

## Compliance Officer Stress Management

[Richard P. Kusserow](#) | December 2022

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There has been a long-term trend in increased stress levels for Compliance Officers, including adding new responsibilities (e.g., HIPAA Privacy compliance). However, the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in a sharp spike in the stress level for all healthcare organizations, including the compliance function. The last couple of years have seen an unprecedented number of employees, including compliance officers, retiring or quitting their job. This has been coined as the “Great Resignation.” In addition, many compliance offices had to cope with people, including their own staff, working remotely. All of this resulted in more deadline pressures, fewer resources, longer hours, and unrealistic expectations from leadership. Consequently, anxiety and stress levels are very high now, with little relief in the foreseeable future. Here are a few suggestions to consider for managing Compliance Officer stress:

- 1. Remain Strategically Focused.** Being drawn into minor and less important matters will divert energy and add to stress. It is critical to keep focused and not be diverted from strategic goals and the related tasks. This will permit better prioritizing of effort and deciding what can be delegated to others.
- 2. Prioritizing.** Focus more on prioritizing time by deciding what is needed to be done, the level of importance, time needed, and level of effort to get the tasks completed. From this, work can be ordered in terms of priority.
- 3. Establish Routine.** Consider developing a routine that includes clearing small tasks that take little work, such as answering e-mails and returning telephone calls. This provides a sense of completion of tasks. It is also advisable to establish meeting times with staff and others. This will assist in being able to better manage the balance of time and provide updates on progress. Actions of these types provide a familiar routine that adds a level of comfort for everyone involved.
- 4. Self-Awareness.** The most effective way of avoiding stress is to become more self-aware of reaction by others to presentations, work delivery and reporting.

- 5. Determine Necessary and Non-Necessary.** It is of little value to struggle against issues that are outside of one's control or unnecessary for compliance program success. The focus should always remain on those issues where efforts can make a positive difference and impact on program responsibilities.
- 6. Create "To-Do" Lists.** It is common to feel overwhelmed with a sense that nothing is really being accomplished. Often, it may be a matter of not realizing what really has been done that causes the feeling that nothing was accomplished. "To-do" lists of tasks are very important for controlling this stress. "To-do" lists keep you on track and allow you to cross off tasks when completed, which adds to a feeling of accomplishment. They evidence progress. "To-do" lists should be for the day, week, month and longer term. A critical feature for this process is determining levels of importance and time needed to address what is urgent, what is important, what is routine.
- 7. Delegation.** One of the best tools for managing stress is to find ways to better use the talents and skills of others. Knowing your people and the work they can do helps you to delegate tasks for them to address. Letting others share in carrying the burden will go a long way to reduce stress. This also involves deciding on what tasks can be delegated for others to do. The more that smaller tasks can be assigned out to others, the more time there will be for larger and more complicated matters.
- 8. Using Contractors.** One common method for managing stress is contracting out services and expertise to supplement internal resources. The most common cases involve outsourcing compliance office related functions to a vendor. Seventy-five percent of organizations use vendors for their hotline and sanction screening needs. Many also use contractors for compliance training programs, conducting evaluations /audits /investigations. In addition, using outside providers can be valuable for task-oriented projects where internal resources and expertise levels may not be adequate. This can be extremely useful when a new major project or task is suddenly added to the workload, especially where it calls for specialized expertise or experience. Contracting out instead of adding backlog delays goes a long way to reducing stress.

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### **About the Author**

Richard P. Kusserow established Strategic Management Services, LLC, after retiring from being the DHHS Inspector General, and has assisted over 2,000 health care organizations and entities in developing, implementing and assessing compliance programs.