

4.1: Introduction- Employment Law

Because most employees do not belong to unions, a host of laws dealing with the many faces of discrimination shapes employers' power over and duties to their employees. Beyond the issue of discrimination, the law also governs a number of other issues, such as the extent to which an employer may terminate the relationship itself. We examine these issues later in this chapter.

Even before statutes governing collective bargaining and various state and federal discrimination laws, the common law set the boundaries for employer-employee relationships. The basic rule that evolved prior to the twentieth century was "employment at will." We will look at employment at will toward the end of this chapter. But as we go through the key statutes on employment law and employment discrimination, bear in mind that these statutes stand as an important set of exceptions to the basic common-law rule of employment at will. That rule holds that in the absence of a contractual agreement otherwise, an employee is free to leave employment at any time and for any reason; similarly, an employer is free to fire employees at any time and for any reason.

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