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Compliance as a customer service agent: Divergent interpretations

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One of the seven elements of an effective compliance program is the implementation of written policy, procedure, and standards of conduct.^[1] Ethics, a part of conduct standards, is the moral compass of an individual and the principles that govern a person's behavior. Ethics and morality are also a part of the culture and the systems that determine right and wrong in the workplace. Creating an environment of high ethical values should be the goal and responsibility of every employee and leader in an organization. Compliance leads the charge in "doing the right thing" and sets an example for others.

So, what words describe the person and duties of a healthcare compliance professional? Let's start with "problem-solver," someone who researches issues and systematically seeks to find resolution. Maybe "integrity" comes to mind—someone who is consistently honest and trustworthy. What about "detailed," an individual that is innately focused, able to uncover the fine points, and ask the right questions to discover root causes in an organized fashion. A compliance professional often is a "facilitator," one who directs the subject matter experts, keeps the group on task, and can summarize holistically. There are many more terms, phrases, or words to describe the healthcare compliance profession and its people, but there is one description that is rarely associated with compliance—customer service.

Customer service enhances compliance

I've googled "customer service" many times; there are various terms and phrases to describe customer service, but "compliance" is not one I've found. The same is true when researching compliance: "customer service," especially in healthcare compliance, is absent. So, what am I suggesting? I am suggesting putting "good customer service" in the core description of the compliance profession.

You may want to know how good customer service enhances the compliance professional and/or the job. In searching for guidance on providing good customer service, I found an article entitled, "The 20 Most Important Customer Service Skills You Need To Have" on a blog for a scheduling company, Sling.^[2]

The 20-point list includes having respect, patience, self-control, concern, attentiveness, empathy, flexibility, communication skills, effective listening, responsibility, efficiency, tenacity, positive attitude, decisiveness, persistence, creativity, a sense of humor, assertiveness, persuasiveness, and not getting offended easily. Each one of the attributes is ideal for a compliance professional. My daily walk includes interacting with operational leaders that design and defend workflows, collaborating with departments to devise plans for urgent change initiatives, coordinating with information technology and training departments to teach and orient employees, investigating anonymous complaints to correct and prevent future occurrences, directing vendors to meet the business need, speaking directly with a patient when problems yet unresolved locally have resulted in escalation, and more. In every one of these instances I want to be led by my innate desire to provide extraordinary customer service in a way that appropriately represents my morals and ethics, as well as my Catholic hospital's ministry, mission, and vision. I want the testimony of every person I encounter to be one of satisfaction, compassion, and

competence. Even when I am delivering news that is not the most desirable, or directing on an action item to foster improvement, probing for answers, reminding of deadlines, I try to get it done with the greatest accentuation on customer service possible. Good customer service is a way to exemplify moral compass, ethics, and culture.

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