

AURAS EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK



**Everything You
Need to Know
to Work Well at
AURAS Design**

CONTENTS

1 Why?

2 Studio Philosophy

STUDIO PROCEDURES

4 Expectations

5 Studio Operating Procedures

8 Working With Your Tools

12 Working With Clients Dos & Don'ts

14 Working With Vendors Dos & Don'ts

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

18 Employee Classifications

19 What Makes Employees Successful

20 Employee Conduct

24 Business Standards and Practices

26 Employee Benefits

Why This Handbook

To make your employment with AURAS as enjoyable and rewarding as possible, it is important that you understand the benefits you can expect from us and the policies that guide our company. In addition, this handbook is a guide that should be used to understand the procedures and structures of workflow in our studio. Personal and professional success at AURAS can be evaluated based on the adherence to the spirit and the intent of the procedures and philosophies outlined in this handbook. Your personal integrity and talent will always be the determining factor for the impact you can make on the organization, but those assets will be amplified by your enthusiasm for “getting with the program.” *This* is the program.

It applies equally to all AURAS employees, who collectively comprise the AURAS “team.” The policies set forth provide one of the most tangible means through which AURAS puts its mission and vision into practice. These guidelines provide for consistent application of our personnel policies and encourage the application of these policies in ways that convey a caring attitude and mutual respect between all employees.

This is a summary of our personnel policies and practices as they currently exist, and it replaces any prior benefits and policies statements, written or otherwise. While this statement is comprehensive, it should not be considered a total and complete statement of all AURAS policies. The policies contained herein are not intended to be contractual in nature or serve either implicitly or explicitly as a guarantee of employment with AURAS. AURAS reserves the right to amend, suspend or change for any reason the policies contained herein.

Comments and suggestions from staff with respect to the clarity and comprehensiveness of the information in this statement are always welcome.

AURAS is committed to providing equal opportunity to all qualified employees without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or status as a military veteran. All personnel decisions, including hiring, promotions and compensation will be made without regard to these factors. If you ever believe you have been the victim of discrimination, we urge you to share this information with the AURAS principals. AURAS advertises job openings through newspapers, professional organization publications and online resources.

Suggestions concerning ways in which we can publicize job openings to the widest possible audience are welcome. We also encourage our employees to notify anyone they feel would be a positive addition to our staff about relevant job openings.

Studio Philosophy

AURAS Design is a multi-disciplinary design studio. This means that we undertake a variety of projects—magazine design, corporate identity, marketing and promotional design in various media. Even though we do a variety of work, there IS an underlying philosophy that gives direction to all our projects, and helps people who work for AURAS understand what is expected of them. This philosophy is about how our designers tackle projects and work with clients. It's about how we prepare documents and how we work together as a studio.

The easiest understanding of AURAS philosophy is that we are in the business of creating compelling vehicles for the communication needs of our clients, and having a fun time doing it. Ideas, impressions, emotions, as well as the degree to which these things are remembered and understood fully are all components of the story we are trying to tell for our clients. And it is ALWAYS the client's story. It's not about US; it's about what works best for our client.

What gets delivered is a result of many skill sets—conceptual creativity, knowledge of printing (or other media) techniques, typography, image manipulation, digital document creation, prepress preparations, project management, and client rapport. A single project may succeed without performing well in all of these areas, but maintaining a successful client relationship demands that we do our best in ALL of these areas.

STUDIO PROCEDURES



We have high expectations for employees at AURAS.

Working at AURAS, employees are expected to:

- ▶ Have professional work habits and take responsibility for daily scheduling, project deadlines and client communications.
- ▶ Collaborate with their colleagues in positive and considered critical interaction, taking the initiative to solicit comments and encouraging discussion about their projects in both informal and structured situations.
- ▶ Follow procedures in the studio for job tracking, billing, scanning submissions, etc. and perform these processes in a timely, considerate manner.
- ▶ Review periodicals, publications, vendor promotions, and studio projects on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ Learn as much as possible about using and maintaining their computer, and resolving technical problems in an on-going effort to keep their equipment running at best performance.
- ▶ Improve their fluency in programs they use everyday and develop new skill sets in other programs on a regular basis.
- ▶ Learn to use all the equipment in the studio: scanners, printers, phones and fax, and know where everything is stored.

When working with clients, designers are expected to:

- ▶ Create designs that enhance the message of the client in terms of legibility, style, emotions and retention.
- ▶ Be articulate about design concepts, including the relative merits of different designs. Always seek ways of extending the value of the work through innovative printing techniques, alternative product approaches or different editorial concepts.
- ▶ Create materials that can be produced within the budget requirements of the client, and maintain accountability for costs.
- ▶ Maintain an on-going rapport with clients, replying to client queries quickly, and acting proactively to inform clients about their project.

Studio Operating Procedures

Hours of Operations

The studio is officially open from 8 AM until 6 PM. Employees select an 8-hour-plus-lunch (usually one hour) time period within the working day. During the core hours of the studio, 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, everyone is expected to be in the studio unless special arrangements have been made.

Traffic can be murder, and it's easy to understand that sometimes people arrive a few minutes later than their usual arrival time. Doing so consistently, however, is a real issue since it undermines the autonomy and trust we like to accord our employees.

