

5 Things to Think About Before You Give that Compliance Presentation

Ted Banks^{*}

Personally reaching out to clients and colleagues with a compliance message can be a superior way to educate them about compliance risks, particularly as compared to a mediocre online computer-based training program. You not only have a chance to present a message that is customized for your client or company, but you have a chance to build a personal relationship with the people in your audience. Very often people are reluctant to reach out to someone they haven't met in person, but once they've had that personal encounter, communications improve. Many lawyers have had the experience of someone coming up to them after a compliance presentation, and saying "Can I talk to you about . . . ?"

But you also can damage your credibility and set-back the compliance program by giving a bad presentation. It could be too long, or have poor slides, or be unrelated to the business, or you might be nervous and unintentionally convey to the audience that you really don't know what you are talking about. Although unintentional, you may help solidify negative stereotypes of lawyers (they are clueless, they are arrogant, they only care about themselves, etc.).

Getting in front of a live audience is an important and sometimes rare opportunity to advance the cause of compliance. Here are a few things to think about so you don't blow your chance:

1. What do you know the audience you will be facing? Can you have a conversation with the audience?

If you have not otherwise interacted with the group you will be addressing, spend some time learning about who they are, and the products they sell. If you don't know the kind of problems they have faced in the past or might currently be facing, do some research. When you start out, approach the audience as a friend and colleague, and stress that the information you are providing will help them succeed, but that you are very interested in hearing about their concerns and needs. Make some part of your presentation a bonding exercise – such as pictures of their office or plant, or perhaps even a local sport team. Make sure they know that this presentation is about them – not about you.

2. Do you know how not to talk like a lawyer?

Your goal here is not only to share some compliance information, but to convince the audience that you are "good guy" (or "good gal"). Many lawyers think they need to talk or write "like a lawyer" with big words and long sentences. All that will do is send the folks scurrying to their cell phones as they tune you out. Keep your presentation simple – which means easy to understand, not childish or condescending. Your skills as a lawyer should include the ability to explain complex legal concepts in simple terms. Always remember that while you take your subject seriously, and stress its importance, you don't take yourself seriously. But

^{*} Partner, Scharf Banks Marmor, Chicago, IL tbanks@scharfbanks.com

don't go overboard on the jokes, and probably it is best to skip the jokes altogether if you are an American lawyer speaking to a group in another country or where the audience has a significant number of non-Americans.

3. YouTube and the media are your friends.

Short (~2 minute) videos are great additions to any presentation. If you don't have a library of videos from a commercial compliance vendor, search online. You would be surprised at what you might find. Apart from short videos that other people have made (and are available for use without violating anyone's copyright), look for news reports that might illustrate the compliance issue you are discussing.

If you have an audience wedded to their smartphones, figure out a way to use the devices as part of your presentation. Developing a custom app may be a bit pricey, but if you can get everyone's email address in advance, you can send them materials to look at during the presentation. For example, a hypothetical story about which they need to determine a solution. Anything that gets the audience's input and participation is a plus. They enjoy it, and because of this they think better of you. Dividing the audience into groups to do something is also a good technique to engage them actively. Although you might think that it is an inefficient use of time, it is a much more potent learning technique than listening to a lecture.

4. Shorter is always better – and you can do it.

Edit your presentation until you have boiled down to the essence. Whatever time you are given to speak, plan to use a fraction of it. Set aside time so that (unless it is a huge crowd) everyone can introduce themselves (helps build rapport with the audience), and allow time for questions at the end. If possible, address everyone by name. If you don't get questions and you find yourself with extra time, have questions for them ready to go. You can throw up a few extra slides, and see how they respond ("Now that you know all about _____, what would you do if this happened?")

If you do ask questions, make sure you listen carefully and respond respectfully. If the question becomes too lengthy, or may expose legal liability issues, politely say that you will talk to the person offline. You don't want to have the program hijacked by something that is of interest to only one person, or expose matters that would otherwise be privileged.

Although lawyers want to pack in as much material as they can, our attention spans fade. Stuff that you present toward the end of a long presentation simply is not retained, and the audience is annoyed for causing them to suffer through a long presentation. Think about TED talks – 18 minutes maximum. If you go much longer without audience involvement in an activity, you may not accomplish anything.

5. Leave them with no more than 4 things to remember – one of which should be whom to call with questions.

Your presentations should be designed so that everyone can play back the essence of what you were talking about. I submit that for any compliance subject, this can be done. For example, if you are giving an antitrust presentation, your main points should be:

- Never talk about competitive matters with a competitor
- Don't unfairly try to dominate a market, or talk as if you are

- Treat customers fairly
- If you ever have a question, call or email _____.

Did I leave stuff out? Of course. If I'm talking to sales or marketing people, I might add in something about unfair or deceptive conduct. If I'm talking to strategy people, I might talk about mergers. But whomever I talk to, I want them to remember the main points. They do not need to be an expert on the minutiae – that is our job. We basically want to educate them enough so that their radar is turned on; when a potential compliance issue surfaces, they will know what to do or whom to call.

Think about how your presentation will be received *outside of a legal context*. Put yourself in the shoes of the audience members. You want to show them you care. You want to sell the concept that compliance is a good thing, and that it is OK to do business with integrity. You want to establish trust and build a relationship so that people will view you as a colleague who wants to help them achieve their business goals, not as a policeman who is only playing “gotcha” if they make a mis-step.