

Why you need standard operating procedures now more than ever

When the workforce is turned upside down, not too much is standard about how you operate. Even so, having standard operating procedures, also known as SOPs, in place can help you maintain a sense of control and consistency in your business.

You might be up against any number of situations now or potentially in the future - from staff on extended leave to hiring temp workers to manage tasks to possibly downsizing your staff. Since you don't know what's to come, now more than ever, you want to have SOPs in place as a tool to help your business operate more efficiently.

What are standard operating procedures?

Standard operating procedures or SOPs are the steps you take when completing routine tasks in your business.

You can write SOPs based on small and large company responsibilities including

- Running department meetings
- Hiring and onboarding staff members
- Learning about new policies
- Issuing paychecks
- Developing training programs and more

SOPs are available to reference by those who have positions relevant to the task at hand.

What's included in a standard operating procedure?

There's a general format for writing standard operating procedures. You want to include the following information to ensure that there's clarity with the SOP when others refer to it down the road.

- The purpose of the project
- The scope of the project
- The definition of any uncommon terms if applicable
- The responsible parties
- The relevant reference materials if applicable
- The procedure

Why having an SOP is crucial for your business

When you have standards relating to your business procedures, it can bring performance consistency, better communication, higher productivity levels, and more to your company or department. These benefits are welcome and can help you continue to operate during a difficult time when more employees might be working remotely, or you're going through frequent staff changes. The more consistency and direction you can provide, the better.

Consistent results

There's a reason why restaurants use a standard recipe when crafting menu items. It allows for a consistent result no matter which chef prepares the meal or even which city the restaurant is located.

The same is true with standard operating procedures.

Whether you have to bring on a temp worker to complete a task or have the information on hand when your team returns to work after an extended period off, it will allow for a more consistent result.

Increased productivity

Having SOPs also allows you and your team to operate more productively.

Working without an SOP would be akin to putting together furniture with no directions included. While it can be done, it might take longer than it needs to.

With standard operating procedures in place, you can say goodbye to wasting time figuring out what to do next or what the expectation is for how to complete a task because the "recipe" will already be outlined.

Improved processes

Another benefit of having standard operating procedures is that you can identify holes in your processes that need to be filled.

When a task is done following a set procedure, it allows you to see how it can be improved.

This might mean providing additional relevant reference material, changing the order of the procedure, or even assigning the task new responsible parties who are better equipped to handle it.

You might find now that your procedures need to be adjusted to reflect the times. Once things return to normal, they might need to be readjusted, and that's okay.

When you have a set operating procedure in place, you can modify it as needed based on your company requirements.

Higher quality work

With SOPs in place, you equip your team with the tools necessary to be clear, consistent, and productive in completing tasks. This allows for higher quality work to be done. When well-written standard operating procedures are in place, there's no need to question what quality is expected from you when completing a task.

Better yet, if you find that the expected quality is not being met, you have the opportunity to improve the processes so that you can achieve the desired results.

Better communication

The clarity of having standard operating procedures in place allows you to have better communication amongst all relevant staff.

This is especially important with changes in staff, remote workers, and adjustments in how the company operates.

Reduced training costs

As staff changes are made, and training is completed, you'll find that having standard operating procedures in place allows you to reduce time, money, and effort spent on training.

When training is implemented, you review the standard operating procedures in detail and provide it to the team member to refer to at any time. Having this information on hand can support him or her throughout the completion of the task.

Also, you can test the effectiveness of your SOPs on new hires. If they can follow the procedure without confusion, you can rest assured that it is an effective procedure.

Put standard operating procedures in place to support your company through these uncertain times

Your team needs clarity, consistency, support, and communication, no matter the role they play in the company. While the future might be uncertain, what is clear is that you want to provide as many tools as possible to help those at your company be successful.

Standard operating procedures will allow you to garner consistent results, improve productivity levels, create better processes, receive higher quality work, and even reduce training costs of new and current employees.