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The research do-si-do

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My father is celebrating his 50th year of square-dance calling, which is a significant milestone, because square dancing is not as popular as it once was. As a child, I have etched in my mind when he first picked up a microphone and began his craft. As a square dancer, I realize it takes eight people in a square to perform movements to the rhythm of the music for the dance to be completed. Today I see the “research square dance” in numerous settings across sites, sponsors, and contract research organizations (CROs), where the precision of working together is the key to success. A caller is the person who prompts the dance figures on the dance floor during a tip. Today, we need “callers” to take the lead in our research square dance just as my father has for 50 years.

Square dancing involves carefully crafted movements with music. As a research compliance team member, sometimes it truly depends on how and who is responsible as the leader. Maneuvering research acronyms that are not well defined can cause a misstep. As in square dancing, terminology can be hard to decipher if you are not aware of the meaning. When my dad would call a “tea cup chain,” if he had dancers on the floor who were unaware of that complex move, the square would falter. The same applies for research compliance when you use, for example, the term fair market value (FMV) or non-disclosure agreement (NDA), and there are team members who do not know the meaning or context of what is being discussed. Your caller must lead the square dance!

Think back to when you were in middle school gym class. The thought of having to hold hands with a partner facing three other sets of couples in a square was too much for many. My memory takes me from the middle school horror to seeing the colorful crinolines and unique bolo ties across the dance floor. Considering my parents have friends in square dancing all across the country even today, I wish that type of comradery was more prevalent. At the end of the tip, my dad would yell, “yellow rock” and everyone would hug their corner partner (gents to their right, ladies to their left). Today, some of the research teams I work with have never met, due to location or circumstance. This can sometimes limit the comfort of relying on one another in a tricky dance. Think about the do-si-do that you learned in middle school during square dance class. Smile and remember, “Bow to your partner, corner, all!”

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