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Find out how we combat fake reviews.We show the latest reviewsLearn about Trustpilot's review process.We encourage constructive feedbackHere are 8 tips for writing great reviews.Verification can help ensure real people are writing the reviews you read on Trustpilot.Offering incentives for reviews or asking for them selectively can bias the TrustScore, which goes against our guidelines.Take a closer look Whether it be for employee onboarding or adhering to ISO guidelines, standard operating procedures (SOP) are an integral part of making sure your company runs smoothly, stays organized, and ensuring your team consistently follows protocol. But, where do you start if you've never documented your company procedures before? It can be intimidating when you're first beginning to build your standard operating procedures. That's why we've built four SOP example templates, to give you a clear and easy-to-follow framework to be able to easily build your own procedures from start to finish. This post is all about SOP innovation. Using Process Street, you can create SOPs in new, more efficient ways. Here's a breakdown of the article: Let's take a look at some SOP example templates to build out SOP examples In this Process Street article, we've built a bunch of SOP examples for you from scratch. Each of them represents a different approach to doing SOPs. We've presented them for you below in the form of checklist templates. Each one highlights a different use case, and solves a different problem. We also have a 'master' template that combines all these features into one solution. You can pick and choose the SOP example that's most relevant to you. Here's what the master template looks like: Here's all of the other templates in this article for reference: We'll be looking at each of them in detail; feel free to skip ahead if you're just interested in that. For now, let's talk about why process adherence is so important. What's the deal with SOPs and why are they important? If you're reading this, you're probably already familiar with SOPs, so I'll try to skip the basics. That said, I think it's important to mention a few important ideas to help you understand how Process Street helps you streamline your SOPs. The main concepts we'll be focusing on are process flexibility and process adherence. Process flexibility: Building robust processes As Schoenenberg et al outline in their paper Process Flexibility: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches: "Process flexibility can be seen as the ability to deal with both foreseen and unforeseen changes, by varying or adapting those parts of the business process that are affected by them, whilst retaining the essential format of those parts that are not impacted by the variations. Or, in other words, flexibility is as much about what should stay the same in a process as what should be allowed to change." The four main approaches to process flexibility are: Flexibility by design (building a process to account for multiple expected outcomes); Flexibility by deviation (allowing for nonlinear process following); Flexibility by underspecification (accommodating for some degree of freedom in how the process is followed); Flexibility by change (the ability to change and continuously improve a process); Two of the SOP examples are built with these principles in mind: the variable and conditional SOP template structures. Check out my colleague Adam's great post on process flexibility for a real deep dive on the principles mentioned above. Process adherence: Why aren't people following my process? Process adherence is a big problem, and the heart of it belies a disconnect between company culture and the way processes are implemented. People should come before processes, and the best way to get people using processes is to make those processes painless. So why don't employees follow processes? Here's some common reasons: Processes are hard to find or take too much time to use Processes are out of date Processes are dull or difficult to read No one has the responsibility of mentoring the team and policing their process adherence Errors are treated as one-offs, not real problems with the documented processes Good process design, as well as having the right kind of tools can help you avoid some of these common pitfalls. Two of the SOP examples have been built with these principles in mind: the enforced and collaborative SOP template structures. We have a whole blog post on process adherence, too, if you're interested in reading more. SOP examples for process innovation Now that we've covered the main points for why SOPs are important, let's look at some SOP example templates built with Process Street, and how they help streamline your SOPs. Think of these SOP examples like blueprints you can use to build out your own SOPs. Each of them is designed around a specific use case: Enforced SOP Structure Template (for enforcing a rigid, linear SOP where task order is important); Collaborative SOP Structure Template (using role and task assignment to make collaboration on your SOPs simple); Variable SOP Structure Template (a combination of static and dynamic process for improved flexibility); Conditional SOP Structure Template (using conditional logic to accommodate process flexibility); Master SOP Structure Template (an example of what a superpowered SOP might look like); Basic SOP Structure Template (a no-frills SOP structure template to get you up and running ASAP); BONUS: ISO 9001 Structure Template (a ready-for-action quality management system SOP structure template); SOP Examples: Enforced SOP Structure Template The value here is all about enforcing a strict, linear set of instructions. Need to make sure the process is followed to the letter, with no deviation in order? This one's for you – it uses stop tasks to keep the process laser-focused on the task at hand. SOP Examples: Collaborative SOP Structure Template Using role and task assignments together with approvals