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an interview with Anne Van Dusen

Manager of Regulatory Compliance and Risk Management
ACM Medical Laboratory

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Shedding the “Big Brother” stigma: Integrating compliance

- » Learning what business partners do and understanding their challenges can aid in better advising them on compliance issues.
- » Use “outside the box” methodology to lay the foundation for a solid compliance program.
- » Continuing education and improving the compliance knowledge base will help to achieve compliance training and education goals for the organization.
- » Becoming an active member of the organizational community increases visibility and accessibility for compliance professionals.
- » Making Compliance an approachable department aids in creating a culture of compliance.

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Whether you are new to the Compliance profession or a seasoned member of our ranks, one of the biggest challenges you face comes with the perception that you are an Orwellian overlord waiting on high for someone to make a mistake. There may be a belief in your organization that Compliance is the game maker, existing only to throw obstacles cleverly disguised as rules and regulations in the path of success. If these perceptions exist in your organization, it's time to shift the paradigm.



Pinkham

Becoming a partner

By using the following techniques, the compliance team at our organization has been able to reframe our role, achieve the OIG's seven elements of an effective compliance program,¹ and become a partner in success.

Walk the line—Learn the business

The first and worst mistake we can make as compliance professionals is to sequester ourselves from the actual healthcare business

happening around us. Talk to the members of leadership and management in your organization. Routinely round throughout the hospital. Ask meaningful and genuine questions about process and workflow, so that you can gain a better understanding of the challenges individuals and departments face throughout the organization. As you grow your partnerships and relationships, having this understanding helps you to better advise groups from a compliance standpoint. It also goes a long way with the key stakeholders you work with and encourages them to report early and question often. This is also the foundation for implementing the seven elements of an effective compliance program, implementing compliance and practice standards, and developing open lines of communication.

Be the expert—

Expand and leverage your knowledge

Marvel Comics fans will be familiar with this adage: “With great [knowledge] comes great responsibility.” As compliance professionals we must be the experts in our field. Our organizations are relying on us to advise them on policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and laws. Yes, being an expert in this ever-changing healthcare field can feel like climbing a giant

skyscraper that would challenge Spider-Man, but we must do it anyway.

Make time in your day to read articles and blogs. Keep up with your news feeds and social media. Attend webinars and conferences as often as you can. Gaining credibility and leveraging our knowledge helps to create an environment where members of our various leadership teams want us at the table advising and educating, and consider us a hot commodity. As the OIG indicates, we must be able to provide appropriate training and education to our organizations, and to do that, we must obtain that great knowledge and be the compliance experts.

Be a joiner—

Become an active member of your community

Even if you have learned the business and transformed yourself into a compliance geek, individuals in your organization may still run the other way when they see you coming. They may cringe when they hear your name, or worse, not know who you are or what you do. Now is the time to get involved. If your organization has a group that plans activities or employee engagement events, join it. If there are committees that have open invitations to join, accept them. If there are volunteer events, community health and wellness events, family barbecues, or fundraising parties, attend them.

Once individuals in your organization see you as an actual person with outside interests who can relax and have fun, you will become much more approachable. People are much more willing to open up to someone they have played a round of golf or muddled through the Electric Slide with. Being approachable

and recognizable is key to successfully implementing all seven of the OIG's Elements. As an added bonus, being involved as an active member of the community gets you some of the best information about any given issue at any given time. Plus, it's really fun and usually the right thing to do as an engaged employee, so start joining today!

Laugh, a lot—

A little sense of humor goes a long way

Last but certainly not least, do not take yourself too seriously. The work that compliance professionals do is important. It is strategic and, despite popular belief, does contribute to any organization successfully executing its mission, vision, and values. It can be hard and thankless work. So laugh. If you think you might be humor challenged, watch an episode or two of *Seinfeld*.² Hit a local comedy club or read a few

*The Far Side*³ comics. Do whatever you need to do to find your funny voice.

People will respond when you add a little humor to what could easily become a very dry topic or discussion. Put individuals at ease, when appropriate, by finding the humor in a tough

compliance situation. Being able to respond to detected offenses, as the OIG indicates, requires that offenses actually be detected. Sometimes the best way to find out if there are concerns that require investigation is to be a friendly face. You will have the greatest success if individuals believe that making a report is not only the right thing to do, but won't result in the sky falling. Even adopting a compliance mascot can help normalize a department that can seem overwhelming to individual employees. The more approachable and accessible you and your department are, the more success you will have.

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Summary

These are some of the tactics we have used in our organization that allowed us to break the Big Brother perceptions and define ourselves as a partner in success. These methods have also helped us to continue to build on our culture of compliance in a small but growing and changing acute care facility. It has been a 5-year journey for our compliance team, but we can honestly say that we have quantifiable measures of success that we continue to build upon. Try one or all of these suggestions, but I implore you to try something if you feel that you are being left out of the important

conversations or having difficulty getting individuals to report. The role of the compliance team is ever changing, along with this industry, and we must be integrated into our organizations if we want to be successful in this often tumultuous climate. It's time to lose the Big Brother designation and replace it with the Business Partner classification. May the odds be ever in your favor. ☺

1. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General: OIG Supplemental Compliance Program Guidance for Hospitals. January 31, 2005. Available at <http://1.usa.gov/1WZOOzS>
2. *Seinfeld* TV series, Fox network, 1989-1998. Writer Peter Mehlman. Director Andy Ackerman. Performers Jerry Seinfeld, Jason Alexander, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Michael Richards. Producer Larry David.
3. Gary Larsen: *The Far Side* comic series. Available online at <http://bit.ly/thefarside-google-images>

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