

Gwen Romack

CEO AND PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT

OFF LEASH ETHICS & COMPLIANCE CONSULTING



MORE ABOUT ME

What is the most interesting thing about you?

I'm an award-winning author of funny books about my crazy rescue dog, and long ago used to sing professionally (with Pavarotti once!)

Skydiving, sunbathing or sightseeing?

Sightseeing! I love experiencing new things and learning about cultures through food, history, and arts.

What is one thing you could not go a day without? (Not including necessities)

Other than my husband and dog, I'd say music.

What would you love to learn to do?

Play piano.

Q&A

THE SECRET SAUCE OF COMPLIANCE

What is your secret sauce for compliance?

FUN. I know that probably sounds counterintuitive, but I see no reason why we can't make both the process of the work and the way we present it to employees fun and engaging.

What challenges have you faced that turned out to be helpful?

Enforcement actions. I had the misery/fun of dealing with a number of very serious multi-national enforcement situations when I was in-house. They were stressful, complicated, high-stakes, and at the time, seemed like the end of the world.

But it's amazed me how often I now draw on those experiences when I'm helping clients design or enhance their programs or deal with their own enforcement moments. Although I'd happily give back all my "speaking with DoJ or SDOs on behalf of the company" moments.

What makes a GREAT compliance leader?

Business experience and understanding of how things actually work "on the ground". I can't stress this enough.

Having a deep understanding of the laws is important, but understanding how the risks might really manifest, and how the processes and systems might reasonably work to catch them... that's where the magic happens. I think it also enables better and more credible conversations with our peers in other functions and in the sales organization.

What is the work achievement that you're most proud of?

The folks in my direct or indirect line that I've helped advance in their career, obtain professional certifications, get visibility, and conquer their fears through new challenges. It lights me up to see people zoom past me in their accomplishments and confidence!

Is technology and automation the answer to the understaffed compliance team?

This is a tricky one! I'll give the patented attorney answer (even though I'm not one)... it depends. Some canned solutions that can automate data capture and analysis are game changers. But I find that often they require customization for the nuances of the business and its usually complex existing infrastructure, not only during initial design but as things change and that can be more consuming than just doing whatever it was manually. I think we can also get a little lazy about analysis when a computer is doing it for us. So, a healthy mix is key.

What does it mean to be an ethical company in 2022?

I think most consumers and employees wrap a lot into the idea of "ethical", including environmental stewardship, diversity and inclusion, and even political positions on key issues. Advancements in technology have also created a whole new concept of ethics in terms of AI and how we tell algorithms to make decisions. Ethics has become less black and white and more in the eye of the beholder.

Why did you decide a career in compliance was right for you?

I was loaned to the legal department for a special compliance project and in the course of that work realized I am a compliance nerd! I've always been a rule-follower with a healthy ability to challenge rule-making when needed. But, I didn't realize how much I liked the process of understanding complex rules, breaking them down, and applying them to complex business processes. My first compliance conference was like the Star Trek Convention or Comic-Con equivalent of my dreams. What I learned was that, at the time, most of the practitioners were lawyers or accountants with little interest in the "fun" or "engaging" part of the work. I felt like I could make a difference in how we digest and communicate this stuff for the average person. Like a nerd-to-normal translator of sorts.

Have you experienced any true crises in your compliance roles?

Well, many things felt like a crisis at the time (read: subpoenas), but there was one true one that has never left me. On September 16, 2013, a subcontractor indirectly employed by my company walked into Building 197 and fatally shot 12 people and injured three others in a mass shooting at the headquarters of the Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) inside the Washington Navy Yard.

For most of that day, the FBI and other law enforcement were mobilized to find who might have been a second shooter. They called on the subcontractor's manager at my company (who was on maternity leave) to help them understand his movements, his role, where he might have been staying, his history, who he was known to spend time with, and other real-time urgent questions. I spent the day in her kitchen with her, her toddler and newborn, trying to secure answers for the authorities also sitting at the kitchen table and fielding calls from her other employees who were locked-down, hiding under desks in terror for hours.

Many saw the carnage personally and knew the shooter. I will probably never forget their voices and sheer panic. It was a horrendous day and horrendous months to follow as everyone involved started to recover.

THE RESULTS ARE IN

On LinkedIn we asked:

Diversity, equity and inclusion are discussed frequently by employers right now - how much actual change have you seen at your company?

Big change & resources given	6%
Change but a work in progress	47%
Very little & low resources	20%
No change	27%

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