helps create the ultimate collaborative SOP template. You'll never have to worry about inter-departmental SOPs or work approvals again with this example. SOP Examples: Variable SOP Structure Template Here "variable" refers to the combination of fixed and variable instructions. Some parts of this template will be fixed (i.e. stuff you know will need to be done every time) while certain steps will be variable (i.e. the "variable" daily tasks you may not know until you start the process). The example used to illustrate this SOP is a daily work schedule for editor tasks, but the template can be adapted for anything with a little tweaking. SOP Examples: Conditional SOP Structure Template If you have a SOP that involves multiple outcomes that you can't actively predict (but can still prepare for) then this is the SOP example template you're looking for. Using conditional logic, various different outcomes can be proactively prepared for, and will be displayed to the person following the SOP based on whatever criteria you set (i.e. if the response to a form field is "yes" instead of "no"). SOP Examples: Master SOP Structure Template Here we have an example using all of the features above, to illustrate what a fully built-out SOP example structure might look like. If you need a SOP example template that utilizes all of the features mentioned above, this one's for you. SOP Examples: Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Template Structure This is a relatively streamlined SOP format, for those who just want a straightforward SOP example template without the bells and whistles. If you're looking to get started with optimizing your SOPs as fast as possible and don't care about process adherence or flexibility, then this one's for you. SOP Examples BONUS: ISO 9000 Structure Template As a bonus, here's a SOP structure template for creating a quality management system mini manual to the requirements of ISO 9001 for quality management. How to use Process Street for SOP innovation If it's not obvious by now, Process Street is a workflow management software that specializes in superpowered checklists. It makes following processes and SOPs fun, fast and faultless for you and your team. When we say SOP innovation, we mean that SOPs are often poorly implemented, and that's partly due to the tools people use to implement them. If you're following a process and you think of a way to improve it, you should be able to edit the process and make that improvement. You can't do that if you're reading a PDF, for example. If you're using Evernote, Google Docs, or Dropbox Paper, to keep track of and follow your processes, you can't account for process flexibility or make sure employees are following your processes properly. If you're using printed forms, then you have all the problems above, and then some (no ability to make clean edits on-the-fly, difficult to share without printing multiple copies, no mechanisms to enforce process flexibility; the list goes on). You get the idea. With Process Street, you can build your SOPs quickly and easily, share them with your team by sending a link, or adding them to the process using role and task assignments, and make sure your processes are being followed how you intended them to be with stop tasks and conditional logic. You can see an example of what a fully fleshed-out Process Street standard operating procedure might look like in this Employee Onboarding Checklist below: These are just a few examples of how Process Street streamlines SOPs. You can also use dynamic due dates to ensure tasks are completed on time, and approvals to get work signed off in management in a timely manner. Check out this video for a great overview of Process Street (and don't forget you can sign up for free!): Premium SOP Templates If you're in the market the most comprehensive, high-quality SOP templates (read expensive) out there, look no further than the Bizmanualz collection written by Chris Anderson, DBA, LSSBB. Bizmanualz is a premium library of SOP templates delivered in various formats (including Word) with products that span from a single procedure template to an entire company handbook. From complete CEO and CFO handbooks to department-specific procedure templates like accounting, finance and IT policy procedure manuals, Bizmanualz is the most comprehensive SOP collection out there. We've been impressed by the exhaustive Bizmanualz library that boasts over 1,200 SOP templates . The procedure manuals cover the core departments of a business, encompassing 7,000+ pages of detailed procedure documentation all available for immediate digital download. We also love that they offer a sample that you can get for free. Grab a free sample SOP here. ISO Quality Procedures Bizmanualz also has a comprehensive collection of ISO-compliant manuals including ISO 9001, AS9100 D and ISO 22000 Food Safety HACCP. Take a look at their extensive collection of SOP Templates at www.bizmanualz.com More SOP resources We've written a lot about SOPs on this blog. Here's some of that, if you're interested. Don't forget to sign up for a free Process Street trial! Thanks for reading. Before you go, consider leaving a comment – we're interested in how our readers are implementing SOPs. If you have any tips or examples for effective SOP implementation, let us know. Your comment will be helpful to other readers! There are several moving parts of every company or organization. The team members must be on the same page at all times for them to work together like a fine-tuned computer. But, what happens if an employee goes on vacation? Who would cover for them? Will they have any idea what to do? Also, how can a new employee learn how to conduct their duties if they join the company? In these cases, standard operating procedures allow work to proceed without interruption. To take a closer look at what an SOP is and how it works, enjoy reading the following. 