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Gwendolyn L. Hassan
(gwendolyn.hassan@unisys.com) is
Deputy Chief Compliance Officer at
Unisys in Chicago, Illinois, USA.



Adam Turteltaub
(adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org)
is Chief Engagement & Strategy
Officer at SCCE & HCCA, based in
Eden Prairie, Minnesota, USA.

Meet Gwendolyn L. Hassan: The importance of “looking around the corner” in compliance

By Gwendolyn L. Hassan, JD, CCEP, and Adam Turteltaub

AT: You’ve spent a good part of your career in logistics and manufacturing, working at a wide range of companies, first in legal roles, then in compliance. What first attracted you to it?

GH: It wasn’t so much that I was attracted to manufacturing and logistics as they were apparently attracted to me! I studied abroad as an exchange student, and having the ability to speak another language turned out to be very attractive to multinational companies in general—but especially those manufacturing under Mexico’s maquiladora program (a program providing certain tax advantages to incentivize foreign investment in manufacturing plants in Mexico). That was, I think, what first differentiated me from some other young lawyers: that combination of legal skills and language/cultural skills.

AT: Given the industries, you have worked with many unionized workforces. I remember decades ago when I started in compliance, there were concerns about whether you could get them to sit for compliance training. I’m guessing by now that concern has long passed, or do represented workers still present a challenge? And if so, how do you manage it?

GH: I think this is still an issue, but in a broader scope than just the union context of pulling people off of a manufacturing line to take compliance training. Now, the challenge includes pulling people off the phones when they are manning a help desk or pulling people in from the field when they are field service representatives or sales professionals. The potential burden on the business should not be taken for granted. This is why role-based learning is so important. Compliance training needs to be a value-added activity—one that directly enables employees to see the connection between the training and their work. No matter where an employee works, training needs to be easily accessible and narrowly tailored. I think the solution lies in being creative. Try providing people with offline methods of receiving training: for example, have you tried adding a few minutes of compliance content to training they are already receiving on safety or customer service? Or you could allow employees to show competence and test out, use microlearning people can take on their cell phones, create a short cartoon or video you can launch through your internal communication channels, hold a lunch and learn people can attend virtually over their lunch breaks; there are many ways to make compliance training not only more engaging and interesting but also less burdensome.

AT: What have you found works well to earn and keep the support of organized labor?

GH: It has been a while since I’ve worked for a company where a significant portion of the workforce was

unionized, but if you are working for a multinational company, you know that working with and obtaining the support of the local work councils many countries have can be equally as challenging as working with a labor union. In my experience, the keys are communication, transparency, and partnership. If your mindset is that the union and/or the council are your adversaries instead of your partners, that can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I suggest you view them instead as a strategic partner to compliance, an ally to help you build and reinforce the type of integrity-focused culture you want. Partnering with them requires open communication and transparency. Tell them what you're working on. Ask for their input and advice early and often. If they also start to see you as their strategic partner, that's an ideal situation on both sides.

AT: In July 2023, you joined Unisys, which is about as different as it gets since it's a technology company. What led you to make the change?

GH: Technology is definitely a new space for me and one I'm excited to learn—so many acronyms! My ultimate goal is to one day serve on the board of directors for a public company. Adding experience working in the technology industry gives me a great opportunity to further round out and complement my risk and compliance skills by applying them in a new and rapidly changing industry. The chance to work for a company that is “out front” on technology solutions—including solutions that use artificial intelligence, machine learning, and quantum computing—is something I just couldn't pass up!

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