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Creative passion, collaboration, and soft skills in Compliance

an interview with **Walter E. Johnson**

Director of Compliance and Ethics
Kforce Government Solutions, Inc.

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Walter E. Johnson,
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an interview by Stephanie Gallagher

Meet Walter E. Johnson

Stephanie Gallagher (Stephanie.gallagher@corporatecompliance.org),
 SCCE/HCCA Social Media Manager, conducted this interview with
Walter E. Johnson (wjohnson@kforcegov.com).

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SG: Thank you, for your willingness to share your expertise with us. Please tell us about your professional background and how you came to be in the Compliance field.

WJ: As a child, I wanted a career in the automotive industry; specifically, my goal was to be a car designer. At the time, there were four design schools in the United States that the Big 3 (Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors) used for recruiting members of their design team. It is a very competitive career path. I decided to broaden my career plan by pursuing a degree in business marketing at

Bowie State University. I figured that designing marketing campaigns for the industry would fulfill my creative passion. Throughout college, I submitted designs and, in my senior year, a presentation video. This was a decade before YouTube and smartphones.

During my senior year, one of my college friends began working for Kaiser Permanente, an integrated healthcare delivery system. He enjoyed working for the organization, and he talked about his experiences often. At the time, I had a temporary position assisting the trading desk at an investment firm. After graduating, I submitted an application to Kaiser Permanente. A few weeks later, I received a call. I was so excited that I arrived a day early for my interview. At first, I was embarrassed, but after receiving the offer, it makes a great story.

I joined the organization as a claims assistant in the Claims department. A year later, I became a proposal associate in the Marketing department. Finally, I moved into the Underwriting and Actuarial Services department. I started as an analyst and was promoted to an underwriter.

During one of our staff meetings, the vice president of Underwriting announced that our department

received approval for a compliance position—compliance coordinator (for the eastern regions). The position was not well-defined and it was confusing to many. One of my colleagues said, “No

one is going to apply for that job; it is a demotion.” I decided that I was going to apply for the position that day. I knew that I was going to make a difference in the role. The position included many of my interests, and there was the opportunity for me to define the role. For example, I enjoy writing, and a responsibility was coordinating the policy development process. I am creative, and another responsibility was developing and conducting training sessions focusing on compliance, fraud, waste, and abuse. Deciding on a template and selecting graphics can make a difference in the tone of a presentation. I enjoy learning and people, so I was looking forward to participating in various work groups to identify and propose mitigation to organizational risks.

After accepting the position, the organization launched an initiative to comply with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. At the time, compliance was voluntary but, eventually, it became a mandatory requirement for the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC). One of

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my responsibilities included coordinating the initiative within three regions (Mid-Atlantic, Georgia, and Ohio). Gradually, my responsibilities increased to coordinating regulatory submissions, logistics, and facilitating entrance and exit interviews for audits conducted by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). I also co-lead the implementation of the Pricing Policy Library, an online policy management

system. Several of the workgroups included Compliance Steering Committee Workgroup, Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity Workgroup, Legislative Committee, and the National Pricing Policy Workgroup. Although my position was primarily

focused on underwriting and actuarial services, I was responsible for reporting quarterly to senior leadership within the region and corporate headquarters. Eventually, the report was shared with the chief compliance officer as a best practices document.

After 15 years, I decided to accept an opportunity with Ameritox LTD, a clinical laboratory that was under a corporate integrity agreement (CIA). As the Director of Compliance Systems and Finance, I focused on the compliance review of focus arrangements, business associate agreements, and physician education events, ensuring compliance to Self-Referral Law (Stark) and Anti-Kickback Statute (AKS), annual compliance training, process improvement, and implementing reporting tools.

SG: Can you tell us a little bit about your current role as Director of Compliance and Ethics at Kforce Government Solutions?

WJ: Let’s begin with a brief overview of Kforce Government Solutions (KGS). This is important, because my role expands beyond

healthcare compliance. KGS provides government contracting services and products. KGS is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kforce Inc., a professional staffing services firm. As a federal government contractor, we provide technical and professional services to the Civilian Service (CS) and Department of Defense (DoD) sectors. For example, we have a contract with the Veteran Affairs (VA) and this falls under the Civilian Services business unit. Additionally, we have a contract with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and this falls under Defense Services business unit. Our TraumaFX business unit manages our product line of ruggedized, untethered, trauma training manikins. These products provide realistic training for medics and first responders of both military and civilian agencies.

As the KGS Director of Compliance and Ethics, I am responsible for managing a compliance and ethics program that meets the requirements of the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), Defense Contracting Audit Agency (DCAA), Defense Contracting Management Agency (DCMA), and other federal contracting rules and regulations.