1. Free Standard Operating Procedure Example MS Word MS Excel Charts Pages PDF Size: A4, US Download 2. Free Standard Operating Procedure Example MS Word MS Excel Charts Pages PDF Size: A4, US Download 3. Free Warehouse Standard Operating Procedure Example Size: A4, US Download 4. Free Laboratory Standard Operating Procedure Example Size: A4, US Download 5. Free Help Desk Standard Operating Procedure Example Size: A4, US Download 6. Standard Operating Procedure Example europa.eu Size: 171 KB Download 7. 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Visual Standard Operating Procedure Example health.hawaii.gov Size: 355 KB Download 19. Standard Operating Procedure Management safety.louisiana.edu Size: 111 KB Download 20. Customer Service Standard Operating Procedure phoenix.gov Size: 48 KB Download 21. Standard Operating Procedure Training Example ucl.ac.uk Size: 136 KB Download 22. Standard Operating Procedure Accounting Example sainthelena.gov.sh Size: 723 KB Download 23. Hotel Standard Operating Procedure Example ecotourismkenya.org Size: 143 KB Download 24. Finance Department Standard Operating Procedure sbp.org.pk Size: 204 KB Download 25. Workplace Standard Operating Procedure Example icac.sa.gov.au Size: 483 KB Download 26. Quality Assurance Standard Operating Procedure epwerth.org.au Size: 860 KB Download 27. Standard Operating Procedure Maintenance theroyal.ca Size: 132 KB Download 28. Standard Operating Procedure Warehouse Example dhqchiniot.punjab.gov.pk Size: 6 MB Download 29. Machine Standard Operating Procedure Example bldeapharmacy.ac.in Size: 491 KB Download 30. Engineering Standard Operating Procedure Example ardmorecity.org Size: 1 MB Download 31. Sanitation Standard Operating Procedure Example fsis.usda.gov Size: 127 KB Download What Is a Standard Operating Procedure? A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a set of instructions that guides employees in performing their regular tasks. An SOP is a form of process paperwork that documents how a particular process works. For a complicated position that may conform to regulatory standards, a written SOP is necessary. There are several reasons companies develop SOPs: Ensure the continuation of the business Consistent quality and fewer mistakes Faster onboarding of new employees Retention and management of information How to Create an Effective Standard Operating Procedure? Whatever industry you're in, you should have well-defined SOP documents to help your employees understand how to complete routine tasks safely, following regulations, and consistently, regardless of who completes the task. There is no official manual that can show you how to compose an SOP. However, there are several steps you can take to coordinate your thoughts and prepare the most productive route to optimizing your procedures. Step 1: Set Your Goal Define the desired outcome or aim for the SOP you're writing. For instance, you're writing a plan about how to close a restaurant each night. Your aim can be to protect the building before the prep team arrives in the morning. Step 2: Choose Your Format There are a variety of companies that have standard operating procedures manuals written originally for other procedures. In this scenario, you can use certain documents as templates for your preferred formatting standards. Step 3: Request for Input Gather the team and inquire if they agree of the job needs to be done on time. Since these are the individuals you'll ask to follow the SOP, make sure it makes sense to them. And determine if they include all the required duties. There will be several drafts and reviews. Let the team also review the draft for additional feedback. Step 4: Determine the Scope The SOP you are working on maybe relying on the results of other SOPs and teams in other divisions. As a result, you should decide whether you need to apply to other protocols or the current standard operating procedure manual. A flowchart or a map can help explicitly identify dependencies and liable actors. Step 5: Know Your Audience Knowing who your audience is will help you decide how to compose your SOP paper. Therefore, it's necessary to determine their prior knowledge, language skills, experience, and many more. Once you've defined your target audience, creating a chart can help you recognize duties and obligations within the protocol. Step 6: Write Down the SOP Make a rough copy of the standard operating procedure and include any of the following components: Title Page Table of Contents Specific Procedures FAQs: A Standard Operating Procedure, or SOP, is a file that outlines how to conduct a particular business operation, such as production or record keeping, step by step. Here's an ideal checklist for a successful SOP: Introduction Know what you want to do Know its purpose Know the amount and type of experience you have in your field A standard operating procedure template is a text that describes an SOP in an organization. It's usually written in a step-by-step style, outlining different features that set the business apart from the competition. Documenting processes might seem to be a tedious task. However, it is a vital aspect of business process management that needs proper attention. When you have clear, detailed basic operating procedures in hand at all times, the staff will still know what to do in whatever case. Employees come and go, bringing their knowledge and skills with them. SOPs are what enable you to expand and scale your company without being slowed down. No matter what business you're in, you probably have a specific way of getting things done. But things are constantly changing, employees come and go, and your business has to keep delivering high-quality products/services regardless of the obstacles. So how can you maintain steady consistency of your end results? That's where standard operating procedures (SOPs) come in! SOPs help you break down even the most complex process so even a novice can complete it from start to finish. In this guide, we're going to walk you through everything you need to know about SOPs including: What's a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)? How