

Coast Star, Inc. Employee Handbook

d/b/a

STAR  **NEWS GROUP**[®]

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Ndmag.com

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1. PURPOSE

The policies and procedures outlined in this handbook are intended to answer questions you may have about your job, employment benefits and the company. These statements are merely guidelines, not promises of any kind. This handbook supersedes all handbooks and personnel policies previously issued. The company reserves the right to modify or eliminate any procedures or policy without notice.

No statement in this handbook is to be construed as an employee contract.

Oral statements made by supervisors may not revise the provisions contained in this handbook. The contents of this handbook can only be modified in writing.

2. COMPANY INFORMATION

The Coast Star has been serving Southern Monmouth County since 1877, and currently targets the following areas: Avon, Bradley Beach, Belmar, Brielle, Lake Como, Manasquan, Sea Girt, Spring Lake, Spring Lake Heights and Wall. *The Coast Star* is published every Thursday.

The Ocean Star has been serving Northern Ocean County since 1998, targeting the following areas: Bay Head, Brick, Lavallette, Mantoloking, Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach. *The Ocean Star* is published every Friday.

Night & Day Magazine was purchased in 2014. The free publication is distributed 15 times annually and covers all of Monmouth and Ocean counties.

Starnewsgroup.com serves all Star News Group publications, including a page for *Night & Day Magazine* (directed from ndmag.com).

Coast Star, Inc. is the name of the corporation publishing both newspapers and *Night & Day Magazine*. Alison Manser Ertl serves as President and Publisher of Star News Group.

In 2006, Coast Star Inc. adopted a new company name, Star News Group, to focus on its corporate image more clearly.

In 2011, the company adopted a Mission Statement. Revisions were made to this statement in 2020. It is included in full here:

Mission Statement

The mission of Star News Group is to provide the readers in each and every town we serve with unique, unbiased, relevant and entertaining coverage of the stories that matter most to them. As a news organization, we will deliver our content in our print publications and on our website. We will chronicle the lives of the residents in the communities we serve and provide a forum for the members of those communities to learn, share and debate. The satisfaction of our readers is vital to the success of our mission, so Star News Group will constantly strive to deliver to our readers the information, images and ideas that reflect and affect their lives. Our publications will provide a marketing vehicle for the businesses in the communities we serve to share their products and services with our readers. We will employ the highest level of customer service during every customer interaction.

3. EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Coast Star, Inc. is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to positive plans and programs to continue providing employment and advancement opportunities to all, regardless of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, creed, ancestry, sexual orientation, veteran status, pregnancy, gender identity and marital status. The company's Affirmative Action Policy is reflected in every phase of your employment – including recruitment, employment, compensation, training and promotion transfers and employee benefits.

POLICY CONCERNING AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT

Employment is at will. Each person's employment is for no specific term. Coast Star, Inc. may terminate your employment at any time, with or without notice and with or without cause, and you may do the same. This employment relationship is neither an expressed nor an implied employment contract or a guarantee of continued employment.

TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT

Full-Time Salary (Exempt): Those positions that require flexible hours based on work demand. Those hours may include assignments on Saturday or Sunday. A full-time salaried employee is exempt from overtime pay.

Full-Time Hourly (Non-Exempt): Those positions that require a 40-hour work week during most weeks, however may require more during busy weeks. A full time hourly employee working more than 40 hours in a pay period will be paid overtime at a rate of one and one-half times regular pay for any hours actually worked over 40 hours.

Full-time Hourly Four Day (Non-Exempt): Due to the deadline-driven nature of our business, some selected positions call for a modified four-day work week, totaling approximately 32 hours per week. For all intents and purposes, employees in these positions are considered full-time hourly and are eligible for overtime (if they exceed 40 hours in one work week). These positions earn a pro-rated share of Vacation days at 80% of the full allotment and Sick/personal days at 100%. These employees will earn holiday pay for those holidays that fall on their regularly scheduled work days.

Part-Time Hourly (Non-Exempt): All employees scheduled on an hourly basis or a per day basis less than 32 hours per week. Employees in these positions are eligible for overtime pay at a rate of one and one-half times regular pay for any hours actually worked over 40 hours.

