an interview by Gerry Zack

Laura Ellis (laellis@cisco.com) was interviewed in May 2018 by **Gerry Zack** (gerry.zack@corporatecompliance.org), Incoming CEO of SCCE & HCCA, based in Minneapolis, MN.

Laura Ellis, CCEP-I, Ethics Program Manager for Global Compliance Enablement, Cisco International Limited, Feltham, UK

GZ: Thanks for taking the time to be interviewed for Compliance & Ethics Professional. Tell us about your role as an Ethics Program Manager for Cisco.

LE: Currently my role is primarily looking after our Ethics Case Management tool and process. If you email, call, or contact the Cisco Ethics Office in any way, it comes to me. The team often calls me the "smiley" side of ethics and compliance, because if something comes to me, you are already doing the right thing by reporting or disclosing it. If someone else from our team meets you, it can be not so smiley. I love my job, because it's global and I get to work with many people in different areas of the business to help solve problems, provide advice, or take the next steps toward internal investigations.

GZ: Structurally, where does the Global Compliance Enablement function sit within Cisco, and how do you interact with other functions?

LE: Global Compliance Enablement is part of the Legal department at Cisco, and my manager reports directly to the general counsel/CCO, and we in turn report out to the Audit Committee of the board of directors. I think, structurally, it works well at Cisco — we have great relationships with the senior leadership, and our tone at the top is really strong when it comes to ethics and compliance. There is a conscious effort on our side to make sure that we are the "yes" team, hence the term "enablement" in our title.

We work closely with all other business functions as we try to instill the mentality that everyone at Cisco owns compliance; and when you're such a large company, it's hard to be everywhere at once without fostering great relationships.

GZ: You have a fascinating background. You've gone from a degree in philosophy to a position in ethics and compliance in just a few short years, with a few stops along the way. At what point did ethics and compliance become interesting to you, and were there any specific events that led to this?

LE: I feel so fortunate to have gotten to where I am in such a short space of time. The last five years have been a complete whirlwind. My interest in ethics started when I was studying philosophy at university. I'll be honest, I never in a million years thought that I could get a job related to the general term "ethics," but I was fortunate enough to have a degree that allowed me to take additional classes in different departments, and I found that the business school was doing a class entitled Business Ethics. It was an incredibly interesting class, where we learned a lot about corruption and business scandals such as Enron. However, the moment I knew that this job was for me was when we were asked a series of problem questions relating to business ethics. We were asked to stand at either side of the room depending on what you thought the outcome should be. Essentially the lecturer

was trying to show that if you stood on one end of the room, you were putting profits over ethical behavior. Out of the series of questions, 90% of the time I was the only one standing on the "ethical" side of the room. I was completely shocked that these highly educated business students were willing to, hypothetically, put their bottom line above the wellbeing of their employees or even the law. I knew that it wasn't malicious or with any specific intentions; however, it highlighted to me how, in many cases, there is a lack of focus on protecting the integrity of your company or the people who work for you. It was then that I knew that I had to find out how to, metaphorically, stand on the other side of the room as a day job.