The Studio

Unlike many offices, AURAS has a very open workplan. You will be working amid other designers and production people, and even sharing a certain amount of workspace with your neighbors. The big open space can feel inspiring and refreshing, but it can also make you feel vulnerable and distracted. Being able to work successfully in this environment is an important requirement of your job. Some people are incapable of being productive in this environment, but we have always felt that the advantages outweigh the problems.

AURAS strives for the feeling of a convivial peer environment. We believe an open workplan facilitates this, but like any asset, it needs to be understood and utilized so people receive maximum benefit. Working in this environment mandates accepting the value of community and trusting your fellow workers to respect your opinion and your space, and at the same time, allowing access to their opinions and demanding their honest evaluation of your work.

Making the most of a group situation demands being an active participant in trying to make the group work. Working together informally, asking for help in technical and design matters, trying ideas out on people in the studio are all positive ways of encouraging group involvement. We try to stimulate group involvement by sharing our music, having meals together occasionally, and having group production meetings so everyone knows what is going on at work.

Lock Up

The studio is locked up around 5:30, or is locked by the last person in the shop. These things should be done to close the studio: make sure the rear stair door is locked, the doors to the conference room and the main door to the studio are locked, and the elevator is locked-out for the third floor.

To lock the elevator button, use the elevator key located in the top left drawer of the receptionist's desk, and turn the key above the third floor button to "off."

The main door in the lobby should be locked before that last person leaves. For example, if you notice that there are only a few people left in the studio when you leave, lock the lobby door as you go to keep them more secure. The lobby door should also be checked (that is, jiggled to make sure it has engaged) when you lock the door.

The last person who leaves the studio should check that everything is already locked, and should turn off the studio lights using the “OFF” button next to the front door. Fans should be left running, and it’s OK to leave the stereo powered up.

Dress

Dress at AURAS is usually comfortable casual. While we hope that an employee’s sense of professionalism would encourage dress that is traditionally considered “office casual,” we are probably more liberal in our acceptance factor than most offices. But we DO have some limits.

While it’s impossible to be specific, avoid dressing like it’s either Sunday morning at home or Saturday night at a hip-hop club. Almost everything else in between works.

Using the Internet

AURAS Design has a high-speed Internet connection. There is no restriction on surfing the Internet, and exploration and sharing interesting and unusual discoveries is encouraged. You are expected to use discretion and maturity when surfing, however, and any materials that might be offensive or alarming should be avoided.

There are several caveats when using the Internet. You may not use any form of Instant Messaging on your machines, or participate in chat rooms. Any recreational real-time interaction is discouraged (and yes, this includes bidding on items in auction sites such as e-bay).

While there are no restrictions on using your AURAS e-mail account, please don’t use it as your personal e-mail address. Be aware that e-mails on your computer are not private, and although employees are expected to respect each other’s privacy, there are no guarantees or rights in respect to your use of the e-mail account at AURAS. If you don’t want someone to see an e-mail, delete it.

Phones

Every employee at AURAS should have their own phone extension and voicemail account. Employees are responsible for learning to use the phone system to set up and use voicemail, as well as simple operations like conferencing or transferring calls.

The voicemail accounts at AURAS are not private, and should not be protected. Since there might be situations where it is necessary to listen to your voicemails without your consent, assume that any messages on your voicemail might be heard by anyone. Please delete any voicemails as soon as you have listened to them.

Eating and Food

AURAS tries to keep the kitchen stocked with snacks and drinks. If you bring food for yourself, please mark the packaging with your name. Try not to keep food stored in your work area. There are no restrictions about eating and working, except that simple rules of cleanliness and courtesy apply. At the end of the workday, please clear your work area of all food, plates, glasses and utensils.

The kitchen at AURAS is supplied with all the equipment you need to prepare and serve simple dishes. Keeping the kitchen clean and neat is EVERYONE's responsibility. Place dirty dishes and glasses IN the dishwasher, not just in the sink. The last person in the studio isn't expected to clean up everyone else's dirty dishes, so anytime the dishwasher is full or running, hand-wash your own dishes and put them in the dish drainer so the last person in the shop won't have to deal with a full sink.

It's not asking too much to make an effort to keep the kitchen clean by wiping down the counter, moving trash and recyclables to their respective bins, and not allowing trash to overflow. **Treat the kitchen like your mother would want your own kitchen kept, and everybody will be happy.**

Smoking

The AURAS Building is a smoke-free environment, and it is actually illegal to smoke in the building. Smoke is particularly bad for the electronic equipment, so smoking is banned in the workspace. Employees who must smoke need to do so outside. Avoid littering the front of the building with detritus.

Music

Using headphones during the workday is discouraged, but that doesn't mean that we don't like music. AURAS has transferred its entire music library into MP3 format on a server. Individuals are invited to bring their favorite CDs for inclusion into the server. Individuals program the playlists on the server so that everyone can share the same experience listening to music. Since everyone has different tastes and sometimes quiet is preferred, no one should program the playlists twice in a row, and sets should be kept to 90 minutes. Some music, such as heavy metal or rap, is less appropriate during the workday. Anyone who is particularly bugged at a song can "nope" it and move to the next selection on the playlist.

Supplies

There should always be at least one stocked item in reserve for studio supplies. It is the responsibility of the person who uses the stocked supply item to inform the studio manager to reorder supplies.