OVERTIME APPROVAL

All Non-Exempt employees are required to obtain prior approval from their supervisors before working beyond their regular working hours.

4. EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

EMPLOYEE PAYCHECKS

For payroll purposes, the workweek begins Saturday and ends on Friday. Paychecks are distributed weekly on Monday. We use a third-party provider, ADP, which allows for Direct Deposit. If you provide the accounting department with a voided check from your savings or checking account you can have your paycheck electronically deposited weekly. If you do not provide a bank account, then your paycheck will be available weekly on Monday. On bank holidays that fall on a Monday, paychecks and direct deposits will be available on Tuesday of that week.

There are certain deductions that are required by law which are itemized on your paycheck stub. In addition, there may be deduction for other items you authorize, such as insurance coverage or Simple IRA contributions. Please address any questions you may have concerning your paycheck to your supervisor or the **accounting** department.

PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS

The company is required by law to make certain deductions from your paycheck. These include:

- Federal Income Withholding Taxes
- State Income Withholding Taxes
- Social Security (FICA)
- Temporary Disability Insurance/Unemployment Insurance
- Family Leave Insurance

The number of exemptions elected on the most recent W-4 form filed determines Federal and State income taxes. All rates are fixed by law. You may change your tax withholdings at any time by completing a new W-4 form.

When authorized, the company also makes deductions for wage assignments and benefit plans. Please see section 5. Employee Benefits for full details on the company's insurance offerings. If an employee wishes to receive these benefits, the appropriate costs will be deducted from their paycheck.

W-2 STATEMENTS

By January 31st, you will receive a W-2 statement of pay and withholdings for the previous payroll year. In addition to your gross earnings, your W-2 statement shows the amounts that were deducted from your pay for Federal, State and Social Security taxes. If you have questions about your tax liability, we encourage you to obtain the advice of a tax accountant.

CHANGE IN PERSONAL STATUS

The company maintains a variety of records that directly concern your welfare. To ensure proper maintenance of these records, you should advise the payroll department if you have any changes, such as legal name, home address, telephone number, marital status or number of dependents. You are also responsible for maintaining a current beneficiary designation and address for appropriate benefits plans.

TIME CARDS

Hourly employees will be required to submit a breakdown of hours worked each day, for that pay period. These hours must be submitted to the accounting department no later than Friday morning by 8 a.m.

5. EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

INSURANCE

Full-time employees and part-time employees scheduled to work an average of 25 hours per week are eligible to enroll in our group health insurance plan, dental plan and/or vision plan on a voluntary basis.

Medical: The Company will pay \$50.69 weekly towards the employee's medical coverage. (This rate is subject to change upon renewal of the policy on September 1st.) The employee is responsible for the remainder of their single coverage premium. If the employee wishes to have additional family members covered by the company's medical plan, the employee is responsible for 100% of the additional family member's premium.

Dental: The Company will pay \$1.55 of the employee's weekly dental premium. The employee is responsible for the remainder of their single coverage premium. If the employee wishes to have additional family members covered by the company's dental plan, the employee is responsible for 100% of the additional family member's premium. The dental coverage is subject to change upon renewal annually in March.

Vision: The employee is responsible for the entire plan premium.

Employees will complete an application for insurance soon after their hire date; however, policies will become effective 60 days from the employee's start date. The plan costs are subject to changes and periodic increases which usually occur upon renewal of the policy in September. Anyone choosing not to enroll after the two-month waiting period must wait for open enrollment to enroll or have a "qualifying event" such as a loss of current coverage. The medical open enrollment is in August. The dental and vision open enrollment is in February.

A Section 125 Cafeteria plan was established in 2011, which allows for insurance premium deductions to be made on pre-tax dollars. This form is filed with the state annually.

The health insurance benefits, the actual programs, the Cafeteria Plan and the percentage of employee contribution are subject to modification at any time at the sole discretion of the ownership of Coast Star, Inc.

Should you decide not to participate in our health insurance plan, you are required to sign a waiver.

