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First impressions: Integrating compliance into onboarding

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Most organizations conduct some form of onboarding for their new employees, and it is no wonder why. Onboarding offers a structured way to introduce new employees to company policy, expectations, and job duties, while also increasing job satisfaction, preventing turnover, and improving employee performance.[1] And although Human Resources often orchestrates onboarding, this introduction to new staff provides compliance professionals the perfect opportunity to take ownership of a critical part of the process: setting the tone for the organization's values, code of conduct, and culture of compliance.

Consider the following scenario:

Jane begins her job as a nurse at the local hospital and attends new employee onboarding. A Human Resources representative passes out several tax documents and a handful of policies before playing one video on safety at work and another on HIPAA. Several months into her position, Jane notices a physician regularly documenting services that did not actually occur. She is not willing to risk retaliation by the physician if she makes a report, and feels the culture of the organization revolves around creating revenue. Moreover, Jane is not familiar with the organization's compliance reporting process. She keeps her head down and ignores the physician's behavior.

By the time an employee begins his/her firs t day of work, they may have already formed an opinion about the organization and its expectations. Compliance professionals should ask themselves, will that employee feel like they work for a company that cares about doing the right thing? Will they feel they are in a "safe" environment, where speaking up about concerns is encouraged? Or will they feel, as employees too often do, a nervous distrust or a fear of retaliation? Proper integration of compliance into the onboarding process can set the stage for long-term employee buy-in. As the saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."