Working With Your Tools

Your Workstation

Your workstation should have a chair, computer, monitor, phone, APS power supply, two cabinets and enough workspace to spread out. Additional lighting, storage and office supplies are available upon request. We want everyone to be as comfortable and productive as possible, so any aspect of your work area that you want to improve can be addressed. We are especially concerned with worker ergonomic comfort. If your chair is causing physical problems, we will replace it with a more suitable product. We provide a trackball instead of a mouse and recommend using it instead, since it is less prone to causing repetitive stress injuries. Your experiences in other environments and personal taste can be a useful asset to the studio. We welcome suggestions that will improve the work environment for everyone.

It is your responsibility to keep your work area neat and organized, or at the very least not looking like a tornado has hit your particular space. At the end of every work day, please clear plates or glasses to the kitchen (where you'll put them in the dishwasher), throw away any trash, replace any resource materials (such as stock CDs) if you are finished with them, organize the remainder into piles by job so somebody can find something at your desk if they need to. It is recommended that everyone have a file sorter in their work area so they can organize their work into folders and store them in an appropriate manner. Everyone should have a file taboret for this purpose, but you can order a desktop file holder also

AURAS Forms

Unlike many studios, employees at AURAS are not required to keep hourly time sheets. The main document for tracking jobs is the AURAS **Project Worksheet**, which an employee should use to record all the billable functions of each job. The Project Worksheet is the document used to create the client billing, so the more accurate and complete the form, the more accurate and complete the bill. Although most jobs at AURAS are billed at a piece rate, recording your time is critical for assessing the productivity of your work and the profitability of the job. These figures are used in developing budgets for job quotations and evaluating the value of the employee, so tracking your time on a job is an important function of the worksheet, even though the hourly rates are usually only used to price inhouse art billing. Hours spent creating charts, graphs, illustrations and photo-manipulation should be clearly marked in the time sheet.

If more than one person works on a job, each person should have their individual hours listed on the worksheet. The Project Worksheet document exists as a PDF file that can be filled out. Keep a copy of the blank document handy and after filling it out and printing it, save the document as the project name and keep it on file.

AURAS has forms saved as electronic files that are used to bid jobs to vendors. The **Print Specs** file is a Quark document that can be filled out and faxed to printers for quotes. ALWAYS get a quote in writing from a printer (email, PDFs, or even Excel files are OK too.)

When requesting **FPO** or **hirez scans** use the appropriate forms. It is critical to track these scans because they are billable a la carte to clients, and provide confirmation as to the workflow for the scanning production people. Even when you scan FPOs or hirez images yourself, those scans should be entered onto the forms. Ultimately, the information will be transferred to the Jobsheet.

When submitting documents for billing, all of the forms should be collected together, with the Jobsheet on top. A thumbnail copy of the project should also accompany the documents, marked to indicate billable-per-page items such as Photoshop manipulation, silhouettes, charts or graphs and in-house art and stock art.

Using Your Computers

The computers at AURAS are updated with the latest software. Learning to use all the bells and whistles on your machine is your responsibility, but other more experienced employees should be available to help train newer users. When needed, we can conduct group training on aspects of using the computers or specific programs.

Your computer, all the data on it, and all of the equipment connected to it belong to AURAS. There should never be areas set up on your computer that restricts access to data or use of your machine. Expect that anyone might sit at your station and use the machine without your knowledge. While we encourage employees to respect the personal privacy of any individual's workstation, it is neither guaranteed nor anybody's right. Don't put anything on your machine that you don't want people to see.

Computers should be left turned on. The screens should be set to sleep at least within 15 minutes (this is set in the Energy Saver Control Panel). Customizing your computer is discouraged. Please use the System that is set up on your computer. You should run Onyx on your computer once a week.

NEVER put programs or fonts onto your computers without consulting the Rob first. All fonts in the studio must be available to everyone on all machines, and programs or system alterations might create incompatibilities with already installed stuff.

If you experience problems with your computer or working with programs, inform the studio manager immediately, since most problems can be resolved quickly by more experienced operators.

Data Redundancy

QuarkXPress should be set to make a single backup document to a designated back-up folder and should make an interim save every 10 minutes. InDesign is usually bulletproof. You should *always* back up your data onto a server folder at the end of the workday, AND keep a folder with all the ancillary files on your own machine. Keeping the latest document on the server will allow other designers to access the most recent version of the file, and this insures you against losing your data since you will have THREE backup resources in the event of a catastrophic loss.

Using the Server

Protecting our data is vitally important. The server volumes are an integral part of the backup and archival strategies. There is adequate space on the server volumes for at least three months of the studio's work, but as a rule, files should be archived on CDs or DVDs and removed from the server in these instances: 1) A large collateral project that is completed should be archived, but any useful pieces of art or libraries should be left in the client's folder; 2) Magazines should be archived after the next issue is finished. There should always be the current and previous issue of a magazine on the server; and 3) Small projects should be periodically archived at the convenience of the designer who worked on the jobs.

The server also contains a current system, back-ups of useful programs, and a complete collection of archived fonts. These files are to be used for restoring things on your local drive, so programs should not be launched from the server or fonts acquired from the master sets even if they are only for short-term use. Always copy files to your local drive before using.

The server has a section of folders for each employee. The folders are to be used to hold temporary materials and personal files. They should not take up more than three gigs of space on the server. Keep your personal folders cleaned out.

