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Compliance professionals need to be master communicators

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Communication is an art form more than a science. But much like science, there are certain rules of the road that are critical to landing your message. To be master communicators, compliance professionals must take cues from communication leaders to effectively convey their messages. Here are a few ways to be your own master communicator, advancing your own career and the compliance profession in the process.

Be intentional about how you communicate

Communications is about more than just saying something. To ensure your communications have the maximum impact, you need to understand your audience. The most effective PR you can do for your function is to understand the business you are in and each function/business area's goals within it. Then, think about how you are connecting with every part of the business on a regular basis to understand their unique challenges and opportunities pertaining to compliance. Think about how compliance can help them meet their goals and offer your services up when they need them. Make it more about them, and less about the compliance function and its own agenda or desires for communicating.

Good example: Sending a reminder about your company's gift policy before the holidays when people need guidance about sending and receiving corporate gifts. Bad example: Communicating about the importance of compliance without a clear timing hook or business reason.

It is also important to track the time you spend managing these relationships and uncovering these opportunities. Track it in a way that makes the most sense to you, then dedicate time every week to keeping those records updated, scheduling any meetings to stay in touch with your contacts, and quickly handling any follow-up from those meetings.

Finally, be intentional about ensuring your content is approachable for those who do not speak the language of compliance. Avoid acronyms and legal jargon. If your grandmother or a teenager couldn't easily read your communication and understand what you are trying to say, it is *not* ready to be communicated to your company's employees.

Variety is the spice of life

While email is attractive to compliance professionals because it is easily consumed, cheap, and auditable, take some time to understand how your audience prefers to receive communication. Many people don't read all their email and are not inclined to view anything that could be construed as "bad news" from compliance.

In many organizations, live webinars, videoconferences, or town halls are more effective ways to get your message out. You can also make personal calls or even send personally written cards to key leaders and

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influencers within the company. Finding the many ways that employees consume information within your company can lead to surprising new means of connecting to consider.

To determine what is most effective, be sure to measure your results. There are many ways to do this, from tools that measure click and open rates on emails, the number of views of videos posted in certain locations, and the number of attendees on a live webinar or presentation, just to name a few.

If it’s worth saying once, it’s worth saying again

One size doesn’t fit all in communication. The language and tone you use with executives may be fundamentally different than the communication style used with all employees. Messages and channels should be carefully cultivated and customized to the audience. It isn’t enough to have a single message that everyone is meant to consume; the best communications are timely, highly relevant, and focused.

Repetition is also key to helping your audience remember your information. This means you must deliver the core components multiple times in multiple ways through multiple channels. Ultimately, you want to have the brain move the memory from short-term processing to long-term memory. Since not everyone learns the same way, you may need to have visual, auditory, reading/writing, and even kinesthetic delivery. This is where partnering with your communications professionals is key—they can help you understand all the options for getting those multiple messages out there.

Make it a dialogue by enabling employees to share their feedback

To be a truly effective communicator, two-way communication is critical. All too often companies—and compliance professionals—focus their efforts on pushing information out to employees. However, it is just as important to have mechanisms for feedback and a specific channel for employees to make their voices heard. You can glean critical information, such as customer insights, frequent questions, and clarification issues, that can be used to continually improve your communications. There are many possible channels for two-way communication, ranging from intranet resources, internal social media, town halls, face-to-face periodic meetings, a dedicated email address for compliance, voice of the customer surveys, or even a suggestion box.

Leverage other leaders, especially the C-suite

Let’s face it—the statistics on compliance communications are pretty dire. The percentage of employees who are likely to open a compliance email are in the low double digits, and the percentage of employees who will actually *read* emails from compliance is in the single digits. But take heart—the reality is that people care what their manager and their direct executive thinks. You can leverage this by using company leaders to deliver compliance messages targeted to each team. Often, executives have a variety of methods by which they communicate with their teams, from intranet and team collaboration sites to team meetings where you can share poignant compliance news.

As you ask for opportunities, make sure you explain the value of compliance to your leaders in a language that they understand. Many leaders will be motivated by a well-articulated return on investment (ROI) that shows a clear connection to business results supported by compliance objectives. Other leaders are motivated by altruistic ideals of doing the right thing. Make sure you can articulate the “why” for your ask in language that resonates with the leader in question.

You can become a master communicator *and* a more effective compliance professional if you just remember a few key elements. If you already have a communications team, engage with them to help you understand the demographics within your workplace, select means of communication, and properly refine the message. If you

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don’t have dedicated communications staff, then use the five tips above to help define your communications approach with your audience in mind.

The answer to the question, “Why do compliance professionals need to be master communicators?” is, because your success depends on it.

Takeaways

- Be intentional about knowing the business you’re in and making your communication more about your audience and less about you.
- Communicate in a variety of ways based on how your audience prefers to receive information. Work with your internal communications colleagues to understand your options.
- Repeat your message to help people remember it. Consider different language and tone for different audiences (e.g., leaders vs. frontline employees).
- Use employee feedback to refine your message and even your overall approach. Remember, feedback is a gift to help you do your job better.
- Make leaders your spokespeople for delivering compliance messages whenever possible. Employees are more likely to listen to them than to you.

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