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CCO: Communication, Presence and Other 'Compliance Superpowers' Advance Effectiveness

By Nina Youngstrom

People tell compliance officers all sorts of things, and they will come to understand the motivations by listening carefully. That became apparent to Scott Jones, chief compliance and privacy officer at Augusta Health in Virginia, as he learned the power of becoming “an expert in listening.” When employees come to Jones with compliance concerns, he makes a habit of trying to understand what’s behind the words so he can better address their concerns. For example:

- “I gave this protected health information to the wrong patient. Am I going to lose my job?”
- “I could document patient care better if we had a new electronic medical record.”
- “I was concerned that if we did not restrain them, the patient would hurt themselves.”
- “I could see more patients if my staff documented encounters for me.”
- “We provided the medical service. The documentation is not as important as patient care.”

Listening is an aspect of the communication skills that are essential to being an effective compliance officer, Jones said. “You can’t bludgeon people into doing the right thing, but you can influence them into doing the right thing, and sometimes we need to communicate by understanding.”

Jones considers communication one of five “compliance superpowers” that help break down silos, “influence decision-makers” and otherwise help compliance officers have a long, successful career, Jones said March 29 at the Health Care Compliance Association’s Compliance Institute.^[1] The other superpowers are research, investigations, presence and leadership.

Communication is a multidimensional skill and “creates credibility,” he said. It includes public speaking. Nonverbal body language accounts for 60% of human communication, and tone is another 30%, Jones said. “You have about 8 seconds to make an impression. How do you do it? Make eye contact. Converse rather than lecture.” He also recommended using your hands to emphasize your message and pausing after making a point so it can sink in. When people ask questions, Jones suggested answering transparently. “Remember the power of saying, ‘I don’t have the answer to that question now, but I will have it Wednesday morning. Where can I find you?’”

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