Archiving

Projects that are complete should be removed from the server and archived onto CDs, which are then placed into appropriate books. Archiving projects is the responsibility of the person who runs the job (usually the one using the job worksheet and filling out the billing). Each computer is equipped with a CD/DVD burner, but you may also move material to the ARCHIVE folder located on each server volume so it can be archived and burned remotely. (BUT the person running the job is STILL responsible for making certain the job is archived, even if you don't burn the disk yourself.)

Magazines are archived by collecting the job and using the collected folder for archive. Older versions of the document (older page proofs, etc) should be discarded, as well as FPO images and rough art for making maps or charts. Collateral projects should be archived completely, including any comps that went unused, or art that was created but not used. The designer running the job should judiciously cull the material for redundant files before archiving however.

AURAS FTP Site

AURAS maintains an FTP site for use by clients and employees. The site is totally unsecured for the convenience of file transfer. The site is to be used for short-term transfer of files, not backing up data or holding data from off-site projects.

Working With Clients — Do's and Don'ts

DO

- ▶ **Get to know your clients on a personal level.** This instills trust and makes communication easier.
- ▶ **REALLY PAY ATTENTION to what a client says or writes on a proof.** Don't just blow off comments that seem ridiculous. Have a conversation about every detail and try to resolve or clarify comments instead of ignoring them or assuming the client "can't really mean" what they have asked for. If the client seems hesitant to compromise in conversation, make the suggested change AND show a better alternative.
- ▶ **Be ENTHUSIASTIC about the project and the content of the project.** Be excited about your solutions and articulate about the reasons why.
- ▶ **Be clear about SCOPE.** Confirm in conversation and when delivering work that you have done what you said you would do and that you have delivered it when you said you would.
- ▶ **CONFIRM schedules, deliveries and process milestones by using email.** TRACK the job for the client and constantly remind the client how things are going. When they send something, email a confirmation that you have received a package, when you send something, tell them it is coming. Using email gives us a record of our interactions with a client and can pinpoint who-did-what if problems occur.
- ▶ **Communicate DAILY with clients when working actively on their job, regardless of whether there is news or not.**
- ▶ **Reply to voicemail messages immediately and email messages within an hour of receiving them, even if they are asking questions that need research.** It is better to reply, "I'll have to check on that, I'll get back to you as soon as I know something," than waiting until you have an answer.
- ▶ **Take responsibility for mistakes.** A simple apology and a promise to make it right (and then making it right) go further in maintaining a relationship than trying to prove it wasn't really your fault.
- ▶ **Follow up on finished jobs.** After a job is delivered, make sure the client is happy. Conduct a post-job interview or send an evaluation email. Make sure everyone is happy, and there are no lingering issues to cloud the next working experience.

DON'T

- ▶ **Don't make the client emotionally unhappy.** That means: don't yell at them, don't be argumentative (even if you are SURE you are right), don't be sarcastic, don't sound condescending (!) and above all, don't assign blame, ever (unless you are assigning it to yourself). Remember that our clients choose to work with us. Why would they choose to work with someone who makes them unhappy?
- ▶ **Don't complain to the client about your workload.** They are your only client when you are talking to them, and managing work in the studio is not their concern. If you are unhappy at the way the work is distributed at AURAS, or feel undervalued, not only isn't it the client's business, but it undermines their confidence in the studio.
- ▶ **Don't avoid telling the client bad news about schedules or budgets.** The sooner you deal with them about difficult issues the better. Soften the blow as much as possible.
- ▶ **Don't get in over your head.** If you feel that the client is asking unreasonable things from you (too demanding, or for work out of scope) or has become frustrated with your interaction, get help right away. Get the studio manager or senior staff to intervene and smooth things over. Think of these situations as learning experiences, not failures.
- ▶ **Don't work with clients you can't handle.**

Vendor Do's and Don'ts

DO

- ▶ **Confirm prices and specs in writing**, using an AURAS spec form if possible.
- ▶ **Tie all quotes to schedules**, to make sure the vendor understands the turn-around.
- ▶ **Get contact names**, numbers and email of salesmen, QC people and managers.
- ▶ **Mark proofs clearly**—mark EVERY possible error—and in the case of multiple corrections, make a list.
- ▶ **Confirm turn-around** on proofs to keep schedule.
- ▶ **Follow up jobs with a post-mortem** of issues and/or compliments.

DON'T

- ▶ **Don't make verbal changes** without written confirmation (or at least an email record).
- ▶ **Don't blame a vendor for mistakes** until the job is finished. We need their cooperation until our client is satisfied, and after that we can sort out who is at fault for mistakes.
- ▶ **Don't use a new vendor** for a critical-time or critical-quality job.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION



Employee Classifications

All AURAS staff members are *at-will employees*. This means that employees can be dismissed at any time for any reason or no reason and that employees can leave at any time for any reason or no reason. No one at AURAS has the authority to promise you that you will be employed for a particular or indefinite period of time except the principal, and then **only in writing**. If you feel that you have been promised employment for a particular period of time or can be fired only for good cause, please contact the principal.

