CFIUS: Compliance with a National Security Agreement (P20)

Making audit your best friend (P24)

Cyberattacks in a global supply chain: How compliance officers can mitigate risk (P28)

So different and so alike: Internal audit and compliance (P32)

DRIVE THE CHANGE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION (P14)
Have you ever worked for a boss who treated you poorly? A “leader” who envisioned themselves as the hammer and you as the nail? Now, how about someone who put your needs first? A leader who valued your input, listened, and helped you to succeed? I will venture to guess we have all had both experiences. So, which one did you work harder for?

As I reflect on my professional career, those leaders I respected and admired most were all servant leaders. They were more than “a boss.” They had high expectations but were also mentors and leaders who listened, cared, and were invested in my success. I respected and wished to emulate them both professionally and personally. I can say absolutely, I worked hardest for them and did so gladly.

As compliance professionals, we know employees can be afraid or intimidated by us and may sometimes view us as the hammer as opposed to a partner in their success. Might we realize better results when stakeholders buy in to our programs, because they want to and not because they have to?

I say “yes” and believe practicing servant leadership can help!

What is servant leadership? Robert Greenleaf first coined the term servant leadership in a 1970 essay titled “The Servant as Leader.” According to Greenleaf, the most important characteristic of servant leadership is making it a priority to serve rather than lead. Instead of employees working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve employees. Similarly, Inc. magazine’s Peter Economy describes servant leadership as, “the typical hierarchy where employees are supposed to serve their bosses is turned upside down. Instead, leaders serve their people” (2015).
Leaders must first be great listeners — not simply nodding their heads and smiling but truly listening.

Persuasion
According to Greenleaf, another characteristic of servant leadership is a reliance on persuasion. Rather than using one’s positional authority in making decisions, the servant leader always seeks to convince rather than coerce.

As compliance professionals, we may force compliance to some extent. But, we know this is an unsustainable approach and, at best, a hollow victory. We are looking for long-term wins and buy-in from employees. To achieve this, we know employees are much more apt to follow compliance, because they want to as opposed to being coerced.

As former President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done, because he wants to do it.”

Besides putting others first, some other core beliefs of servant leadership include:

◆ Believing everyone deserves respect and trust
◆ Sharing power and gaining consensus
◆ Knowing people perform at their best when they feel they are making valuable contributions

For me, not only are these tenants the right way to treat people, they just make good business sense. Fortune magazine’s annual rankings of “The 100 Best Companies to Work For” show companies practicing servant leadership consistently rank within their top 10.³

Servant leadership and the compliance office
In his 2005 article titled “The Understanding and Practice of Servant-Leadership,” Larry Spears outlined ten characteristics defining servant leadership. Of these characteristics, I chose three I feel are especially pertinent to our roles as compliance professionals:
1. Listening
2. Empathy
3. Persuasion

Listening
What are the traits of a good leader? Some that come to my mind are decisiveness, determination, vision, and communication. These traits are emblematic of how we perceive good leadership. But, to do any of these well, leaders must first be great listeners — not simply nodding their heads and smiling but truly listening.

Most of us can tell when whoever we are speaking to is not listening. It is almost like a sixth sense. Even if someone thinks they are good at pretending to listen, most of us know better. Listening shows we care about others and what they have to say and that we value their opinions. So when someone assumes we are not listening, they also perceive us as uncaring, disrespectful, and untrustworthy.

Listening also allows us to understand where others are coming from and what their motivations are. Some people simply want to be heard. Even if things do not go their way, if they feel they have been heard, they are more apt to buy-in and support final decisions.

For our message to be heard and supported, we must have the trust and respect of our stakeholders. To earn trust and respect and to understand others, we must be good listeners.

Empathy
Servant leaders strive to understand and empathize with others. As compliance professionals, the more we understand the organization, the more we can understand the challenges employees may experience when trying to implement compliance solutions. Employees who see we understand and empathize with their challenges are more likely to buy in to the compliance program.

In order for us to empathize, we need to take the time to learn about other’s roles in the organization as well as what is happening in their personal lives. To gain trust and help others succeed, we must first understand their needs and inspirations. To quote Henry Ford, “If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from that person’s angle as well as from your own.” As compliance professionals, we know this to be as true in our line of work as in any other.

We cannot place demands on business partners and then hide behind our perceived authority as compliance officers. We must be empathetic to their needs and should always seek solutions that limit negative impacts as much as possible.
Conclusion
As kids, we had no choice but to accept "because I told you so" from our parents. However, as working adults, “because I told you so” is not the best way to gain compliance and likely is not helpful for morale either. Unfortunately, many organizations and leaders still model a traditional, autocratic, hierarchical style of leadership in which they view themselves as the parents and the employee as the child.

As compliance professionals wanting to grow support for our programs, servant leadership can prove to be a useful tool. I am confident most compliance professionals are already servant leaders at heart. But, it takes time, effort, and much practice to develop servant leadership skills and years to gain mastery. So for those of us yet to master servant leadership, let us join in further study and continued practice!

Endnotes

Takeaways
◆ Trust and respect are key to gaining buy-in for compliance programs. Practicing servant leadership helps build both.
◆ Listening to employees and understanding their challenges helps us to implement compliance initiatives with limited business disruption.
◆ Employees are more apt to follow compliance because they want to as opposed to because they have to.
◆ Rather than positional authority, the servant leader seeks to convince rather than coerce.
◆ Servant leadership makes it a priority to serve rather than to lead.

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