

There are few cures for insomnia more potent than a good old-fashioned compliance and ethics training session. Mind-numbingly boring topics like antitrust, bribery, labor laws, and SEC regulations anesthetize all but the most caffeinated. Even the hearty souls who manage to keep their eyes open soon become inattentive zombies with glazed looks and wandering minds.

Awaken the Zombies!

BY JIM NORTZ

Face it—if your training program consists of little more than presentation slides with bullet point summaries of laws and policies, your program is not only ineffective, it may also violate international conventions against torture. Following are a few ideas to transform a “check the box” training program to one that is an effective tool in reducing your company’s ethical and compliance risks.

Less Is More

Remember your principal objective. You are raising ethics and compliance awareness in lay people—not training law students for the bar examination. Forget the detail and the nuance. Get to the bottom line fast, while they are awake. Keep your slides simple and uncluttered with only a few ideas on each—in big letters. Strive to use as few slides as possible.

Make It Fun

The most receptive part of the human body is the funny bone. Take advantage of this by working a little

humor into your act. If you get them to laugh—even a little—your students will listen to the next thing you have to say. I recently started a session on antibribery laws by offering cash to the first person who could tell me what the definition of bribery was. It wasn’t as good as Robin Williams’ stuff, but it broke the ice and lightened the group up a bit.

Tell Stories

No matter how well-crafted, no one remembers PowerPoint® bullets. However, people listen to and remember well-told stories—especially if they are applicable to their work place. The best stories are the ones that really happened because they drive home the point that what you are teaching really matters.

Read Words, Use Pictures

We are visual creatures. That’s why we use projected slides in the first place: to enhance a verbal message with the written word. But the slides become a pointless distraction if all you do is flash them without taking the time to read and explain. If you don’t intend to read it, you don’t need it.

Pictures are, indeed, worth a thousand words. Always look for opportunities to deliver your message through a picture. Moving pictures with sound are even better; but beware of the work and special attention they require. (And don’t forget to honor copyright laws when including such materials in your compliance and ethics presentations!)

Ask Questions

Never drone on for more than 10 minutes without asking your audience a question. Socrates was no dummy. As with most great teachers, he recognized that challenging students with questions engages their minds by making them

think. If students are thinking, they are learning, and that’s the idea. The more interactive your training, the fewer zombies you will have in your class.

Use Realistic Scenarios

In addition to asking basic questions like “What is the difference between bribery and a gift?,” give your students some realistic hypothetical problems. This will let them apply the principles you are teaching, and let you test whether they are getting it. When engaging in such exercises, always consider whether it is best to challenge students individually or to allow groups to work together. Cultural differences and student personalities will dictate which approach will be most effective.

Rehearse

Like it or not, live presentations are a form of theater. When you are on stage, you are both director and star of your own production. Even the best actors don’t go on stage without rehearsing their lines. Once you have your presentation together, go to an empty room with your slide projector and run through the talk as many times as it takes to hone your message and reduce the chances of appearing unprepared. Finally, be dignified on stage, but project, inflect, and move to keep your audience’s attention. There is no more surefire way of manufacturing a room full of zombies than standing behind a podium and speaking in a muffled monotone.

By using one or more of these techniques in your next compliance and ethics talk, you can take full advantage of your opportunity to train your workforce. 🚩

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