When you are hired at AURAS you will be notified of your classification according to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Hourly employees (termed “non-exempt”) are entitled to time-and-a-half overtime pay for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in any one week. Salaried employees are exempt from the FLSA and are not entitled to overtime pay. Executives, creative directors, art directors, designers, operations coordinators, production managers, sales representatives and marketing personnel are salaried positions. Hourly employees include office managers, clerks, technicians or service people. These classifications entitle an employee to overtime pay regardless of whether they receive a paycheck calculated for hours worked each week or annual salary. An hourly employee should not work overtime without direct instructions to do so.

Classifications

Full-time Non-Exempt Employee Works the full schedule of her/his position (usually 40 hours per week) and is paid for the number of hours worked in a pay period. A full-time employee will be granted holidays and will earn personal leave based on number of years of continuous service.

Part-time Employee Works less than 40 hours per week and is paid for the number of hours worked. Part-time employees working will receive a pro-rated amount of holiday and personal leave based on number of hours worked per week compared to 40 hours.

Salaried Employee Works the full schedule of her/his position (usually 40 hours per week). There is a fixed compensation paid for services. The benefits for a salaried employee are the same as a full-time employee.

Entry-level Employee Hired with less than two years prior experience in her/his job field.

Mid-level Employee Has more than three years prior job experience in their field

Senior-level Employee Has more than five years experience in their field.

What Makes Employees Successful

At AURAS we believe these three values make the studio thrive:

1) Perform superior work that is informed by content, budget, education and talent.

2) Strive to work with clients in a process that everyone finds enjoyable, positive and rewarding.

3) Continually improve our skills, our ability to be articulate about our work, and our self-critical eye by working respectfully with our peers as colleagues and friends.

Using these three value statements as a guide, an employee at AURAS is responsible:

To The Studio

- ▶ Maintain good working relationships with everyone.
- ▶ Keep the Studio Manager informed on their work progress.
- ▶ Completely fill out all forms in a timely manner.
- ▶ Share information and skills with others in the studio.
- ▶ Contribute opinions and critiques in group sessions or individually.
- ▶ Maintain their workspace and their files.
- ▶ Endeavor to improve the morale in the studio through participation, suggestion and invention.

To The Product

- ▶ Create materials that support the content and enhance the message with a distinct style that is in harmony with the client's identity.
- ▶ Provide multiple solutions to design problems.
- ▶ Explain design products and process in clear, non-biased language
- ▶ Work in group situations to provide creative input, positive comments and maximum synergy.
- ▶ Produce work on schedule.
- ▶ Create clean, high-quality documents.
- ▶ Work with other studio members and vendors to insure that the final product is faultless.

To The Client

- ▶ Maintain friendly rapport and generous patience by continuous interaction throughout a project. Run their project. You are responsible for the schedule of your job in agreement with the client.
- ▶ Keep the client informed of all out-of-scope expenses before they are made.
- ▶ Reply immediately to client queries.
- ▶ Respond to client suggestions through example. Then provide your preferred solution as an alternative.
- ▶ Create closure. Follow up on completed projects and make sure the client is satisfied.

These responsibilities are all necessary attributes to the success of the studio as a whole; therefore they contribute equally to the evaluation of each employee's value to AURAS.

Employee Conduct

Maybe work isn't like a family, but treating fellow employees with personal consideration, respect and a degree of interest is still valuable to the studio as a business. So is treating your connection to the studio with a sense of personal ownership that demands loyalty, sacrifice and interest in the cause of advancing the success of the studio. Employees should behave in professional public situations mindful that they represent the studio and its interests.

AURAS encourages these areas of conduct:

Responsibility At AURAS, we believe responsibility deserves privilege. Being responsible means taking charge of your projects, maintaining their schedules, keeping communication fluid among all the people working on a job, paying attention to the details, and constantly trying to make the final product better. Responsibility means putting your skills at the service of the message and the client, while still maintaining the procedures of the studio and caring for the budget of the job.

Great designers at AURAS are not only creative, but they are also productive and profitable. They are careful listeners and “play well” with their clients, maintaining a good rapport and dealing with issues before they become problems.

Taking responsibility for the job means taking responsibility for the WHOLE job. The quality of the document is as important as the appropriateness of the job, and no project is successful if it isn't delivered on time.

Rapport Working in a studio demands more than design. Group interaction at both informal and official levels is critical to the morale of the studio and the quality of the work we produce. Employees have an obligation to work together and a mandate to play together. Promoting inter-studio rapport both professionally and socially is an important part of your job.

Working with clients is also about rapport. Unlike some studios, where the designer is shielded from the clients through layers of organization, at AURAS the designers work directly with clients. Clients should be treated with respect, entertained with enthusiasm and presented with the best creative ideas that an employee has to offer. The level of trust and confidence that is built with a client pays off in the ease with which interesting but daring ideas may be accepted.

Generosity Although mindful of budgets, employees of AURAS are shielded from the time clock as much as possible. In exchange, we want designers to take the time to do their jobs right. Exploring interesting ideas, or honing a document to perfection is only part of the process. Designers should actively seek out the critiques and opinions of their fellow employees, and use the other members of

the studio as resources for skills and talents that can improve their work. In turn, employees should be available to be used in the same fashion. Self-critique and informal reviews are much more effective in the long run for a studio than hamfisted creative direction from above.

Sociality Working at AURAS should be a rewarding experience. To a great extent, the quality of everyday work is enhanced by social relationships built among the community of people who work at—and with—AURAS. The studio officially attempts to promote a good social environment by celebrating birthdays and holidays, by encouraging employees to become part of professional groups, and by making attempts at fun extra-curricular activities.