We have 600+ KGS associates and most of them operate at government locations. It is important to ensure that our associates remain connected. Our approach is providing multiple communication channels to remain connected. For example, we have road shows to visit our associates across the country to reinforce our Commitment to Integrity, which is our corporate code of conduct shared with Kforce Inc. and Kforce Global Solutions, Inc. Our road shows include our Chairman and CEO, Patrick MoneyMaker, as well as representation from

Human Resources, the Facility Security Office, Legal, and Compliance.

Site visits require coordination, because security clearance levels vary among our associates. Additionally, we host quarterly town hall meetings and distribute a quarterly newsletter. All members of our leadership team contribute a column that provides updates on their business unit; my column is entitled, “Compliance Corner.”

As a solutions provider, we use a cloud-based platform that includes a social media site. I use this site to casually reinforce program messages, provide updates, and distribute information. Although we have

multiple communication channels, we are committed to ensuring our associates are able to access information. When possible, I participate in our firm’s events to demonstrate that we have an open line of communication. Through these activities, I am able to connect with our team and establish a relationship.

In addition to communication activities, I conduct compliance investigations and internal audits. I monitor regulatory reporting activities to ensure timely submission and respond to our hotline complaints.

My healthcare experience remains vital. As mentioned, we have a contract with the VA. In their mission to care for our veterans, we play an important role to ensure our veterans receive quality care by protecting their health information. All of our associates performing on the VA contract require training on topics such as privacy and security. Although the VA administers compliance training for all contractors, these topics are included in our annual compliance and ethics training session. Keeping abreast of regulations such as the HIPAA Omnibus Rule remains important.

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As a federal government contractor, ensuring our associates receive training on procurement integrity, false claims, gifts and gratuities, kickbacks, organizational conflicts of interest, and personal conflicts of interest is important. There are some similarities as well as some major differences between industries but, when observing the bottom line, the objectives are similar. From a healthcare perspective, it is providing quality care at an affordable price, and from a government contracting perspective, it is providing quality products and services at an affordable price. Our services and products contribute to saving and protecting lives.

SG: Does your position have direct interaction with the board of directors?

WJ: Yes, I have direct interaction with the board of directors. Prior to board updates, our Compliance Steering Committee reviews the progress of items listed on our annual work plan and the status of recently identified risks. This meeting is followed by the board of directors Compliance Committee before reporting to the board of directors. At a minimum, these meetings occur quarterly.

SG: What is your favorite part of your job?

WJ: By far, our corporate culture. The board and senior leadership demonstrate genuine interest in compliance and ethics program activities, especially work plan status and risk assessments. They are engaged in program activities by providing guidance and valuable feedback. There is support for my program ideas, and having support makes the challenging activities much easier. Also, the Compliance Steering Committee includes experienced and tenured associates who are passionate about their business units and thus,

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make our dialogues interesting. Dan Roach, HCCA/SCCE Board member said, "Surround yourself with smart people and rely on them." Fortunately, I have Kathy Massie, Vice-President of Contracts, Compliance & Pricing (KGS) and Paige Shannon, Senior Associate & General Council (Kforce). Both have extensive experience in government contracting.

SG: We heard that there is an interesting story behind your pursuing your current position. Do you mind sharing?

WJ: After leaving the clinical lab, a Kforce recruiter contacted me about a compliance privacy and security position at Kaiser Permanente. The hiring manager's travel schedule made scheduling an interview challenging. At the same time, another Kforce recruiter contacted me about my current position as the KGS Director of Compliance and Ethics. Although I was entertaining the other opportunity, I was ready to expand my experience beyond healthcare. I was excited to receive the call and pursue the opportunity with KGS. A couple of days before my interview, I posted some advice to a compliance certification candidate on HCCAnet/SCCEnet. Paige Shannon saw the post and mentioned it during my interview.

SG: What advice can you give to a compliance professional interested in changing industries?

WJ: The Compliance profession has opportunities in many industries. After identifying the desired industry, I recommend evaluating your skills and experience to determine a transitioning strategy. Be able to demonstrate how skills and experiences will contribute to an easier transition, and assess your ability to be successful in the next role. When reflecting on my previous experiences, each had a

way of contributing to my entry into government contracting. For example, my experience as proposal associate gives me a baseline understanding of the proposal process, and my experience assisting traders helps with developing compliance training focusing on insider trading.

Also, I recommend networking and finding a mentor in the desired industry. These individuals can recommend resources such as books, training sessions, distribution lists, and networking groups. Within a short period, I joined the National Contract Management Association and began purchasing resources such as the Government Contractors Compliance Handbook. The ability to be surrounded by experienced individuals and great reference material contributes to an easier transition.

SG: What advice can you give to a new compliance professional? What is the most important thing for a new compliance professional to know/learn?

