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Be hard on your work, never yourself

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Every profession comes with its own stresses and even the occasional traumas. We have become so integrated with our work roles that sometimes it becomes difficult to separate the two. We often hear about compassion fatigue of doctors, nurses, social workers, or attorneys, but one role for which we often neglect to mention mental wellness is the ethics and compliance officer.

This role is tasked with being familiar with all applicable regulations in the industry. Ethics and compliance officers are also tasked with knowing employment law and having the right interpersonal skills to be able to interview or investigate misconduct. Often, the role comes with the responsibility of bearing witness to misconduct such as harassment, discrimination, and fraud. It might even need to assist in making employment decisions—factors that affect another person's livelihood. It truly is a dynamic profession, but unfortunately, at times it comes with the risk of emotional depletion. It is *Groundhog Day*, so let's bring to light a few stressors those in this profession may experience and some ways to deal with them.

Feeling like an island

The ethics and compliance officer (ECO) can, at times, feel an enhanced degree of separation from other employees. There is not much opportunity to gripe to other colleagues about a recent issue due to the sensitivity of the role. Other employees might also not feel comfortable approaching the ECO due to fear of the grumble being taken as a formal complaint. Some employees even steer clear of being in a closed-door office with the ECO to avoid the appearance of filing a complaint. Hence opportunities to form friendships at work are not always present. In addition, ECOs can often feel isolated because they are responsible to two different groups and feel the divide: the general employee base and the board of directors.

In most cases, the ECO will report by way of a dotted line to the board of directors. This is to allow for some independence and for the ECO to be the eyes and ears on the ground, since the board of directors has a minimal view into the organization. The ECO might feel they are not included in some controversial discussions, for example, for fear of the board of directors hearing about it before the CEO is ready to divulge a more baked plan. Or perhaps the ECO is invited to the meeting but is caught between whether they need to give a heads-up to the board of directors. At times, there might even be instances where the ECO and the CEO disagree, and this can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and even fear for the ECO.

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