

How to Stop Delivering Boring Compliance Training: A Holistic Approach to Employee Engagement



INTRODUCTION

A company’s compliance training covers topics that have serious ramifications for individual employees as well as the business. Even so, many people see such training as fundamentally uninteresting, irrelevant – or just plain boring. Failing to engage employees could increase the risks of unethical or non-compliant behaviors.

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WHAT MAKES COMPLIANCE TRAINING SO BORING?

Here are the three main factors that contribute to compliance training that leaves employees bored, dismissive and disengaged:

1. Information Overload

For compliance and ethics professionals, there's a real temptation to share everything they've learned about a compliance topic. They've done extensive research, and what they've uncovered is relevant and important – to them, but not necessarily to their audience.

The problem is that burdening your audience with non-essential information is a sure way to lose their attention, and it dilutes the effectiveness of the message you need to convey. When an employee doesn't see most of the information as relevant, they're likely to dismiss otherwise worthwhile content and may end up gaining nothing from the compliance training.

A common mistake is to go into way too much detail about the enforcement landscape and legislation behind your company's policy. Employees may need to know some general information about the law, but it's less than many compliance and ethics professionals assume. Global companies face additional challenges in this regard, in that the legislation that applies to employees in Brazil, for example, may be wholly irrelevant to those in the U.K. or India.



Solution:

The key is to boil down what you know about a compliance topic to the bare essentials: **key principles** and **relevant advice** about what to do in specific, real-life situations. Ask yourself, "Does this information help employees know what to do when confronted with an ethical dilemma?"



2. Long Form, Long Content

Since e-learning tools first entered the compliance training market, the standard approach has been to cover a single topic in a long session of 30-40 minutes. The vendors creating these materials tend to fill the time with technical details that the average employee probably doesn't need.

While long-form training modules may be an effective way to cover a handful of core issues, they're probably overkill for other risk topics you want to address, and they increase the risk of training fatigue.



Solution:

Use videos, cartoons and other short-form content to maximize attention. People expect videos to be fairly brief and slick, and when someone is able to see that a video runs only four minutes, they're more willing to reserve their upfront objections and judgments – which maximizes their attention to the topic at hand.

3. Lack Of Clear Takeaways

Compliance training materials often suffer from obscured or non-existent takeaways. After spending 30 minutes on an e-learning training session, employees won't necessarily know what they should do in a challenging situation.

A typical training on bribery, for example, might spend most of the time telling employees about the laws that govern bribery. When it finally gets to the point, employees learn what not to do – something like, “If you're in a foreign customs office and an official asks you for a bribe, don't give it.” Then, the employees take an assessment, and the training is done.

“Don't give the bribe” is certainly good advice, but it's not particularly useful counsel for employees who actually find themselves being asked for a bribe in real life.



Solution:

Effective compliance training provides guidance not only on what not to do, but also on what to do. Get right to the substance of the matter, presenting a common situation and the steps a person should take if/when you encounter it.

CREATING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

Making sure that your compliance content is concise, varied and relevant is the first essential step to mitigating boredom and training fatigue. But, to truly engage and motivate employees, you need to be proactive about gaining their attention and creating emotional connections.

If your current compliance resources just aren't getting through to bored, disengaged audience members, you need to employ strategies for getting around their defenses. Entertaining cartoons or surprising video content are good ways to overturn your audience's expectations, using pattern interruptions that make them more receptive and open to new learning.

Using a variety of media provides additional opportunities to illustrate and show scenarios, which is helpful in making abstract compliance issues more concrete and relatable for employees. Video, in particular, gives you the capability to arrange music, imagery, pacing and other elements in a strategic manner that gets your audience's attention and guides them through an emotional experience, making your compliance training more resonant.

Take, for example, a compliance video in which a narrator's friendly voice asks, "Have you ever been in a difficult situation where ...?" This empathic language helps to align the audience with the video's narrator and – by extension – the compliance officer who has asked them to view it. Next, the video shows a scenario that's broadly applicable and asks employees to imagine themselves in it, which arouses some degree of anxiety. Finally, the video shows how to resolve this anxiety by taking the proper steps to address the compliance issue.

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By the end of a short video, employees feel like they've gone through a challenging situation, learned what to do and reaped the emotional rewards of following the route of compliance. The viewer experiences the negative feelings associated with following the wrong path, and learns to associate compliance with feelings of happiness and success.

Focusing on emotional connections and empathy is a great way to engage employees and shape their future attitudes and behaviors. Such an approach also changes the dynamics of compliance conversations: moving away from an adversarial tone toward an empowering tone, no longer demanding but encouraging a certain outcome. The end result is a wider, more receptive audience – and compliance resources that don't put your employees to sleep.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMPLIANCE COMMUNICATION

Effective compliance communication and training requires compliance professionals to put real thought into the structure, tone and content of the materials and to communicate through multiple modalities. Compared to infrequent, long-form training sessions alone, a holistic approach to compliance communication is far more effective.

Using multi-channel, multi-modal communications enables more opportunities to engage employees and accommodates a broader range of learning styles. It also allows you to apply a variety of behavior-change principles, such as pattern interrupts and repetition, showing social proof and gaining empathy.

As you work to make your compliance training more engaging, remember that training isn't an end in itself – or just a way to avoid violating the law. Stopping an ethical or legal violation is important, but it doesn't actually move the business forward.

Striking the right balance of content types and frequency isn't easy, but the potential benefits are significant: Not only do you protect your company from liabilities, but you also empower your employees to conduct business in an ethical, compliant and profitable manner.

Compliance Communication Content Your Employees Actually Look Forward to Seeing

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COMPLIANCE WAVE

Compliance Wave, a Steele company, provides engaging compliance communication tools that utilize behavior-science principles to drive meaningful change. Leading global organizations use our unique Compliance Pulse Communication and Training system to reinforce understanding of compliance and ethics issues, foster commitment and solidify intentions among employees, agents and other third parties. The company is led by industry pioneers with more than 20 years of experience creating innovative communications and training solutions. Learn more about our approach, our team and effective compliance communication at www.compliancewave.com.



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