

## Holidays

The Association recognizes the following holidays as time off with pay:

- New Year's Day
- Labor Day
- Christmas
- Memorial Day
- Veteran's Day
- Four (4) Personal Days
- July 4th
- Thanksgiving

## Leaves of Absence

All leaves of absence must be requested in writing from the immediate supervisor as far in advance as possible. All leaves except jury duty are without pay. Benefits will continue to accrue only if required by law. Failure to return from a leave as scheduled is considered to be a resignation.

## Military Leave (USERRA)

The Association complies with applicable federal and state law regarding military leave and re-employment rights. Unpaid military leave of absence will be granted to members of the uniformed services in accordance with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA; with amendments) and all applicable state law. You must submit documentation of the need for leave to your immediate supervisor. When returning from military leave of absence, you will be reinstated to your previous position or a similar position, in accordance with state and federal law. You must notify your immediate supervisor of your intent to return to employment based on requirements of the law. For more information regarding status, compensation, benefits, and reinstatement upon return from military leave, contact your immediate supervisor.

## Leave for Victims of Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault

The Association will provide Employees who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault up to eight days of leave per year to:

- Obtain or attempt to obtain any relief, including, but not limited to, a temporary restraining order, restraining order, or other injunctive relief to help ensure the health, safety, or welfare of the victim or the victim's children.
- Seek medical attention for injuries caused by domestic violence or sexual assault.
- Obtain services from a domestic violence shelter, domestic violence program, or rape crisis center due to domestic violence or sexual assault.

- Settle matters, including, but not limited to, court appearances in the aftermath of domestic violence or sexual assault.
- In order to obtain leave under this policy, you must provide reasonable advance notice of your intention to take leave, unless such advance notice is not feasible. Within 48 hours after returning from the requested time off, you must provide documentation to support the necessity for leave. Appropriate forms of documentation include:
  - A police report indicating that you were a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault.
  - A court order protecting or separating you from the perpetrator of an act of domestic violence or sexual assault, or other evidence from the court or prosecuting attorney that you have appeared in court.
  - Documentation from a medical professional, domestic violence advocate, or advocate for victims of sexual assault, health care provider, or counselor that you were undergoing treatment for physical or mental injuries or abuse resulting in victimization from an act of domestic violence or sexual assault.
- If an unscheduled absence occurs, the Association will not act against you if, within 48 hours after the beginning of the unscheduled absence, you provide certification to the Association as described above.
- Any information provided by you regarding a request for leave will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.
- Leave under this policy is unpaid; however, exempt Employees may receive pay as required by law. You may opt to use Vacation in place of unpaid leave.
- The Association will not retaliate against Employees who request or take leave in accordance with this policy.

## Voting Leave

If your work schedule prevents you from voting on Election Day, the Association will allow you a reasonable time off to vote. The time when you can go to vote will be at the discretion of your immediate supervisor, consistent with applicable legal requirements.



## Attendance

You are expected to be on the job, ready to work, when scheduled. If an employee cannot work their scheduled hours or cannot be at work on time, they are to call the Association as soon as possible and preferably no later than one hour after their work schedule begins. If you know ahead of time that you will be absent or late, provide reasonable advance notice to your immediate supervisor. You may be required to provide documentation of any medical or other excuse for being absent or late where permitted by applicable law.

The Association reserves the right to apply unused vacation, sick time, or other paid time off to unauthorized absences where permitted by applicable law. Absences resulting from approved leave, vacation, or legal requirements are exceptions to the policy.

Dependable attendance is of critical importance to the effective operation of the Association, and employees should be aware that even legitimate absence, such as sick leave, can become excessive. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness will be determined by the appropriate supervisor considering the nature of the job. Excessive absenteeism will be subject to disciplinary action as explained in the "Discipline" section to follow.

If you fail to show up for work or fail to call in with an acceptable reason for the absence for a period of three consecutive days, you will be considered to have abandoned your job and voluntarily resigned from Golden Belt Telephone, Assoc., Inc.

## Communications

Internal communication and coordination are encouraged in all directions to improve productivity. For operational matters, employees should communicate upward through their immediate supervisor. Supervisors are expected to be accessible and open to their staff's input and communication needs.

In case of a difficulty or a disagreement with a supervisor, the employee has the right of appeal to the next highest level without the supervisor's notification or presence.

No supervisor or manager should hear an employee's problem without confirmation that the proper channels have been followed.

## Safety And Health

It is a priority of the Association to provide a safe working environment for its employees and to maintain reasonable safeguards to protect public life and property. Management shall provide an ongoing program to educate the staff regarding safety regulations and procedures.

If an employee has a chronic or life-threatening illness and wishes to continue working, management will see that they are treated consistently with other employees. They may continue working as long as they are able to meet acceptable performance standards and by medical evidence, are not determined to be a medical or safety threat to themselves or others.

Workers who are injured on the job should report their injury to management as soon as possible and may be eligible for benefits under the State Worker's Compensation Laws. The Association also maintains a long-term disability policy for workers that is described under "Benefits" in this manual.

## Vehicle and Equipment Use

All motorized vehicles owned by the Association are to provide operational services for the Association and are not to be used for personal use unless approved by the General Manager. For liability reasons, only Association employees may ride in the vehicles. Employees assigned a vehicle are responsible for its safe operation and maintenance. Maintenance expenditures in excess of \$50.00 must be approved by the appropriate supervisor.

The company will run pre-employment Motor Vehicle Reports (MVR) to ensure that employees who drive a company vehicle meet standards for eligibility. The Association will also run MVR's annually thereafter, to ensure continued eligibility of insurance coverage.

## Drugs and Alcohol

All employees are prohibited from the use, possession, sale, or influence of any controlled substance on Association premises or work location. Employees on medication prescribed by a physician must notify their supervisor of its use. In the event that illegal substances are found to be involved, the Association will cooperate fully with law enforcement agencies.

With reasonable suspicion in the above areas, the Association reserves the right to:

1) search a person, their personal effects, lockers, and vehicles; 2) request that the employee submit to medical tests to be determined by approved testing facilities. Failure to cooperate will be treated as serious insubordination and implied guilt. Any related criminal conviction, on or off the job, will result in serious disciplinary action or discharge.

## Nepotism

In order to ensure fairness, objectivity, and lack of interpersonal conflict, no two (2) members of an immediate family may work for the Association. "Immediate family" is defined to include aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in-laws and first cousins. Unless prior authorization is passed by the Board of Directors.

## Discipline

Disciplinary action may be required to either 1) unintentional inefficiency, or 2) willful misconduct. Inefficiency is the inability to perform a task reasonably related to the job or assigned by the supervisor. Misconduct is refusal to comply with position descriptions, defined policies, or supervisory assignments. In either case, the following procedure should be followed realizing that it is not progressive and that any step of the procedure can be initiated depending on the seriousness of the violation.

- **Step One:** Coach and counsel the employee as to the desired behavior or outcome.
- **Step Two:** When an employee cannot improve or will not change their behavior, a written statement will be issued and discussed with them. It will contain a minimum: 1) the problem(s), 2) the desired change or outcome, 3) the deadline for compliance, and 4) the consequences of non-compliance.
- **Step Three:** Termination of Employment.

Steps Two and Three above cannot be implemented without approval by the next highest level of supervision. The Association also reserves the right to have an employee leave the premises, with or without pay, for further consideration of a disciplinary or terminating action.

This does not exhaust all possibilities of offenses warranting discipline, rather lists action items as a result of unintentional inefficiency or willful misconduct.



The Golden Belt  
Telephone Assn. Inc.



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