

Compliance Today – June 2022 Distracted compliance

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I recently heard the story of someone who had an interview for a job as a lab technician. And the story reminded me of an important aspect of compliance risk assessments, one that is often difficult to assess.

As part of the employment interview, the person was asked to perform a simple lab test in front of the two employees who were conducting the interview. The interviewee was slightly surprised by this, but she proceeded to carry out the test without any problems.

What came next is what really surprised her. Two additional interviewers came into the room. The interviewee was asked to perform one more lab test. But this time, each of the four interviewers began talking loudly, laughing, moving around, and doing anything they could to distract the interviewee. They were attempting to replicate the conditions that their lab techs might encounter in the real-world environment of their workplace.

Likelihood of noncompliance can be difficult to measure, yet it is vital to do so as part of a periodic risk assessment. And one of the common factors leading to noncompliance is worker distraction. Distraction can be of the obvious, environmental type like this interviewee experienced. Working conditions can have a significant impact on workers' ability to remain focused and perform their jobs properly. But distraction can also result from other stress a worker is experiencing that is far less obvious, whether something going on at home or simply pressure to perform at work.

And worker distractions are, of course, not limited to the laboratory setting that this interview focused on. Virtually every one of our employees who plays a role in compliance is subject to distractions. It is impossible to create a distraction-free environment. But minimizing distractions should be one of the goals of a compliance program.

By the way, to finish the story, the interviewee performed better when distracted than not, stating that she felt more observed and under pressure in the undistracted test than when she was subject to distraction. But I don't think we should interpret that as a message to increase worker distractions.

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