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Meet Stephanie Hillhouse: Unbottling local compliance-globally

Stephanie Hillhouse, Director of Ethics & Compliance Training, Communication & Strategic Initiatives for The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

Stephanie Hillhouse (shillhouse@coca-cola.com) was interviewed in March by Adam Turteltaub (adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org), Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & International Programs at SCCE & HCCA.

AT: First, I think it would be good if you gave some size and scope for The Coca-Cola Company. You certainly seem to be in every corner of the world, but exactly how big is Coca-Cola?

SH: Coca-Cola does business in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. We were founded in the US, but we are a local business. Most of the Coca-Cola products people drink are made close to where they live. We have nearly 250 bottling partners worldwide, and the system employs more than 700,000 people. Those jobs help fuel local economies.

AT: That's simply enormous, and what's also worth noting is that you are an extremely high-profile company. You're a brand name everywhere in the world, which means there's great reputational risk if anything goes awry. What are some of the top risk areas as you operate around the globe?

SH: We've been building our reputation since 1886. As Warren Buffett has said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." We fully appreciate the importance of maintaining our reputation around the world.

We are very focused on driving growth, but not at any cost. People matter. Our planet matters. We do business the right way by following our values and working toward solutions that benefit us all. My team helps reduce risk with a central focus on our anti-bribery program. The program ensures we have the proper policies and controls in place to prevent bribery. We also want our third-party business partners to act properly on our behalf.

As you may have seen, we've had some high-profile acquisitions recently, including Costa coffee. When we acquire a business or brand, they sometimes continue operating under their existing business models, while creating synergies with the Coca-Cola system over time. This creates a huge opportunity for our compliance team. Everyone on our team is giving a lot of thought to how we can best establish an effective ethics and compliance program within these entities while respecting their independence within the operating model.

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