

Compliance & Ethics

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By Maurice L. Crescenzi



When Ethics Are A Best Buy

Meet Kathleen Edmond
Chief Ethics Officer, Best Buy

How an “internal customer service” model can improve compliance programs

By Mary-James Young

So, your compliance program is in place, you’ve got your executives on board with a well-documented “tone at the top,” and strong support of compliance efforts communicated appropriately and enthusiastically down through the ranks, and you’ve established all the necessary policies and processes to ensure that regulators and enforcement authorities will deem your program sufficiently robust to provide mitigation, if your company should ever have a compliance issue.

Now what?

Tone at the top is a great start. We know that workers tend to follow their executives’ lead. We know that a vast majority of workers want to do the right thing, and that, from time to time, all of us need a bit of guidance as to what that right thing is. In those situations, we look to our supervisors and we look to the compliance professionals within our organizations for sound advice and clear direction on how we are to proceed with matters of compliance.

What is the role of the compliance professional?

Compliance professionals must maintain two separate sets of

competencies: competence in their subject matter, including knowledge of relevant compliance requirements, and secondly, confidence in their ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with their internal “customers” on all aspects of those compliance requirements. A deficiency in either competency can be deadly to an organization’s compliance efforts.

Compliance professionals serve on the front line in an organization’s effort to build and maintain its culture of compliance and ethical business conduct. They interact with all levels of the organization as trainers, mentors, troubleshooters, and, if there is a problem, they are the first responders. Consequently, compliance professionals’ diligence and the quality of their guidance has a direct effect on compliance success within an organization.

How do we prepare our compliance professionals to provide that level and quality of support?

Compliance Customer Service is an innovative model that applies what we’ve learned about customer service in general to the specific internal

“customers” served by compliance professionals. Compliance Customer Service engages compliance professionals as partners with their internal compliance customers. They identify internal compliance customer needs, and they work directly with those internal compliance customers to meet those needs. Meeting those needs is the critical first step towards compliance success. When our internal compliance customers succeed, the compliance program succeeds, and the organization succeeds – enhancing the culture of compliance towards which we are all working.

Compliance customer service includes providing the necessary support to internal compliance customers to facilitate their understanding of and implementation of compliance requirements that affect their work. Compliance customer service challenges the compliance professional to think “big picture,” to understand how compliance fits into the overall function of the organization, to see compliance as a means by which other areas of the organization can better meet their goals for the organization, to work collaboratively with others in the organization to improve compliance, and to enhance the culture of compliance.

Specifically, Compliance Customer Service includes the following functions that most compliance professionals perform every day:

- Answering questions and finding answers to questions;
- Anticipating needs of internal compliance customers and meeting those needs;
- Assessing levels of cooperation and participation and insuring

the necessary levels are maintained across the organization;

- Analyzing regulations and requirements to determine the elements for compliance and conveying that analysis to internal compliance customers in a timely, understandable, and efficient manner;
- Comparing evidence of compliance provided by internal compliance customers to the elements of compliance requirements to ensure that nothing has been overlooked, omitted, or misstated;
- Following up, reporting up, and, when necessary, mopping up.

Who is the internal compliance customer?

An internal compliance customer can be anyone in an organization: a co-worker or another department or an executive who depends upon the compliance professional to provide services, which in turn are used to create a deliverable for an external customer. (In this context, external customers are often the regulators who monitor the organization's compliance activities). Some internal compliance customers may need orientation and a basic understanding of compliance requirements, but others may require only assistance in receiving and analyzing updates and preparing for compliance audits and spot checks. Regardless, the compliance professional assesses the needs of the internal compliance customer and works with that internal customer to meet those needs. This furthers both the immediate goal of full compliance and the longer term goal of enhancing the organization's culture of compliance. The

compliance professional models good compliance practice while moving his or her internal customers towards those good, and later, best compliance practices.

How can compliance professionals encourage good compliance customers?

As with many other aspects of organizational development, communication is key. Compliance professionals must take the time to assess the needs of internal compliance customers, listen to them, communicate clearly the compliance requirements, and work cooperatively with their internal customers. Compliance professionals must establish processes and procedures in consultation with their internal customers and facilitate the compliance activities to be performed by them.

And, lastly, compliance professionals must deliver high-quality service and results to their internal customers. In brief, compliance professionals must work towards making compliance requirements understandable, attainable, and sustainable. For the organization to maintain its culture of compliance, compliance professionals must help their internal customers integrate compliance activities into their everyday work, every day. ♦

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