



## The HR Headmistress: How to deliver compliance training with aplomb

Posted by Kate Russell, head of Russell HR Consulting in [Managing people](#), [Employment law](#) on Tue, 21/02/2012 - 14:17



Compliance training is like visiting a difficult family member. You may not really like spending time with them, but your mother insists.

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Topics such as health and safety, data protection, food hygiene and employment law evoke a similar rather less-than-thrilled response in a 'we do it because we

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have to, but don't expect us to enjoy it' vein.

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But the consequences of compliance training failures can, at best, be embarrassing and, at worst, result in shameful breaches of the law with disastrous outcomes in terms of cost.

In the recent case of *Michalak v The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust*, for example, a Polish consultant was harassed for reasons relating to her nationality, pregnancy and maternity leave and was awarded £4 million in compensation.

Therefore, as someone who thinks that employment law is one of the most fun things you can engage in with your clothes on, I have recently been considering whether we might be missing a trick in regard to the whole compliance training issue.

Are organisations getting the best value from such activity? Or are too many merely ticking the compliance box when, in reality, they could be getting far better commercial results for spending the same time and money on it?

The economy is rarely out of the news these days and finances are still very tight. Budgets have been reduced or cut altogether, but we still need to discharge our legal, regulatory and/or advisory compliance training responsibilities.

**It's all about delivery**

Such training often revolves around an organisation's policies and procedures. Having a policy is a good starting point, but that alone won't cut it. The training has to be personalised. But even more to the point, it's has to be delivered effectively.

If we can raise our game in delivery terms, not only do we spend less time rounding up staff and herding them in, but they retain more information, experience a greater sense of personal accountability and, above all, are able to apply what they have learned.

Last year, I did some practical discipline training for a large company, whose managers' initial grasp of fairness, consistency and procedure was tenuous to say the least. As a result, they had experienced employment tribunal-after-tribunal-after-tribunal.

My delegates were an absolutely lovely bunch, but I felt like Calamity Jane in the Wild West. I cracked the HR Headmistress whip a bit, however, and, by the end of the session, which was a two-day affair, they had taken the points I wanted to make on board really well.

Over the last six months, I have had regular feedback from the HR director and she can't believe the difference in them. They now nip problems in the bud; keep records; escalate matters to HR in a timely fashion as well as understand conduct and capability and keep them separate.

Their performance has improved phenomenally and saved their employer time and money and reduced its risk exposure. Critically, involvement in employment disputes and tribunal applications have dwindled away to almost nothing.

So for what it's worth, here are my tips on making compliance training a really worthwhile and engaging event:

1. **Love your topic** - If you genuinely enjoy it, you will be energetic and enthusiastic, which comes across and is enormously engaging
2. **Know your subject** - Ensure you know your topic area in far greater detail than your presentation requires as you are likely to have to go off piste and talk about all sorts of things that are technically unconnected to the immediate topic
3. **Demonstrate your own expertise** - You have to earn respect every time you speak in front of a new group. That means sharing with them what you've done and how you've done it ie showing that you can walk the walk
4. **Give examples to help people understand difficult material** - I, for example, have a very narrative style and tell lots of stories from the courts and my own experience. I work on the basis that if your audience can remember the stories they may be able to work back and retrieve the principles. Make sure the stories are balanced though ie not all scare stories
5. **Ask the audience questions** -The aim is to encourage participation and keep people on their toes

6. **Use humour** – But be careful not to force it and never be inappropriate.

*Kate Russell is head of HR services and employment law training provider, [Russell HR Consulting](#).*

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### Attached Images

