If you work for a living, regardless of whether you are a “blue collar” hourly employee or a “white collar” salaried worker, this book is for you. It contains important information that your prospective, current, or former employer does not want you to know, including the basics of your rights and obligations in the workplace, as well as practical tips on how to level the playing field regarding issues that arise every day on the job.

Your job is likely one of the three most important aspects of your life, along with your family and your religion, in whatever order of priority you choose. Despite the central importance of one’s job, most people don’t fully understand the rules that define their employment or know what to do when the relationship with their employer sours.

All too often, employees who have questions about their rights at work rely on their not-so-well-intentioned bosses, or on well-meaning but misinformed coworkers, friends, and family members. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the complexity of employment law, the information provided by these people cannot often be trusted. In addition, when employees search various HR websites for answers to their employment questions, they usually become more confused than they were to begin with. The difficulty in obtaining clear, reliable information leaves employees with many questions, such as the following:

- Do I have any rights in the workplace even if I am told I am “employed at will”?
- What should I do when I receive a warning or a poor performance evaluation that I believe to be unfair?
- Can my boss fire me without any warning?
- Can an employer require me to disclose my social media passwords?
- Am I entitled to overtime pay even if I am paid a salary?
- If I quit or am fired due to no fault of my own, can my current employer enforce the noncompetition agreement I signed when I was hired?
- What forms of discrimination are unlawful?
• What are my rights if I think I am the victim of discrimination?
• What are my rights if I am working in a hostile work environment?
• Am I protected if I complain about unfair treatment?
• When should I seek legal help for problems on the job?

You will find answers to these and many other common questions in this easy-to-read book, along with practical tips to help you protect your job and enforce your rights.

It bears mentioning at the outset that your chances of continuing to draw a paycheck are much higher if you know your rights and employ successful strategies to keep your job, since the odds for a favorable outcome are not in your favor if you entrust your case to the justice system. Seeking legal remedy after a job loss is less than ideal because of the many twists and turns that can ensue, as well as the very real possibility that a decision will not go in your favor. Even if you have been undeniably wronged in your employment, your outcome will be significantly affected by factors such as whom you or the company retains as counsel, your ability to afford a legal battle, the attitude of the company toward a peaceful settlement, characteristics of the court system and judges in your jurisdiction, and ultimately your luck of the draw with potential jurors. Given these many variables, it is wiser for you to know your rights now rather than plan on winning a legal challenge down the long road of litigation.

We recommend that you read each of the chapters of this book to fully understand the employment relationship, but if you seek information on a specific issue, the chapters are organized so you can find what you need in a matter of minutes.

This book is focused on the rights of employees in the private sector, rather than the public sector. Public employees should be aware that, generally, they have greater employment and job security rights than employees in the private sector. Such employees should make sure they are knowledgeable about their rights.

To the extent that public employees have greater job security than private employees, many state laws require employees to exercise such rights within a very short period of time. Consequently, if you are a public employee, you should know your rights prior to an adverse action by your employer so that you will be able to take timely steps to protect your interests.

Private and public employees can learn their rights either by asking for information from their employer’s human resources department, by researching the issues on the Internet, or by consulting with an experienced employment attorney who is familiar with the rights and responsibilities of employees.

Since every employment situation is unique, many facts must be considered before you can determine if your company has violated the law. This book is designed to provide basic and useful information about your rights as an employee. It will help you determine whether to seek the advice of an employment attorney about your particular situation. It is not intended as legal advice and should not be construed as such.

Note: As with any employment situation, private and public employees should consult a specialist familiar with employment law rather than a general practitioner who may not be current on employment law. Local bar associations can usually provide assistance in finding an attorney in virtually any area of law, including employment law.