If an employee has insurance coverage and termination of employment should occur, under the provisions of COBRA, the employee may choose to have continued coverage for up to eighteen months. During those eighteen months the employee is responsible for the entire premium effective the date of termination. All COBRA payments are administered through a third-party provider. The third-party provider will be in contact to arrange payments. If you have any questions, please contact the payroll department. COBRA coverage is subject to change based upon the guidelines of the federal program.

DISABILITY INSURANCE

Guardian is the insurance company that Coast Star, Inc. uses to provide disability insurance. The plan mirrors the State of New Jersey plan. Any employee who becomes disabled can apply for short-term disability benefits for up to 26 weeks if they meet the NJ guidelines for number of weeks worked and earnings for those weeks (as found on the NJ Dept. of Labor an Workforce development website).

Employees who participate in our health, dental, and /or vision insurance are responsible for 100% of the premiums during the disability period.

SIMPLE IRA

All employees who earn at least \$5,000 in compensation for the calendar year are eligible to enroll in the company's Simple IRA program within the first pay period of each month. The program is administered by LPL Financial and offers investment options with Franklin Templeton Funds (www.franklintempleton.com).

Participating employees will select a percentage of their base salary to contribute pre-Federal tax to the IRA. Coast Star, Inc. will match dollar for dollar up to 3% of the employee's gross pay, which includes all earnings. Simple IRA contributions will be arranged through the payroll department and the appropriate amount will be deducted from the employee's weekly paycheck. Employee contributions will be limited by the maximum contribution amount allowed by law.

There are several funds to choose from and participants may choose to spread their investments over more than one fund.

Information regarding this plan and a Simple IRA application will be provided to you at the time of hire. If you have any questions regarding your investments, you should seek the advice of an investment counselor or accountant. Anyone choosing not to participate in the Simple IRA will be asked to sign a waiver.

The Simple IRA program is subject to modification at any time at the sole discretion of the ownership of Coast Star, Inc.

PAID HOLIDAYS

There are seven paid holidays for full-time employees throughout the year:

1. New Year's Day (January 1)
2. Memorial Day
3. Independence Day (July 4)
4. Labor Day
5. Thanksgiving Day
6. Day After Thanksgiving
7. Christmas Day (December 25)

Holidays which fall on a Saturday are normally observed the preceding Friday. Holidays which fall on a Sunday are normally observed the succeeding Monday. However, it is at management's discretion each year to determine the observance of holidays that fall on weekends.

VACATION DAYS – Full-Time Employees

Vacation days are calculated on January 1st each year. During your hire year, days earned are pro-rated based on your date of hire within the year. The pro-rated schedule is listed below.

Paid vacation is to be used between January 1 and December 31 of that calendar year, cannot be carried over to the following years, and will not be reimbursed if unused. If an employee resigns or is terminated and has been on staff for a minimum of six months, payment of unused vacation days will be pro-rated as a percentage of the year.

Vacation days may only be scheduled as full days (8 hours) or half days (4 hours) only.

Frozen Time – Vacation time is restricted for the period of time beginning with the week prior to Thanksgiving and continuing through to the full week prior to Christmas Day. During this time period, no more than one vacation day can be used per week. Any requests for more than one vacation day will be submitted to the Publisher for review. This is the busiest time of the year and requires a full staff on board. In 2025, the Frozen Time period will be November 16 through December 18.

Vacation days should not be used consecutively with company holidays, unless pre-approved by your supervisor.

Scheduling of all vacation must be requested with your supervisor and approved at a minimum of one month in advance for all vacation periods exceeding one day. Because multiple employee vacations within departments is restricted, it is important to schedule vacation as far in advance as possible. A vacation day request form should be completed and submitted to your supervisor for each vacation period that you are requesting time off.

Each full-time employee is entitled to paid vacation as provided for by the following policy and schedule shown in the chart below:

Full-time employees can earn up to 5 days in their hire year, 5 to 10 days in their first full calendar year, 10 days in their second full calendar year, and after five full calendar years of employment, they earn 1 additional day per year until they reach a maximum of 15 days.

