

CEP Magazine – May 2022 'What exactly do you do?' Examining the ethics and compliance role

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I came across “Career Path: Manage Your Career Like You Advise Your Clients,” an article by James Bellerjeau, while working on my presentation for the SCCE 2022 European Compliance & Ethics Institute, where I planned to explore competencies to be an effective mid-level ethics and compliance professional in the public and private sectors. (My presentation was canceled when the conference switched to a virtual format.) I read Bellerjeau’s article with great interest, and since I have worked as in-house corporate counsel, the initial paragraph resonated with me, as it related to both professions: legal and ethics and compliance. Bellerjeau states, “People sometimes ask me what in-house counsel actually do. I struggled to explain it to my kids, who came away from their visits to the office with the impression that we ‘write emails, talk all day on the phone, and have a lot of meetings.’”^[1] I, too, have struggled to explain what I do as both in-house corporate counsel and as an ethics and compliance professional.

To help others better understand the role of a chief ethics and compliance officer specifically, I started to describe it as akin to a general counsel and consigliere (an Italian word used for someone who is a confidential adviser and counselor). Like a general counsel is responsible for all aspects of a law department, including the nitty-gritty of budgets and performance, so too is the chief ethics and compliance officer responsible for all aspects of an ethics and compliance function and program. And, like a consigliere, the chief ethics and compliance officer is responsible for providing confidential advice and guidance when possible. Unfortunately, the term consigliere often evokes the movie *The Godfather* and advice related to illegal and immoral behavior—the opposite of an ethics and compliance professional.

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