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Meet Krista Wolff: It's all about purposeful fun

By Krista Wolff and Adam Turteltaub

AT: I spend a lot of time on LinkedIn as a part of this job, and I see a lot of different ways people describe themselves. They typically label themselves “compliance leaders” or “skilled compliance professionals.” You went a different route and described yourself as “Ethics & Compliance Unicorn.” I love that. How did you come up with that term for yourself?

KW: “Compliance Unicorn” originated from a T-shirt that I designed in advance of attending my first Compliance & Ethics Institute (2022) in Phoenix. I wanted to bring the same kind of energy that we were creating in the compliance program at Qualcomm, so I designed a different fun compliance-themed shirt for each day of the conference.

The titles I remember on LinkedIn are ones that are different, catchy, or fun. Given that my path leading to compliance is pretty unique, “Compliance Unicorn” seemed to fit quite nicely.

AT: So, what led you to compliance?

KW: Before joining the compliance team, I had worked at Qualcomm for seven years in two different corporate functions. It's a big company, and in both roles, I had the opportunity to make many connections across multiple functions. One of those connections was the future chief compliance officer. I didn't know it at the time we were working on a project together, but she had mentally filed away my name as someone she thought would be a good fit for the team. She didn't know it at the time, but I had seen a presentation given by the compliance team and was phenomenally interested in helping develop their training program. When she asked me if I was interested in joining the team, I jumped at the opportunity.

It was a great lesson in the importance of making authentic connections and being open to new opportunities. Networking isn't a bad word. Listening to people, understanding their perspectives, sharing ideas—all of this builds your network, and you never know when that could lead to the next big thing.

AT: Let's spend time on your education. There are lots of people who work in compliance who studied law, business, or accounting. You studied graphic design. I can definitely see the virtue of that when it comes to communicating with the workforce. How else has it helped you be a more effective compliance professional?

KW: I was one of those kids who always knew what they wanted to do (a graphic designer, not a compliance professional). I studied menu design when we went out for dinner and pored over catalog and magazine spreads

when they arrived in the mail (this was before the great and powerful internet). The way information was presented to people to help them understand or make decisions was fascinating to me, and I wanted to learn more.

As a college undergraduate, I added a concentration in communications, and in graduate school, I added studies in educational technology. My thesis focus was studying how to take dry or complicated information and make it interesting, understandable, and engaging. You can probably see how this begins to intersect with the world of corporate compliance education and communication.

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