

Working with Rules. And with People.

Like many Compliance professionals, I stepped into my Compliance role with a lot of enthusiasm and confidence. Rules, processes and risks were an area where I felt comfortable. However, that was only one part of the new job. I quickly realized that I urgently needed to learn something quite different as well. How to position myself in this specific role, how to communicate in a way that preserves both the message and the relationship, and how to have professional influence. And what it means to take care of myself so that I can feel well and stay in the role.

A large part of Compliance work, after all, happens in our interactions with other people. We set boundaries. We have to say NO. And the other person may not like hearing that NO. We need to influence without formal authority. And all of this happens between people with their own emotions, interests and reactions.

It is interesting how often we assume that the ability to handle such complex situations and relationships simply comes “as part of the package” when we take on a Compliance role. But that does not have to be the case. Being drawn to working with rules may also mean that we are more inclined towards analysis and structure, and less towards personal exposure and confrontation. We cannot all be equally good at everything.

Compliance work is demanding in many ways. Research confirms that it is often stressful and exhausting, and we may feel the effects both mentally and physically. At the same time, if we are to do our job well, we also need to be well ourselves. Recognizing what is happening within us, paying attention to the signals from our own bodies, taking care of ourselves and building resilience to stress are also part of this work.

There is knowledge we can develop and there are practical ways that can help us manage ourselves, work with people and influence without formal authority. Throughout my Compliance career, I have devoted a great deal of attention to this part of the job.

Just as we consider the continuous development of sales and leadership skills part of professional development in those roles, I now see the development of communication and other skills in the same way for Compliance professionals. This includes, among other things, using emotional intelligence, setting and maintaining boundaries, managing stress and building resilience. When an organization expects these skills, it makes sense to support their development as well.

Because by doing so, we are not only taking care of the people who do this work. We are also supporting collaboration with colleagues, the reputation of the Compliance function and, ultimately, the safety of the business.

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