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Using liaisons to extend the reach and influence of your program

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A persistent challenge for compliance and ethics (C&E) programs is the difficulty of reaching every site, every business unit, every employee, and key third parties when programs tend to be leanly staffed and located exclusively or primarily at headquarters. Another challenge for many programs is the difficulty of embedding the C&E program in the business sufficiently to ensure a program has a voice in appropriate business decisions—the big decisions about corporate strategy, acquisitions, and markets, and the smaller decisions, such as whether to engage a potential partner. And yet another is the ability to reach different locales (that may have very different cultures) with messaging that will effectively reach hearts and minds. Enter compliance liaisons (or champions, ambassadors, representatives, or “insert your own more creative title here”). A strong liaison network can significantly extend the reach and effectiveness of a program, creating tentacles that extend beyond headquarters in order to both push out the C&E program and pull in local information and assistance.

In the past decade, I have had the opportunity to review C&E liaison programs in a variety of organizations—some exceedingly effective and some utterly ineffective. At one organization, I assessed their C&E program multiple times over 15 years or so, during which a liaison program was commenced, withered away, and then came back to life in a way that has served the C&E program and the company exceedingly well. I have identified several characteristics that are most important to creating sustainable and effective liaison programs. In the following, we will explore some of the ways in which compliance liaisons can benefit an organization and some strategies for creating an impactful liaison program.

Prerequisites

While the following will delve into some of the specific strategies that can help a liaison program succeed, there are a few prerequisites for successful programs that are worth mentioning at the outset. Companies with the most robust, most effective liaison programs have each of the following: leadership support, independence, accountability, incentives, and guidance.

Leadership support is necessary to get a liaison program off the ground and ensure your program is continuously staffed with the right people to serve in the role and that the role has the requisite authority and gravitas. Independence is imperative to ensure that liaisons feel comfortable performing their roles and can perform the most sensitive tasks (escalating concerns, receiving reports of suspected misconduct) without impediment. Accountability and incentives are both critical to ensuring the liaison tasks are completed and valued. Guidance is necessary to ensure organizations are providing liaisons with the support they need to undertake the tasks that are asked of them. These significant liaison program characteristics are referenced further in the relevant sections below.

It is helpful to create a charter for the compliance liaison program, which might include information about the qualifications to be a liaison; the responsibilities and authority of liaisons; those activities that liaisons are *not* responsible for (such as conducting investigations); and administrative aspects of the program, such as

meetings. Such a tool can be invaluable in educating both management and liaisons on the purpose of the program and the authority and accountability of the liaisons themselves.

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