

Why Should the Boss Listen to You: Compliance Professional as Trusted Advisor

July 2, 2012, was the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act. This piece of Congressional legislation established land grant colleges throughout the United States and paved the way for the establishment of colleges in each state to teach the practical sciences of agriculture and mechanical arts, among other things. If you went to a college or university with the designation “State” or “A&M” attached to it, you can direct your thanks to the 37th Congress for enacting legislation which provided both land grants and financial assistance. That is why such institutions of higher learning are termed “land grant colleges”. It was a clear case of Congress listening to the needs and desires of the American people.

I often write about the art of listening as one of the skills critical to being a successful business leader. However, if you are a compliance practitioner you need to have developed the necessary skills so that the senior management in your company will *listen* to you. This subject was touched on in the March/April issue of the SCCE Magazine, Compliance and Ethics Professional, in an article entitled “*Does your boss listen to you?*” by Meric Craig Bloch. In his article, Bloch notes that “Compliance professionals are business advisors”; as such they can never be effective if senior management does not listen to them. Bloch advises that the key is to become a “trusted advisor” to capture the attention of key decision makers at your company.

Bloch understands that the need to “be relevant is a constant challenge for any business advisor.” He cites to management expert Jim Lukaszewski and his book “*Why Should the Boss Listen to You*” for a seven point approach to becoming a trusted advisor to senior management. These seven disciplines are:

1. **Be trustworthy:** Trust is the first discipline and the foundation for all business relationships between an advisor and business leadership.
2. **Become a verbal visionary:** Generally a leader’s greatest skill is to articulate his or her vision in a way that is compelling and motivates employees; in other words, good verbal skills. This means that any successful leader’s trusted advisors need these skills as well.
3. **Develop a management perspective:** A trusted advisor cannot simply talk about their staff functions. A trusted advisor must be able to integrate his or her message into management’s goals and objectives.
4. **Think strategically:** As a leader’s job is almost always about tomorrow, a leader must have a strategic vision. This means that a trusted advisor must not only think strategically within your discipline but you must also integrate your function into the leader’s strategic plan.
5. **Be a window to tomorrow:** What are the patterns of your business or your professional discipline? The more that you can study and understand them, the more helpful information that you can put in front of your company’s leadership.
6. **Advise constructively:** You should start with where the leadership in your company has been and move your advice into where they want to go.

7. **Show the boss how to use advice:** This means more than having your boss accept your advice. You need to develop the skills to teach your leadership how to use your advice as well.

Bloch concludes by correctly recognizing that “every compliance issue, is ultimately, a business issue.” I often tell executives that compliance is another form of risk and as such you can measure, evaluate and then manage it. If the risk becomes too great to manage, that may create an unacceptable level of risk which your company will not tolerate. As a compliance practitioner, one of your key roles is to reduce the number and level of risks which your company cannot or will not tolerate. This is a major mechanism by which you can demonstrate the value of compliance within the organization and ensure that your contribution is relevant.

But it can only occur if your boss will listen to you.

This publication contains general information only and is based on the experiences and research of the author. The author is not, by means of this publication, rendering business, legal advice, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such legal advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified legal advisor. The author, his affiliates, and related entities shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person or entity that relies on this publication. The Author gives his permission to link, post, distribute, or reference this article for any lawful purpose, provided attribution is made to the author. The author can be reached at tfox@tfoxlaw.com.

© Thomas R. Fox, 2012