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Congratulations, you're the boss! Considerations for moving from peer to manager

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I had the privilege of being named chief compliance officer for a large integrated health system a number of years ago. I had been a compliance director for the organization for many years, and now I was being entrusted with the leadership of the organization's compliance program. Over the years I had developed wonderful relationships with my peers, both in the compliance department and in other departments. Now, as the boss, I needed to establish my expertise, credibility, authority, and strategic vision for compliance without negatively affecting the team. I think there are some things that I did well and some that I did not in managing my transition from peer to manager. In this article, I will discuss some of the lessons I learned and highlight some of the special considerations that a compliance professional in this position may want to think about.

The transition from peer to manager is never easy. Not only do you have a new job to learn, but you need to manage your old friends, some of whom may have the hurt feelings that often come when someone is promoted from peer to manager. As a compliance professional, you have the added burden of managing it all while ensuring your compliance controls and safeguards remain intact. The following are a few things to keep in mind.

It is not all about you

It is true, you got the new job for a reason. You're probably very good at what you do. Don't let it go to your head. You may be leading the team now, but you are still a member of the team. Now, more than ever, it is important that you acknowledge and celebrate the success of the team and individual members of your team. You are all in this together, and the job is not about you. It is about serving your team, your organization, your patients, and your community.

Give it time

When I first moved into the chief compliance officer role, I had a lot of ideas about changes I wanted to make. I knew I wanted to change how the work was structured, I wanted to change some of the reporting relationships, and I wanted to change the composition of the compliance committee. When I got into the role, I was raring to go. I explained my strategy to the executive management and board, I discussed my vision with my team, and I set up a task force to involve the team in the redesign. What surprised me was how hard it was to fully design and implement. I never realized that I was taking away the comfort of familiar work before my team had time to adjust to my leadership, style, and vision. Even though I always felt fully supported by the team—and I think they were excited about where we were going—it was too much change all at once.

Transitions are hard, even when the change is seen as a positive. Bring your staff along with you slowly enough for the team to adjust to you and your style, but not so slowly that you don't establish your leadership and strategy. It is a balance, but I think it is important for you to recognize that you will be ready to move much more quickly than your team.

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