to Write an SOP How to use Process.st for your SOPs Let's dive in! What's a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)? A standard operating procedure, or SOP, is a set of detailed step-by-step instructions that describe how to carry out any given process. Most companies that are serious about process management use SOPs to manage their day-to-day activities. Why? Well, Standard Operating Procedures allow you to: Achieve consistent results. With standard operating procedures, you complete your processes in the same way and achieve the right results every time. Reduce costs and increase productivity. When everyone does the same task in different ways, eventually your organization will run into inefficiencies that cost you time and money. With SOPs you can streamline the process and increase productivity. Create a safe working environment. SOPs are very useful when it comes to safety. You provide a standardized way of getting things done with minimized risk of safety hazards. In this way your workers are safe and your company reduces the risk of liability. Standard Operating Procedure Structure The typical SOP covers the following information... A title page Title SOP ID number Names of the people who created the document The dates when the document was created and edited The department or division that will use the SOP The signatures of the people who approved the SOP Table of Contents. You can include a table of contents if your document is very long. This way, your employees will easily find the section they need in no time. Preparatory Information. The purpose and scope of the SOP The roles and responsibilities of the people who are directly involved in the process Resources and materials that the employees will need to complete the procedures Cautions and warnings related to the procedures or materials used in the process Procedures section. This is the essence of your SOP. Here you describe what needs to be done, the order of the tasks, and methodology your employees need to follow. You can list the different steps and if the process is more complex, include sub-steps to describe all activities in detail.Also, include supplementary diagrams, images, or illustrations when appropriate. Imagery can sometimes be a more effective way of explaining how to get things done. Quality control and assurance. Your employees can keep track of their performance on a case-by-case basis or over time by consulting with this section. This is especially helpful if you're onboarding a new hire, and they're not familiar with a lot of the concepts. So far so good, right? But now you're probably wondering how exactly do you write a standard operating procedure from scratch? Read on to find out the exact steps you need to take in order to create an SOP. How to Write and implement an SOP Step #1. Determine the SOP format Depending on the size of your company and your needs you can choose from different SOP structures. The 2 most common SOP formats are: Simple checklist This approach lets you quickly outline the steps you perform in a certain process. It's more suitable for startups and small teams that are just starting to build their processes. However, this type of standard operating procedure is NOT a good idea if you want a more detailed manual or if your goal is to perform analysis in order to improve a business process. Detailed hierarchical checklist This type of checklist also includes more detailed sub-steps that explain how to perform the process precisely. Essentially you're breaking down the steps in such a way that anyone could understand and perform the process. This SOP format is great if your goal is to analyze your processes and see where they underperform. Step #2. Gather all relevant stakeholders When you assemble a team responsible for constructing the SOP you should include employees who work directly with the process. After all, they're the people who know the process best. Additionally, you need to decide who is going to write the standard operating procedure. It's always better to assign the task to someone from within the process. You can also hire outside consultants, but you should make sure that they have substantial knowledge of the industry, your company, and your internal operations. Step #3. Identify the goals of creating an SOP Determining your end goals will help you build a better SOP and understand whether you are achieving the desired results with your standard operating procedures. Some of the most common goals include: Achieving better product quality Improving the underperforming steps Increasing the efficiency of the process Improving your bottom line Speeding up a process that is too slow Sometimes all it takes to fix a broken process is to describe all the steps in a detailed easy-to-follow way. However, you need to have a clear purpose behind it. Step #4. Define the SOP structure If you're part of a big corporate company, your SOPs will have a more formal and strict structure that will require official approval from a quality and assurance department or another authoritative figure. But if you're running a startup or a small organization you can keep a more informal format as long as this works for your team. Once you start growing, however, you might want to start following a more formal structure for better results. Step #5. Determine the scope of the SOP Depending on the process you're targeting, your standard operating procedure can involve multiple departments or teams. However, it is important to understand whether your SOP should only use them as a reference or actually include them in the current document. Sometimes it's hard to determine to what degree you should involve multiple departments. But keep in mind that you should have a clearly defined scope and not stretch out the standard operating procedure document to other processes and lose focus from your goals. Step #6. Be consistent in your style To make it easier for the end-user, e.g. the person who's going to be using the standard operating