**SCHEDULE OF VACATION DAYS EARNED
EACH FULL CALENDAR YEAR OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT**

<i><u>Full-Time Hire Date</u></i>	<i><u>Hire Year</u></i>	<i><u>1st full calendar yr</u></i>	<i><u>2nd - 5th full calendar yrs</u></i>	<i><u>6th full calendar yr</u></i>	<i><u>7th full calendar yr</u></i>	<i><u>8th full calendar yr</u></i>	<i><u>9th full calendar yr</u></i>	<i><u>10th full calendar yr</u></i>
Jan. 1 – Feb. 5	5	10	10	11	12	13	14	15
Feb. 6 – Apr. 20	4	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
April 21 – July 2	3	8	10	11	12	13	14	15
July 3 – Oct. 13	2	7	10	11	12	13	14	15
Oct. 14 – Nov. 24	1	6	10	11	12	13	14	15
Nov. 25 – Dec. 31	0	5	10	11	12	13	14	15

VACATION DAYS – Part-Time Employees

Part-time Hourly Employees who are on staff on January 1st and are regularly scheduled to work a minimum of 12 hours per week, but no more than 32 hours per week, are eligible for paid Vacation equal to the number of hours they are regularly scheduled to work in one week. For example, employees who work 24 hours a week (or 3 days) will earn 24 hours of Vacation Time each January 1st. Employees not on staff on January 1st will not be eligible for vacation time until the following year.

Part-Time Hourly Employees will be paid a half-day's pay for holidays that fall on their regularly scheduled work days. A limited number of additional days off without pay may be arranged in advance if coverage is available; however, vacation days are restricted during the frozen time from Thanksgiving through Christmas. All time off should be arranged in advance with your supervisor.

SICK/PERSONAL DAYS

All employees will earn one hour of sick/personal time for every thirty hours worked, not to exceed 40 hours in a calendar year. Any unused sick/personal time at the end of the year will be carried over (40 hours maximum may be carried over).

The maximum amount of sick/personal time (current year plus carry over from previous years) may not exceed 80 hours.

Sick/Personal days should be used for sick leave, personal appointments, etc. Whenever possible, employees should give ample notice of the use of a sick/personal day to their supervisor by completing a sick/personal day request form. In the case of an illness, employees must contact their supervisor by telephone.

Sick/Personal Days can only be scheduled in increments of quarter days (2 hours), half days (4 hours) or full days (8 hours).

Sick/Personal days may not be taken consecutively unless a special circumstance or illness arises. A doctor's note may be required when an illness occurs.

Sick/Personal days cannot be used in combination with vacation days.

Sick/Personal days cannot be used on days immediately preceding or following a company holiday.

Employees must notify their manager by telephone call (not email or text message) when there is an unplanned absence due to an illness or emergency.

ACCRUAL VACATION and SICK/PERSONAL DAYS

Vacation and Sick/Personal days do not accrue during a period of absence where an employee is not working their regular hours.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance and timeliness are critical to business operations. Therefore, absenteeism and tardiness must be kept to a minimum. If an employee exceeds the Sick/Personal and Vacation time allotment for the year or is consistently and/or considerably tardy, it is considered excessive and could lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Employees will not be provided days off without pay for vacation time. Extended illnesses and other extenuating circumstances that cause an employee to exceed their allotted Vacation and Sick/Personal days will be addressed on an individual basis.

BUSINESS HOURS

Both *The Coast Star* and *The Ocean Star* offices are open to customers Monday through Friday, 9a.m. to 5p.m.

LUNCH BREAKS

During the normal 8-hour workday employees are entitled to a 20-minute paid meal break.

JURY DUTY

Employees will be allowed any necessary time off mandated by jury duty. Coast Star, Inc. will pay the full-time employee a half-day's pay of their full salary for no more than three days. Subsequent days of jury duty will be unpaid. Part-time employees will not be paid for time missed due to jury duty.

Employees may work and make up the 4 hours of the remaining half-day, if they so desire, by arranging a schedule with their supervisor. Employees must present a copy of the Jury Summons to their supervisor.

