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Managing compliance and ethics business relationships with S.T.Y.L.E.

by Natalie N. Gunn

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There's no shortage of science touting the benefits of systematic, formalized, consistent actions — essentially, corporate habits — to create productive relationships and impart long-term sustainable impact and change. As compliance and ethics professionals, we are in the business of developing, training/educating, and enforcing policies within our organizations at large. We regularly evaluate our policies, request feedback, and implement changes to better serve anyone who is subject to the policies. Although this work accounts for much of our time, we would be remiss not to create similar processes aimed at managing our business relationships. Well-developed business relationships are essential to our work of effectuating policy, influencing our colleagues, and paving a path toward positive culture shifting.

As the manager of Global Compliance and Ethics for a multinational jewelry, apparel, and skin care company, I use STYLE: Systematic, Team driven, Y (the why), Leadership, Every day to manage internal and external business relationships. Compliance and ethics work is complex, but doing it with STYLE will lighten the load and make you look good (bonus points!).

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I like to use what I call the "Power of 3 on repeat" as the basis for my personal Systematic relationship building policy. I email or hand write a note, call (I actually pick up the phone — imagine that!), and do in-person visits with key leaders. Then repeat. This method of engagement works well in most cases. The email or note is a soft touch letting them know I will be reaching out about a specific matter. Specificity is important — no one has time to waste! I follow up with a phone call to set up a time to meet. The call also helps to build a rapport with colleagues so they are comfortable enough to engage on the phone if necessary in the future.

The third touchpoint — a meeting — can be a quick coffee, office meeting or, my personal favorite, an after-work cocktail. In the meeting, you have three goals. Goal 1: Learn about your target — how they think about compliance as it relates to the company, something personal, and their preferred method of communication. Goal 2: Share something about yourself — something memorable and pertinent to your role in compliance and something personal. Goal 3: Set up another time to meet. Do not leave your meeting without a follow-up meeting.

You want to learn how your business partner thinks, what makes them tick (e.g., goodwill, money, social or moral standing) and use that when you have to secure their buy-in. Learning something personal about them (e.g., do they have kids, a spouse, love cars, do yoga) gives you something to start building a person-to-person relationship rather than just a work relationship. People work for people and go out of their way for people, not positions — be personable. Sharing something memorable about yourself that pertains to your role develops the work relationship and the person-to-person relationship. My go-to sharable is telling people I have always wanted to be in compliance, which is usually followed by "(gasp!) Compliance?! Why?" I tell them that I wanted

to be in the FBI, that I passed the first rounds to become a FBI Field Agent, and that I only stopped because, at that time in my life, I couldn't do a single push up! Again, depicting yourself as a person makes you and your agenda palatable. Capitalize on your momentum and schedule another meeting to ensure that you continue your relationship building.