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Meet Mike Sandulak: What a former FBI agent can teach us about compliance

Mike Sandulak, Director of Investigations at Providence St. Joseph Health in Portland, OR

This interview with Mike Sandulak (mike.sandulak@providence.org) was conducted in February 2020 by SCCE & HCCA CEO Gerry Zack (gerry.zack@corporatecompliance.org).

GZ: Your first investigative role was as a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Had being an investigator or working for the FBI always been a goal of yours, or was there something that put you on this path?

MS: Being an investigator has always been something I've wanted to do. I was one who always asked way too many questions while in school and assumed there had to be answers to everything if you just kept looking for them. Also, I considered FBI special agents to be highly esteemed and distinguished investigators that exemplified integrity and respect, and I had strived to become one. FBI special agents are recruited to work on the highest level of investigations, from white-collar crimes to national security investigations, and I was very fortunate to have worked there in serving and protecting our country.

GZ: Transitioning from the FBI—or any other law enforcement position for that matter—to the private sector inevitably brings significant change to the investigative environment and process. What were some of the biggest adjustments you had to make in order to successfully settle into your life as a private sector investigator?

MS: During my first few months in the private sector, I realized that although the basics of conducting investigations remained the same—preparing an investigative plan, building rapport, conducting interviews, gathering evidence—I had a lot more to learn, especially regarding compliance-related issues. This included learning how to conduct and lead investigations differently.

One of my biggest challenges was resource allocation, as I could no longer use the same resources available to me to complete my investigations, and I did not have the given authority provided to a federal law enforcement agency. Data and general information readily available in the FBI were no longer at my disposal. Further, I had to learn how to interview people in a completely different setting and use a different approach due to legal standards and environmental awareness.

As a consequence, I soon joined industry-leading groups such as HCCA; attended trainings and presentations; read books and magazines; and, most importantly, networked with compliance professionals around the country to further increase my skill set. For me to best do my job, I had to check my ego at the door and go out and ask for assistance, and all of the above has made me a better investigator and given me the ability to best serve my organization in my position.

GZ: Having an employee with a background like yours is incredibly valuable for an organization. From an employer's perspective, what characteristics does an investigator from law enforcement bring to a healthcare organization?

MS: Having a law enforcement background brings many important investigative skills to a healthcare

organization. These include communication skills, critical and analytical thinking skills, being able to adapt to different variables quickly, having great attention to detail, and being a team player.

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