Compliance by wandering around

by Joseph Agins

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I will admit the term "wandering around" may not relate to what most of us agree to be productive workplace habits. Even Webster's primary definition for "wander" is *to move about without a fixed course, aim, or goal.* So, I get it. I understand the inherent need for the compliance-minded business professional to scoff at the thought of aimless wandering. However, what if wandering around is exactly what your compliance program needs to bring it to the next level?

For those familiar with the management philosophy of management by wandering around (MBWA), you may guess where this article is going. For those unfamiliar with this concept, and as a refresher for the others, let us first recall the core concepts of this popular method.

Management by wandering around

MBWA means managers are putting aside emails, meetings, and spreadsheets to get out of their offices and engage employees by talking with them, asking questions, and listening.

Bill Hewlett and David Packard used such an approach in their open management style at Hewlett Packard (HP). Tom Peters and Robert Waterman later highlighted "The HP Way" in their best-selling management book, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (1982).[1] It was here Peters and Waterman coined the MBWA term. The premise was simple—for managers to have their finger on the pulse of their organizations, they needed to wander around and talk to their employees.

The HP executives learned information received through formal channels was filtered and diluted once it reached them. Telling the boss what they wanted to hear, and minimizing and leaving out details were an unfortunate fact of chain of command. Therefore, managers were not getting a full picture of the problems employees and their organization faced. However, by wandering around, talking to employees, asking questions, and listening, they had a better understanding of their concerns and were better able to fix them.