

Mike Scher talks with the 'Lion of Compliance'

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Michael Scher in Donna Boehme, RAND Symposium, Retaliation



Donna Boehme is widely credited with transforming the compliance profession into what is now known as **Compliance 2.0**. For that ten-year pioneering struggle and for creating models for global compliance programs, the SCCE's **10-year anniversary award** for dedicated service went to her as the "Lion of Compliance."

Donna is also known among compliance officers as a warm and wise friend, the one COs should turn to if threatened with retaliation, or when unsure in the tough situations, like how to deliver internal reports of wrongdoing to unresponsive top executives and directors. Donna convenes the annual **RAND Symposium** reports on strategy for this evolving profession.

Donna is a founder of **Compliance Strategists**, a leading consulting firm based in the metropolitan New York area specializing exclusively in compliance, ethics, risk and governance practice. She was previously in private law practice with Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson in New York. She holds a J.D. from New York University School of Law.

Donna kindly agreed to answer a few questions for the FCPA Blog.

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When you were a little girl, did you always want to grow up to be a compliance professional and to design and develop the first comprehensive compliance program for a global multinational company?

No, never for a second! But I was there for the birth of our profession in the early 90's, and it was after attending an early PLI on Compliance in NYC that I came home and told my husband that this was going to be HUGE and GLOBAL! I said I could imagine global teams of compliance staff or at a minimum a compliance officer at every key location reporting to a chief compliance officer! At that time I thought I would definitely be part of that someday!

Are you surprised about the direction compliance is taking today?

No, from the beginning I always thought that compliance, to be successful, would have to be a part of the CSuite and in touch with the Board. I can say what doesn't surprise me: 1) that compliance is regarded as a "hot profession" now, in light of the complexity of risks on the corporate landscape and 2) the demise of Compliance 1.0 (compliance as **a captive arm of legal**) -- which was always doomed to fail on so many levels.

Some people say the compliance movement has played itself out and others think it's just getting started. Where do you stand?

I can't see any substantiation for saying Compliance is "played out." As discussed in this year's RAND Symposium, the profession has spent decades now forming and defining its craft and evolving its best practices, and part of that time fighting to define itself as a separate and distinct profession from Legal. That battle has been won, and now the profession needs to embrace Compliance 2.0 and build robust, effective programs that

are structured for success. I'd say we are in the building stage of that endeavor.

Compliance officers are often subject to retaliation and threats for just doing their job. Can you explain your advice about "voting with their feet"?

I wrote to my profession once that **There is No Crying in Compliance** meaning that CCO's need to choose carefully, and avoid jobs that are not positioned for success. What I find astounding and unproductive is that when a CCO leaves a post, their company is usually able to fill that role with a successor who doesn't even bother to question the departing CCO about their reasons for leaving. That is just WRONG and unsupportive of the profession. I'm one of the folks who would like to see a CCO exiting as an 8K Event that needs to be disclosed and explained to the market, just like a change in auditors. Sunshine is a great cure for the kinds of retaliation that many CCOs face, just for doing their jobs well.

You made a career in compliance. Is the field open to women? Do women make better compliance officers than men?

Yes, it's open to women and I can point to a number of women who are stars in the field. I wouldn't say women make better CCOs broadly, but I do think that many of the traits needed by a strong, effective CCO are of the soft EQ [Emotional Quotient] variety that some professional women wield skillfully.

Going back to my first question, do you ever wish you had run away and joined the circus or are you still glad you became a compliance officer?

Yes it is a noble and dynamic profession with an exciting future, filled with people with talent, character and courage! I often feel like one of those actresses who say "I can't believe I'm being paid to do what I love!" Compliance is a great place to be and it's a profession I am very proud to support and be a part of.

Michael Scher is a senior editor of the FCPA Blog. He has over three decades of experience as a senior compliance officer and attorney for international transactions. He can be contacted [here](#).