WJ: Personal development is important, and maintaining an equal focus on hard skills as well as the soft skills. Understanding the regulations applicable to your organization is equally as important as having an approachable personality. If members of the organization cannot approach the compliance professional, then they may choose to avoid them altogether. Their options become sharing concerns with their supervisor, the hotline/helpline, OIG, the contracting officer, or, worse, no one. Making sure the option isn't "no one" is more than enough reason to focus on soft skills. Recently, I was listening to a Dr. Phil McGraw audiobook and he said, "Talk to your kids about things that don't

matter, so that it is easier for them to discuss things that do matter." This applies to the compliance professional. Being authentic and showing a genuine interest in your colleagues and their responsibilities is a great approach to establishing trust. By establishing trust, there is a better chance of learning of compliance concerns sooner, rather than later.

SG: How do you stay up to date on new regulations and best practices?

WJ: Monthly, I review *Compliance Today*, *Compliance & Ethics Professional*, and a publication focusing on government contracting. Additionally, I attend conferences, webinars,

and I subscribe to industry updates provided by local firms.

Often, there are posts on *HCCAnet/SCCEnet* that share regulatory guidance/ notices or request best practices on program implementation.

Sometimes the discussions may not apply, but participating or viewing the exchange is beneficial. Not only does it increase awareness of a topic that other compliance professionals are experiencing, but it becomes a reference topic to include in decision-making. It is my primary resource for reviewing the "What would you do?" scenarios. Often, there are discussions focusing on compliance risks associated with HIPAA, social media, and mobile devices. Frequently, Frank Ruelas and the crew have interesting discussions on whether posted scenarios are impermissible or permissible privacy breaches. The ability to share ideas and compare interpretations of regulatory guidance is beneficial to self-development.

SG: You hold your CHC, CHPC, CCEP, and CCEP-I credentials through the Compliance

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Certification Board. What was your motivation to seek these certifications?

WJ: By obtaining these certifications, I am demonstrating that I understand the framework and regulatory requirements to develop, manage, and promote a compliance and ethics program. Additionally, it demonstrates my commitment to the profession and, hopefully, inspires others to demonstrate their commitment to the profession, also.

SG: Besides Twitter, are there other forms of social media that you use? How do you decide what social network you'll use?

WJ: In addition to Twitter, I have accounts with LinkedIn, Periscope, Pinterest, and YouTube. I am always looking for ideas to improve efficiency, and I make my decision with this in mind. Occasionally, I read leadership articles on LinkedIn, but primarily, it serves as a backup contact list to my smartphone. I am new to Periscope. After reading Nancy Beckley's "Connectivity" column in *Compliance Today*, I started my Periscope account. So far, I receive updates reminding me that "Tom Fox is live." I plan to tune in soon! Sometimes, I refer to the infographics on Pinterest for compliance program training ideas. Former federal prosecutor, Michael Volkov, has several presentations available on YouTube on the role of the compliance officer and compliance program structure. I find these videos helpful, and I have created a compliance video playlist that includes his videos as well as HCCA/SCCE videos. All are great resources.

SG: What are the pros and cons that you see with social media in healthcare today?

WJ: Social media is a channel for receiving an abundance of information and data on practically any topic. Depending on the feed, information is constantly updated and delivered to our mobile devices. This is good. Unfortunately, etiquette varies among

generations and social classes; this presents a challenge in many healthcare settings. Physicians are often double-booked to see patients with complex cases in 15 minute slots. Without consent, some patients take pictures of waiting rooms and post them along with their comments about their waiting time on Yelp. This is only one of many social media challenges facing healthcare. Another challenge is healthcare staff using social media to communicate, despite the many training efforts to communicate the associated risks. Eventually, we will need "Tech-Free" zones similar to "Smoke-Free" zones to enforce the expected behavior in healthcare settings.

SG: You have written several articles focusing on compliance and ethics. How did you get started? What inspires you? Where can readers find your articles?

WJ: I have written articles for *Compliance Today*, *Compliance & Ethics Professional*, *Ethikos*, and the *Compliance & Ethics Blog*. I started with a single post to HCCAnet/SCCEnet entitled, "Question of the Day... Who is interested in writing an article but too busy." There were about five responses and four of us (Adam Weinstein, Cindy Hart, Frank Ruelas, and I) agreed to start our collaboration with the Compliance 101 series. Although it serves as a refresher for many, the series is targeted towards new compliance professionals. A few months after starting our collaboration, I learned on a Friday that I passed the CHC exam. That night, I could not sleep, and that's when I wrote my first solo article entitled, "Corporate hoarders: Implementing a record retention and destruction program."