A great work experience is still mostly dependent on individuals working together in a cooperative and trust-filled environment. Having fun at work is a high priority at AURAS, and employees who help make the experience enjoyable and rewarding contribute beyond their professional skills.

Loyalty While employees work for AURAS they are expected to be looking out for the studio. New job opportunities, keeping internal conflicts internal, promoting the studio to potential new resources such as new vendors or new employees, are all ways that an employee is loyal to the studio.

AURAS strives to be as open about its process and product as possible, but employees should still use discretion when discussing the studio business with outsiders. At the same time, feel free to pump others for valuable information.

AURAS discourages these areas of conduct:

Inattention At AURAS the most valuable skill is learning how to listen. Paying attention and clarifying areas of confusion leads to a better product with fewer mistakes. Yet, many people, through hubris or impatience, won't take the time to really understand the criteria for a task. Some designers even take pride in NOT reading the content of material that they design. In a studio that prides itself on effectively communicating a client's message, hearing that message is the most critical part of a job.

Crankiness Sure, everyone has problems, but at work we should strive to get along. "Playing well with others" is an important attribute in creating a productive work environment.

Stubbornness Working together also means helping each other solve problems. There is nothing wrong with making a mistake, but wasting time trying to fix something yourself is often unproductive. It's no sin to learn new skills from other people in the studio, and trying to bluff your way through complicated work only leads to mistakes.

Exclusiveness Everybody likes to get credit for the work they do, but at AURAS we encourage an open sharing of design ideas and a willingness to let others build onto your concepts. Our goal is always to create the best product, and present the clearest set of alternatives to our clients.

Over-competitiveness We like employees to compete with one another in the spirit of creating the most viable product, but when competitiveness leads to valuing your own ideas over the work of others, or trying to aggressively promote your ideas in groups, it stops being about the product and more about winning.

AURAS finds these are areas of employee conduct intolerable:

Harassment Everyone at AURAS has the right to a friendly work environment. AURAS will not tolerate abuse for any reason. Conversely, anyone who feels uncomfortable at work for any reason has an obligation to inform the studio manager.

We all must be sensitive to the fact that what one person sees as innocent conduct may, under the law, constitute harassment. Therefore, please be careful to avoid any behavior that might make another person uncomfortable. We consider any intentional harassment to be a major violation of company policy, and it will be dealt with seriously through counseling, suspension or termination depending upon the severity of the violation. We will investigate all charges as quickly and as confidentially as possible. Your privacy will be respected at all times consistent with our obligation to conduct a fair and thorough investigation. All employees will be expected to cooperate with such an investigation. Under no circumstances will there be any retaliation for making a complaint.

Race and religious intolerance We encourage you to be sensitive to the racial and religious differences of coworkers. Using words or telling jokes that belittle or intimidate a member of a specific race or religion or making fun of religious practices of ethnic customs is unacceptable behavior.

Self-abuse Employees should come to work prepared to jump into their daily jobs. AURAS policy is that employee's private life is just that—private. But when private life spills over into work life, that is a consideration for the studio. Drug use of all kinds—including alcohol—which results in a noticeable loss of productivity or decorum, is a cause of immediate termination.

Malingering Employees at AURAS are expected to give their 110%. As a small studio, it is discouraging to see employees who are slacking off and abusing their privilege of autonomy. While there are no set rules on breaks or pacing the workday, it becomes fairly obvious when employees are not pulling their own weight in the studio.

When work levels are low, it is the individual employee's obligation to the studio to find ways of making oneself useful. Tackling educational projects such as learning new software, housekeeping projects such as organizing the library, or working on promotional projects are all good alternatives to twiddling your thumbs or surfing the Internet.

Theft Stealing is not just bad business, it is illegal. Certainly, taking another employee's property is stealing, but there are less obvious forms of theft that are equally deleterious. The property of the studio is meant for use at the studio, and while a certain laxity of enforcement is always the policy at AURAS, office supplies are meant for the office. Equipment should never be removed from the premises without authorization from the studio's principals. Similarly, software of any form should not be copied and taken from the studio.

Theft of time and resources is still a form of theft. The resources of the studio are available to the employees for their job use, and their personal use—within reason. When an employee works on freelance projects at work they are in effect competing with the studio, stealing time, materials and focus from the business. While after-hours *pro bono* or small job “favors” are acceptable at work, any employees working on any jobs that are considered in conflict with the studio will be immediately dismissed. If you aren't sure what qualifies as a conflict, let the studio manager know what you are working on. If you are hesitant to do that, it's probably going to be a problem.

Freelance Work An employee's off hours are usually none of AURAS's business. If an employee wants to do freelance work in addition to working at the studio, there is nothing that AURAS can do to prevent it. But philosophically, we view this as the equivalent of serving two masters, and so we strongly discourage freelance work. When freelance projects invade the workday, or the focus of the employee, there is a clear issue. Freelance work can therefore lead to deceptions and dishonesty between the employee and the studio—undermining the level of personal autonomy that studio members should be accorded.

Business Standards And Practices

Ownership of Products Created Any product created while working for AURAS becomes the property of AURAS. This includes design concepts, preliminary and final art, copy writing and E-mail messages. AURAS may identify and use these items as ours even after you leave the company. All AURAS employees agree that any work created by our employees while working for AURAS is work-for-hire and the copyright of such work belongs to AURAS.

