

Compliance Today – January 2018 Meet Marla Berkow

An interview by Adam Turteltaub

This interview with Marla Berkow (Msberkow@gatewayfoundation.org) was conducted in October by Adam Turteltaub (adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org) Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & International Programs, Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics & Health Care Compliance Association

AT: I want to start with your educational background. A lot of people come into Compliance with a legal background. You studied behavioral science and organizational behavior. On the face of it, that sounds like a great background, but has it proven to be?

MB: I have no regrets and would not trade my residential liberal arts education for anything in the world. My undergraduate degree is actually in Cultural Anthropology. I studied child language acquisition. My first regulatory position was in the Legal department of a vitamin and supplement manufacturer, reporting directly to an international regulatory attorney first and then to the Assistant VP of Legal, so working under a licensed attorney was necessary, I believe, to complement my educational background and to gain an understanding of legal review and due diligence. Additionally, once I began overseeing regulatory implementation, it was clear that legal education would help me. But as far as perspective, having a behavioral science background really helps when working through employee relations issues and in developing training and corrective action plans. My liberal arts education has served me well, and I would not have done it any differently, given the opportunity.

AT: What are some of the key tenets of organizational behavior that you think more compliance professionals should know?

MB: For me the most significant takeaway from studying organizational behavior was the evolutionary psychology approach that has been applied to management. When in graduate school, I built on my undergraduate research and reviewed evolutionary theory, but applied it to organizational development instead of as pure academic research. Evolutionary psychology focuses on how evolution has shaped the mind and behavior. Applied to an organization, that information is used to better understand human behavior in order to create a better work environment. Understanding human nature and what the evolutionary psychologists call, “hardwiring” and working with it, rather than against it, is really important in corporate compliance. Particularly when you are working preventively, people have to accept where you are coming from and be motivated on an intrinsic and not always a conscious level to cooperate.

AT: How have you handled not having the legal background that so many have?

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