procedure, you have to keep a clear consistent style throughout the whole document. Here are some tips on how to maintain a consistent style: Emphasize on the tasks that the end-user has to carry out. To do that you can use more action verbs and place them at the beginning of the instruction sentences. Don't write fluff. The shorter, the better. After all your employees are just searching for guidelines on how to perform a given task. Create an easy-to-read explanation for each step. After you state the action that your employees need to take, you might have to provide additional explanation. Keep them short and easy to scan. Step #7. Choose the right notation (if you're using one) When working in a corporation, you are most likely sticking to some sort of notation which is especially specific to the company. And always keep in mind that these procedures are dynamic and will change with time in order to stay up to date with the current trends. Also, you should think about how you're going to distribute the SOP document so it's easily accessible to your professionals outside of your company without having to explain everything from scratch. Step #8. Include all steps of the process Here, you record all steps that your employees take to complete a certain process. You can observe the process itself or collaborate with the people directly involved in it to make sure you recorded all steps in the right order. This rough first draft allows you to see whether you need to go in more detail with some of the steps. Step #9. Choose the right metrics for measuring the success of the SOP To understand whether your SOP is achieving good results, you need to track the right KPIs. If we're following the previous example, the KPIs would be: How many products are we producing per month? How many of these are faulty? What is the production time per product? Step #10. Test the SOP To make sure that your SOP is good to go or to make any final edits and tweaks you can test it on a smaller scale. Ask some of the employees who work with the targeted process to use the SOP and ask for their feedback. You can involve both more experienced employees and new hires to see if the standard operating procedure guidelines are clear enough. You might have to make some changes to the grammar, language, and style to ensure that the SOP is easy to follow and can be successfully completed. Step #11. Ask superiors to review your SOP In a bigger corporation, the SOP will have to go through the senior staff for review and if approved, it goes to the quality and assurance department for the final approval. However, if you're a small business or a startup and have no superiors, you can skip this step for now! This will give you another perspective and will open your eyes to things you might have missed while assembling your SOP. Step #12. Assess all risks related to the process When you have reviewed and tested SOP, it's time to consider the possible risks. Pay attention to the procedures that might be hazardous. Working with hazardous materials can be dangerous for your employees while producing a defective product can put your customers at risk and your company under a lawsuit. You have to predict such possibilities and try to minimize them. You can never guarantee 100% safety but you can at least have standard procedures for minimizing the risk and be prepared when things don't go as planned. Step #13. Implement the SOP Once you're all set on all the previous steps you're ready to implement your standard operating procedure. And always keep in mind that these procedures are dynamic and will change with time in order to stay on top of all the changes and keep on delivering the best possible results. Use Process.st for Managing Your SOPs The distribution of your standard operating procedure can happen through either a traditional paper copy that you give out to your employees or using a digital version of the SOP. With the paper document you should keep in mind that every time you make a change to the SOP, you will have to give out another set of documents to your employees. And having multiple updated versions of several SOPs throughout your company will get messy. In this case, using workflow management software is a much better idea. The software will make sure that the right people have access to the SOP from any location at any time. But that's not all. Our favorite software for this job is Process.st. The platform is very easy to use and navigate. And it gives you SOP templates depending on your industry and the process you want to target. Meaning, you don't even have to make SOPs from scratch – just pick a template, tailor it to your business, and you're good to go. You can create your SOP documents in the form of simple or more detailed checklists (depending on your need). Plus, you can edit and customize them additionally so they fit your purpose. The software is drag and drop, so it's extremely easy to get started with it – zero coding skills required. Process.st also: Creates interactive process checklists with if/then logic. Streamlines and automates all sorts of approval forms. Integrates with 1000+ other apps. Lets you collaborate with your team when completing a certain procedure. Notifies you on workers' progress and when someone completes a task. And on top of all that, the software also lets you keep track of your SOPs in real time. You'll know EXACTLY when a process is underperforming, or at risk of missing a deadline. Conclusion Now you know everything about standard operating procedures, including how to build one and the best ways to distribute your SOPs among your employees. Creating functional standard operating procedures for your business will help you eliminate the confusion around the processes that are performed on a daily basis which will allow your employees to be more productive and minimize the mistakes made along the way! We hope this article was useful for you and if you're looking for more advice on business process management, check out our blog!