Confidentiality The economic well-being of our company is dependent upon protecting and maintaining proprietary information. The responsibility falls on all of us to safeguard sensitive company information. Where necessary, AURAS will educate employees about the proper handling and use of material that may consist of confidential information relating to clients, products, designs, drawings, marketing data, accounting, pricing or salary information, business plans and strategies, negotiations and contracts. Any employee who disregards this policy may be terminated.

Accommodating Special Needs AURAS will accommodate any employee's reasonable religious needs that will not cause undue hardship to the company. We ask all employees to be understanding when they are asked to make it possible for other employees to observe their religious practices. Although AURAS is not required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because of its size, we feel it is our responsibility to be open to candidates with disabilities.

To help with this effort, we may restructure a job or alter the work process if it does not affect the quality of work performed. It may mean altering a work schedule or asking for help from other employees.

Employee Evaluation New employees will be evaluated on a regular schedule. The first two evaluations, made at three days and then three weeks into new employment are confirmation evaluations. Employees may be dismissed if they fail to meet the expectations of AURAS either in department or skill level.

After three months employment, a third evaluation will be conducted to assess a new employee's strengths and weaknesses and work out criteria for improvement.

It is specifically an opportunity for new employees to assess their own value to the studio and voice any issues about their own work. After six months another evaluation will be made to determine how well new employees have improved since their initial employment.

This evaluation process for new employees may be more or less formal depending upon the individual employee and their particular issues working at AURAS. Thereafter, employees are evaluated informally or in formal evaluation periods depending upon the necessity in the studio. Evaluations are not necessarily tied to salary adjustments. It is AURAS policy never to make downward salary adjustments based upon evaluations.

Salary Salaries are reviewed once a year, usually at the beginning of AURAS's fiscal year, which begins March 1. Any salary change is determined by AURAS principals and is based on the billings created by the employee, their value as an asset to the studio, and the economic condition of the studio. There are no guaranteed pay raises, or set time period for raises. AURAS tries to pay employees a better-than-competitive salary for their work, and we feel strongly that each employee should be fairly compensated for the income they produce and their value to the studio as a whole.

Overtime There is no overtime pay at AURAS for salaried workers. Employees are encouraged to track their overtime and compensate for this extra work by scheduling compensating leave. Overtime is a necessary part of working in a service business, but by no means an expected part. Employees who find themselves continually working overtime will need to be evaluated. No one at AURAS should have to work overtime consistently based on their workload if they are competent at their jobs.

Bonuses Financial bonuses have never been a significant factor at AURAS. Occasionally, depending upon the success of the business during a given year, bonuses have been distributed as a token of appreciation for the performance of the studio as a whole.

Termination At AURAS there is no formal termination process. An employee may be excused at any time and for any reason, without explanation or recourse. Termination may be immediate, or may encompass a grace period. There is no set severance package, although some form of benefit is often made, depending upon the reason for dismissal. All work performed during employment at AURAS is the property of AURAS, and any private material removed from the studio is subject to review.

Employee Benefits

We like to think that working at AURAS should be reward enough, but there is more. The philosophy at AURAS is that responsible people deserve autonomy, and that valuable workers should be treated as important assets to the business and deserve to have their important needs met.

Long Term Benefits

Every full-time employee at AURAS is eligible for a **medical insurance plan** after 90 days at AURAS. The plan is a PPO—CareFirst, allowing you a wide choice of doctors. The insurance for the employee is fully paid by AURAS but other family members can be added to the plan with additional deductions taken pretax directly from salary. The plan also includes a small life insurance benefit.

AURAS Design also runs a **Cafeteria Plan**. This is a program that shelters an employee's pre-tax income for them to use during the year for medical or child care expenses that are not covered by insurance plans (for example, some forms of elected surgery, or the co-pay of a doctor visit or prescription). Employees choose the amount withheld, and have to use these withheld funds within the tax year, or risk losing them. The advantage of the program is that it allows employees to spend money on necessary expenses that would otherwise come out of their regular salary, from which taxes have already been deducted.

AURAS employees are covered by a **short- and long-term disability policy** through Ft. Dearborn Insurance.

After one year, AURAS employees are eligible to join the **AURAS Simple IRA** with T. Rowe Price. AURAS will match up to 3% of the employee's salary, and employees can choose to withhold additional funds up to the limit set by the IRS.

After one year at AURAS employees are enrolled in a small **life insurance policy**.

Working Benefits

A **monthly transportation stipend** is paid by AURAS for employees who take mass transit to and from work. Employees who drive to work have their **parking paid** for by AURAS. The parking stickers allow employees to use various county lots located near the studio.

AURAS Design encourages employees to extend their skills through formal education. The studio **subsidizes classes** that are beneficial to the needs of the studio. Employees interested in taking classes need to apply in advance for approval.

AURAS seeks the most pleasant and productive work environment for its employees. **The kitchen is stocked** with food for everyone's enjoyment, there is a shower available for people who exercise or bike to work, and the resources at AURAS are available for use by employees for personal projects. Employees are expected to use these privileges respectfully.

Work And Time Schedules

Every full-time employee is responsible for working a 40 hour week. The pay period is bi-weekly (two weeks in duration.) Payday is every other Friday for the two weeks ending at midnight on the previous Saturday. There are 26 paydays a year.