Last year, I read *Good Leaders Ask Great Questions*. The author asks the following question, "Why do you write?" and the response was, "To inspire people that I may never get a chance to meet." That response captures my reason for writing. When I left the 2016

Compliance Institute, I was talking to a member who attended the CI for her first time. When we entered the shuttle, we were separated. When we arrived at the airport, my suitcase was placed on the sidewalk and I rushed off to make my flight. When I arrived at the check-in desk, I realized that I left my book bag in the shuttle. When I returned outside, the shuttle driver and the HCCA member were waiting with my bag. She said, "I wasn't going to let him leave." After thanking both of them, I gave her my business card and she said, "You are Walter Johnson; no wonder you look familiar. I find your information helpful and just yesterday, I gave my friend one of your articles to review." I am honored that readers find my articles helpful, and this is my inspiration to contribute to the association.

Most of my individual articles appear in *Compliance & Ethics Professional, Ethikos, and The Compliance & Ethics Blog*. I enjoy collaborating, and that is evident in the *Compliance Today* articles. Latoya, my wife, contributed to the physician perspective of "Compliance Training: The vantage point." The collaboration in itself is interesting, because you have Jeanne Fahey who worked with Latoya, Stephanie Helline and I worked together, and Jeanne and Stephanie are long-time friends. Collaboration has a wonderful way of capitalizing on diverse experiences to achieve a vision. Depending on their subscription type, members can access the articles on the HCCA website or SCCE website. All articles are available on my LinkedIn page (www.linkedin.com/in/walter16).

SG: What areas of healthcare compliance do you see as being the greatest concern for healthcare providers in the next year?

I am honored that readers find my articles helpful and this is my inspiration to contribute to the association.

WJ: I believe one of the greatest concerns will be aligning to the Affordable Care Organizations (ACO). The ability to meet documentation requirements and ensure providers are meeting quality care measurements to avoid the risks of reduced compensation will be challenging.

SG: What areas of compliance do you see as being the greatest risks for government contractors in the next year?

WJ: Time accounting, procurement integrity, and organizational conflicts of interest will remain at the forefront of government contracting risks. In 2017, there will be a new administration, and that may pose new challenges to government contractors. During this administration, several federal programs were either eliminated or received reduced funding. Fewer contracts led to increased contract protests and delayed the issuing of task orders. Also, there were several presidential executive orders issued that were applicable to government contractors. I believe that we will learn more after the new administration is elected.

SG: Are there other industries that can learn from the healthcare industry?

WJ: I believe there are best practices to be learned from each industry. More specifically, there is attention on the automotive industry. Last year, the Senate passed the Motor Vehicle Safety Whistleblower Act. There are privacy and security concerns growing within the auto industry, but that remains a hot topic for all industries.

SG: Please let us know more about you. What types of volunteer work, hobbies, and/or

relaxation activities do you enjoy? How do you decompress after a stressful day at the office?

WJ: I enjoy spending time with family. Many evenings and weekends are filled with Latoya and me chauffeuring our two children to their growing list of activities, which include swimming, soccer, chess, and gymnastics to name a few. Sometimes I escape to my garage. I enjoy home renovation projects, and I am always brainstorming on my next project. My hobbies include visiting automotive museums and car shows, so I have a bucket list of travel

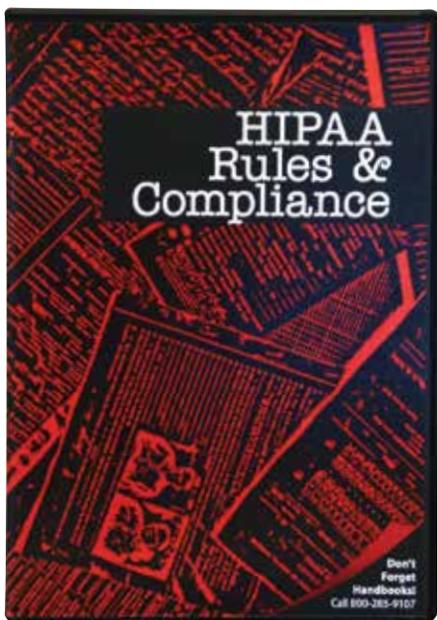
destinations. As for volunteering, I joined the conference committee for both the HCCA DC Regional Conference and SCCE DC Regional Conference. I enjoy participating in both of these groups. Occasionally, I teach business ethics at a local college; it is one way I contribute to the next generation.

SG: Thank you, Walter, for taking time with us for this interview.

WJ: Thank you, Stephanie! I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you. 🍷

www.hcca-info.org/duphipaadvd

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) has undergone several modifications since its enactment in 1996, from the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (2010) to the HITECH Act. Recently, the Department of Health and Human Services issued the HIPAA Omnibus Rule to revise, enhance, and strengthen HIPAA yet again.



With these layers of changes, how can employees know what has stayed constant, expanded, or altered altogether? And how does this new rule impact your compliance strategies?

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