INCLEMENT WEATHER DAYS

Due to the production-oriented nature of our business, we do not close due to inclement weather, such as snowstorms, nor'easters, hurricanes, etc. If a snowstorm (or other inclement weather) has occurred overnight and you are unable to make it into the office, please contact your supervisor immediately. If transportation cannot be arranged for you to attend that workday, one Vacation or Sick/Personal day will be deducted from your bank of Vacation and Sick/Personal days. If the employee has no Vacation or Sick/Personal days available, the day will be unpaid.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

Upon request, employees will be granted bereavement leave with pay due to a death in their immediate family.

Although it is difficult to quantify needs at a time of loss, paid bereavement leave is intended to provide sufficient time, within reasonable guidelines, for an employee to attend a funeral or memorial service and mourn their loss.

The bereavement policy of Coast Star, Inc. offers paid time off under the following guidelines:

For the loss of an employee's spouse or child, the employee will be granted up to 5 days of paid bereavement leave.

For the loss of an employee's mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law or sibling, the employee will be granted up to 3 days of paid bereavement leave.

Additional time beyond these allotted days will be charged to accrued Vacation or Sick/Personal days and must be approved by management.

Bereavement days for those relationships other than specifically defined above will be charged to accrued vacation or sick/personal days.

6. ETHICS AND PERSONAL CONDUCT

DRESS CODE POLICY

Coast Star, Inc. maintains a business casual, yet professional, working environment. Because we frequently encounter customers and contacts and because the quality of those interactions impacts how our customers feel about our organization, we expect our team to dress appropriately. Employees are expected to use good judgment when deciding whether the attire they wear to work is appropriate for professional interactions.

For example, a collared shirt and full-length trousers is preferred for men. Jeans are acceptable when customer contact is minimal. A dress or a blouse and full-length trousers or skirt is preferred for women. Jeans are acceptable when customer contact is minimal.

The following items are considered unacceptable in a business casual working environment: shorts, tank tops, t-shirts, athletic clothing, belly shirts, baseball hats, mini skirts, torn or ripped jeans.

Dress shorts are acceptable for those employees who are required to work outdoors in the summer

months.

When an employee's dress does not comply with these standards, their supervisor will discuss the matter with the employee. If continued dress code violations should occur, the supervisor may initiate disciplinary action.

In addition, employees are expected to maintain proper hygiene techniques to ensure a comfortable working environment for their co-workers, as well as with vendors and customers.

CUSTOMER CONTACT

Please be professional and courteous when speaking with customers. Remember that you represent the company, whether you are attending a meeting, conducting an interview, taking a photo, writing a letter or answering a phone call. Specifically, as staff members of an information organization, staff members should strive to be an information source to all customers seeking information about the newspaper services or information about our coverage area.

OFFICE CONDUCT

Every staff member should treat each other with respect and professional courtesy at all times.

HARASSMENT

Coast Star, Inc. is dedicated to the maintenance of a professional work environment. Harassment of any present or potential employee by another employee, a customer or vendor, is unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated.

Harassment includes, but is not limited to, verbal or physical conduct relating to any individuals race, creed, color, national origin, religion, ancestry, age, medical disability, marital status, affectional or sexual orientation, familial status, veteran status or gender.

"Sexual harassment" includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, unwelcome or offensive touching, and other verbal, graphic, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This type of conduct rises to the level of unlawful sexual harassment when: 1) submission to the conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; 2) submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions; or 3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work performance creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

No employee shall threaten another employee with adverse treatment or promise preferential treatment on the basis of a refusal or consent to engage in sexual conduct. Nor shall any employee engage in verbal or physical conduct that contributes to an offensive or hostile work environment whether based on unwelcome sexual remarks or advances or racial, ethnic, or religious remarks.

If any employee feels another employee, customer or vendor is harassing them in any way; they should immediately see the Publisher.

All complaints of harassment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated and, where appropriate, disciplinary action will be taken. To the extent possible under the circumstances, complaints of harassment will be investigated and resolved confidentially. False harassment claims are also categorized as a violation to this harassment policy and will be dealt with under the same disciplinary guidelines.