Flex Time Each full-time employee is responsible for working a total of 40 hours a week. These hours can be divided as you wish based on deadline schedules, personal preferences, and studio approval. AURAS may ask you to be on the job at a specific time and for a specific period when work demands special participation.

Overtime As required by law, an hourly employee will be paid her/his regular rate of pay for all hours worked up to 40 hours in a week, and one and one-half times their regular rate of pay for the time worked over 40 hours in a week. Holiday, personal or other non-worked paid time are not included for computation of overtime pay. Time worked beyond the scheduled work day must be authorized in advance. A salaried employee is not paid for overtime work.

Lunch Breaks You are entitled and encouraged to take a daily lunch break. This time is not included in the 40 hour work week. If your lunch break will be more than one hour, please let the office assistant know how long you will be gone.

Holidays, Vacation and Leave

Holiday Schedule AURAS celebrates these as paid holidays: New Year's Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Yom Kippur, Thanksgiving Day, The Day After Thanksgiving, Christmas Day. Depending upon workloads and schedules, other days of the year might be declared holidays on a discretionary basis. You may choose to observe other religious holidays using personal leave or leave without pay. If you decide to take additional religious holidays, please notify the studio in advance.

Personal Leave is allotted based on longevity at AURAS: First year, one week, taken after six months; second year, two weeks; third year, three weeks, and thereafter, four weeks annually. Vacation weeks are considered 5 working days and may be charged individually. Vacation time must be used in the calendar year or it is lost. There is no accrual of vacation time, nor is there a financial reimbursement associated with unused vacation time.

Liberal Leave is a long-standing policy that recognizes that employees who meet their professional obligations deserve the privilege of having flexible and generous working arrangements. Employees at AURAS are encouraged to monitor their own schedules, workloads and lead healthy, complete lives. Employees are allowed to schedule time off in exchange for overtime, weekend or heavy stress workloads. Occasional leave can be negotiated by arranging extra hours to make up lost time.

Leave Scheduling The Studio Manager should approve all leave. Employees who take leave **MUST** have their work covered while they are out and should inform any clients who might be affected when they will be out.

Emergency Leave is available at the discretion of the employee. AURAS believes that family comes first. Employees who need to deal with a family emergency should take whatever time is needed, provided they have coordinated their schedules with the Studio Manager.

Sick Leave has always been discretionary at AURAS. We expect employees to come to work healthy, and to stay home when they are ill. Medical appointments count as sick leave. There is no set amount of sick leave, but the abuse of the policy may result in restrictions in its use or garnishment of salary.

Maternity/Paternity Leave Both men and women are eligible for maternity leave. There is no more important time in your new baby's life than the first months, and new parents are encouraged to take the opportunity to be home. Any new parent is allowed one month paid leave, and is allowed an additional two months of unpaid leave before they have to commit to returning to work. Employees who intend to leave work after having a child should inform the studio as soon as they are certain of their decision. A one-month severance package may apply in this situation.

Family and Medical Leave Consistent with the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act an eligible AURAS employee is permitted up to a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid family medical leave during any 12 month period under certain circumstances. You are eligible for this leave if you have worked at AURAS for at least 1250 hours during the previous 12 month period. You may use this leave to care for a newborn or a newly adopted child or foster care placement.

You may also use this leave if, because of a serious health condition, you are unable to perform the functions of your position at AURAS. Finally, you may use this leave in order to care for your spouse or a son, daughter, or parent if such spouse, son, daughter or parent has a serious health condition. Unpaid family and medical leave and paid personal leave may be combined for these purposes. An unpaid leave of absence will not be approved to look for or to perform another job or to start another business.

Bereavement Leave Paid leave may be provided upon request and approval in the event of a death in your immediate family. Such leave may range from several hours off (e.g., to attend the funeral) to up to three continuous working days off (e.g., to attend the funeral, observe a period of mourning and/or settle the affairs of the deceased). Approval for bereavement will depend upon the circumstances and your relationship to the deceased.

Jury Duty Full time employees are granted up to two working days paid leave to serve on a jury. Please notify the studio immediately when called to jury duty. No employee will be discharged, threatened with discharge, intimidated or coerced because of responding to a summons for jury service, jury service or prospective jury service.

Legal Appearance Leave Employees required by a written legal summons to make a legal appearance will be given the time off with pay necessary to make the appearance. Please provide the studio with the written legal summons in order to be eligible for this paid leave. If you volunteer (but are not required by a written legal summons to make a legal appearance) the time off may be charged to earned personal leave time, worked as additional time in the same work week with approval or counted as unpaid leave.

Inclement Weather, Power Outages or Building Closings All employees should attempt to get into work when the weather is nasty unless public transportation has been stopped for some reason. If you are in doubt about whether the studio will be open, you are welcome to call the principal at home. In the event that the studio is closed for the day, you will be paid for your scheduled work day.

When the studio closes early due to inclement weather, power outages or building closings, you will be paid for your full scheduled work day if you have reported for work that day. If you report to work late or do not report to work at all, the time off may be charged to earned personal leave, may be worked as additional time in same pay period, or will be counted as unpaid leave. If our work load is heavy and projects are jeopardized because of studio closings, you may be asked to work time in the evening or on a weekend to catch up.



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