

Debra Sabatini Hennelly

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

RESILITI

MORE ABOUT ME

What is the most interesting thing about you?

I love to be creative - I sing, I paint, I cook, I garden, I sew, I embroider, I love photography, and I love trying to fix things that are broken. Several years ago, I used my creativity as a path back from burnout and I even published a book using my photography.

Skydiving, sunbathing or sightseeing?

Definitely sightseeing!

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

Meeting someone new.

What would you love to learn to do?

I am re-learning to play the piano. It's coming along... slowly!

Q&A

THE SECRET SAUCE OF COMPLIANCE

What is your secret sauce for compliance?

To focus on ethical leadership and speak-up culture with as much or more intention as the traditional compliance program elements. Creating clear policies, processes, and training programs is critical, but if they are just afterthoughts to the way decisions are made, the program can never be fully effective. We need leaders to see the long-term benefits of incorporating ethical decision-making into the way they manage the day-to-day operations of the organization - even when it feels like they're sacrificing short-term gains to do so.

Avoiding liability or enforcement actions is not the most effective "why." Thinking about long-term resilience of the organization and of the people in it is our best sales pitch for integrating what we do into the way the organization runs.

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

Starting my own company back in 2004, to advise organizations on how to build practical, risk-based compliance and ethics programs and speak-up cultures. I thought I would just be consulting for a few months, while I got my head back into the idea of taking on another big leadership role, but I found out that I loved the variety of projects and helping other compliance professionals sort through their challenges.

So here I am 18 years later, almost to the day, of starting my little company. I'm especially proud of coaching compliance professionals on how to navigate obstacles (both systemic and relational), while also protecting their wellbeing and resilience.

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

Both can be a great support for an understaffed or compliance team, but we cannot assume that technology and automation can take the place of some of the things we do. In-person interaction is critical to being effective; sometimes we need to read facial expressions or answer questions real-time in order to ensure that the program is effective.

There are parts of our work that surely can be enhanced by technology. For example, analyzing all of the data that we collect through our helpline, risk and culture assessments, and various other software tools used for management controls can help us anticipate issues or at least see patterns and trends that can give us early warning signs of problems that need attention.

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

Being an ethical company in 2022 is a bit more complex than it was 25 years ago. We seem to have chipped away at the misconception that "doing the right thing" and being profitable are mutually exclusive pursuits, which is definitely progress, but we still have a lot more work to do on that score. We need to keep helping organizational leaders and middle managers lift their line of sight to long-term value and resilience.

The "VUCA" (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) operating environment—from tectonic societal changes and the growth of ESG to the pandemic and the "great resignation"—has made this a priority. Being an ethical company requires considering the interests of a broader circle of "stakeholders," beyond just looking at monthly or quarterly profits and a limited view of shareholder "value."

Focusing on employee well-being, sustainable sourcing, supply chain integrity, and political and social responsibility are central considerations in this shift.

How do you stay motivated?

By staying on top of developments in the news and in our profession. There's always something new to think about and to "connect the dots" to things my clients are dealing with. I also teach as an adjunct professor in Fordham Law School's Program on Corporate Ethics and Compliance - it's a Masters of Legal Studies program with working professionals who are hoping to advance their careers. I love teaching and interacting with my students, so that definitely keeps me motivated!

I also enjoy speaking at conferences about new perspectives—especially when I can help connect what's going on in adjacent fields to what we are doing in compliance and ethics.

What is your favorite question to ask people you interview?

To tell me about their favorite boss and what they appreciated about working for them. I can learn so much about how they relate to a manager and how they work best.

That's my big picture favorite question. My more granular favorite question is to ask what they learned yesterday, because I think it's important for us to learn something new every day.

THE RESULTS ARE IN

On LinkedIn we asked:

Hiring managers and recruiters: How likely are you to consider LinkedIn profiles when vetting candidates for an open role?

Every time	34%
Very likely	40%
Not very likely	4%
It depends	22%

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