SAFETY POLICY

Coast Star, Inc. is sincerely interested in the safety and well being of our employees. Every effort will be made to keep the office equipment in excellent condition and make sure that all safety devices are working properly.

ACCIDENTS

If an employee has an accident or becomes ill on the job, it should be reported to their manager immediately. They will see that prompt medical attention is provided. This includes car accidents, in your personal vehicle or in a company vehicle, damage to company equipment or any personal injury to yourself or to others.

COMPUTER AND TELEPHONE USAGE POLICY

Employees should limit their personal use of the telephone and computer during office hours. Because Coast Star, Inc. provides telephone and e-mail systems at its expense for business use, all messages sent by or received on those systems are company documents and may be subject to review by management. Employees who abuse this policy are subject to disciplinary procedures up to and including termination.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY

The misuse of drugs and alcohol impairs employee health and productivity. Drug and alcohol problems result in unsafe working conditions for all employees and customers. Coast Star, Inc. is committed to maintaining a productive, safe, and healthy work environment, free of illegal drug and alcohol use.

Any employee involved in the unlawful use, sale, manufacturing, dispensing or possession of controlled substances, illicit drugs and alcohol on Company premises or work sites, or working under the influence of such substances, will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal and referral for prosecution.

SMOKING POLICY

The Company maintains a non-smoking policy within the office. Employees should smoke only in designated areas on the outside of the building.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Employees who are considering a second job should consult their supervisors to determine if a conflict of interest may arise. For example, positions with other newspapers, media outlets, etc. may cause a conflict of interest for the employee and will require the supervisor and/or the publisher's approval.

GIFTS, GRATUITIES, ETC.

To guard against a belief that donors of gifts, trips, gratuities or other favors receive preferential treatment in their relations with the company, all employees should decline such favors with the explanation that acceptance is contrary to company policy. If a doubt arises because of the circumstances, please consult with your supervisor who will determine if acceptance would expose the office or the employee to misunderstanding or embarrassment.

EMPLOYEE USE OF STARNEWSGROUP.COM

Employees of Star News Group are prohibited from commenting on articles or public forums on Starnewsgroup.com. Both anonymous posts and posts including the employee's name are prohibited. Violation of this policy is grounds for dismissal.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

There is a variety of information you might handle that seems routine, but might be proprietary. Technical know-how, business plans, telephone numbers, computer passwords or access codes, customer lists, advertiser information, customer credit card numbers, personal information about employees and other proprietary information can, if disclosed, negatively impact our competitive position. Employees are strictly prohibited from copying and/or removing confidential or proprietary information from our offices during their employment with Star News Group, as well as, after separation from Star News Group.

It is essential that employees exercise prudence and good judgment in handling confidential information. These guidelines can help:

- Restrict the distribution of confidential information to only those within the company who have a legitimate use for it.
- Confidential information can be provided to the public only by authorized company management.
- Important documents must be marked and given special handling.
- Any documents that contain sensitive information, such as customer credit card numbers, should be disposed of by shredding.
- Maintain the privacy of computer access codes and passwords.
- Protect computer data and documents in your possession.
- Sensitive material must be filed in locked cabinets or other secure areas.

7. APPRAISALS AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

EMPLOYEE APPRAISALS

Employee Appraisals are typically performed one time per year by each employee's supervisor. An employee can request an appraisal at any time, as well. The purpose of these appraisals is to monitor an employee's work performance over a specified time period, establish goals and objectives for the future and to keep the lines of communication open between supervisors and employees.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

Any dissatisfaction in an employee's work performance that is not addressed at an Employee Appraisal may be discussed in a Disciplinary Meeting with their supervisor. The purpose of a Disciplinary Meeting is to immediately bring any work performance issues to the employee's attention and discuss goals and objectives to remedy the situation.

The discussion at the Disciplinary Meeting will be noted in the employee's personnel file. If the work performance problem is not remedied, the employee will incur a second Disciplinary Meeting and/or further consequences for their actions, including termination.

Infractions of Company Policies are grounds for immediate termination and, as an at-will employee, Coast Star, Inc. may terminate your employment at any time, and you may do the same.