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Transformation of a healthcare compliance and privacy program – consistently evolving effectiveness

by Donna Schneider, RN, MBA, CPHQ, CPC-P, CHC, CPCO, CHPC, CCEP

Many of us have been there: we have accepted a new position and arrived to lead a department that, in our humble estimation, was not functioning at its most effective. That could be a result of training needs, processes, or technology. Instead of having a negative outlook on your new job assignment, I suggest using people skills to lead this department through a transformation. What do I mean by that? Let me share my recommendations below.

Steps to transformation

1. **Remain positive.** The process of transformation or re-envisioning is ever-constant. It requires energy in the form of human capital. Some considerations in the transformation process are costs, time, and a consistent focus on your behalf to start with positive intentions. The past is in the past and worked in the past. There is no reason to denigrate the past. To improve the present or the future, refrain from negative comments regarding predecessors or prior processes, as that will not help you in your transformation.
2. **Meet with every staff member, even those outside the department who play a significant role in your department's work yet do not report directly to you.** The idea is to engage in a “get to know you” meeting. Create a safe space for this meeting and ensure confidentiality. Establish ground rules so staff can actively participate in the meeting. Be positive and open-minded. Focus on “how we can” instead of “why we can’t.” Encourage staff to ask questions and focus on welcoming all points of view. Let staff know that no idea is too big or too small and remember to ask staff about recent achievements and frustrations. The goal here is to identify what the employee doing the job feels is working and what they would change. Active listening and mirroring what you hear would be excellent techniques during these meetings.

Sample questions are:

- A. Tell me about your job.
 - B. What works and what does not work in your role?
 - C. What is the one thing that would make your job more satisfying and rewarding?
 - D. What automated systems do we have and what automated systems do we need?
3. **Hold the same meetings with your customers.** Those who are your organization’s leaders, peers, and governing body—which may include your organization's board and/or audit committee leadership. You

want to know their expectations for your department and your role. What has worked in the past, and what would they like to see in the future? Scheduling and holding these meetings may take follow-up, tenacity, and curiosity, as busy individuals may not initially see value in this meeting. It is up to you to learn from what you hear and create the value add that your leaders, colleagues, and board members will see going forward.

Sample questions are:

- A. What is it like to work with the compliance team today when they are at their absolute best? What frustrates you in how they provide services to you?
- B. What would you like to get from the compliance team today that you do not get?
- C. What do you think will be the major drivers of disruption that will impact compliance over the next year? Over the next five years?

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