

Letter from the CEO

ROY SNELL

Everything I learned about compliance I learned in kindergarten dealing with the bully

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Dealing with bullies is part of a compliance professional's job. In kindergarten there were bullies who tried to intimidate me. Although I would eventually try several hundred unsuccessful techniques to deal with bullies, the successful encounters had something in common.

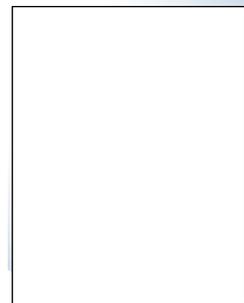
Before discovering these helpful points, though, I tried several techniques that had painful outcomes. I tried telling everyone except the bully about my problem bully. However I discovered that the more people I told about my problem with the bully the bigger the problem got. I tried internalizing the problem but that hurt and affected important things like sleep and my general disposition, which lead to more problems. I once tried the "Eye for an Eye" thing, however my eye hurt for days. I tried banging heads with the bully but then my head hurt for days. There are many things that will help when you are dealing with someone who has a different opinion and seems to ignore all principles of fairness, ethics, and rational thinking. Here are two ways that I recommend.

Number one: Smile

Smile, or if you can't smile, at least try not to look angry. Do anything but look angry, look inquisitive, curious, interested, I don't care look hungry if you think it will help, just don't look angry. We will get to the more substantial stuff in a minute but you can't lose by smiling. It's difficult to be angry when you are smiling.

A wise old kindergarten teacher once told me, "Roy, when you get angry, your brains fall out." Rational thinking and intelligence are the ultimate tools for dealing with difficult people and if you are mad you talk before you think. By definition, if you are not thinking while you are talking then you are likely to sound like Jesse Ventura. That can lead to public statements that you

may regret. As it has for Jesse, that will cause you problems no matter how right you are or how smart you are. Just ask Jesse who, believe it or not, is often smart and right. Unfortunately when he says something stupid in the heat of the moment people tune him out.



Also, if you smile you give the bully the feeling that you are not attacking and it gives them the feeling that they don't need to attack you back. By keeping things calm you can help them think before they talk and that will ultimately help you. I'm not talking about a smart aleck smile. I'm not talking about a pie-eating grin. I'm just talking about an expression on your face that you would have when you are working through a problem with someone who you really want to help. I'm not talking about being phony either. You should care about this person as you help them work through your common problem. If you don't care about helping them you are in for a long drawn out and very negative experience. If nothing else do it for yourself.

Number two: Sleep on it.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "If you are mad count to ten first." As far as I can tell this is the only time Mr. Franklin was ever incorrect. Ten seconds gives you just enough time to think of two more reasons to be mad. There is no way to calm down in ten seconds or is there time enough to think of the best way to convince a bully the error of his/her way. In ten seconds you can't ascertain what the bully wants, thinks, or knows about the subject.

Another great philosopher, Mrs. Brady (yes I do mean the Brady Bunch Brady), once said "Never go to bed angry." My view is that if you go to bed angry you might just wake up rational. As many great philosophical quips go, they sometimes sound more helpful than they really are. Without the proper information and the correct disposition all you can do is shoot from the hip. It's hard to aim when you shoot from the hip. You will miss your point. You may end up looking like a five-year-old.

Sleep on it. By waiting some time, at least 24 hours, you have a chance to calm down. In 24 hours you have a chance to figure out what it is that you have to say to get your point across. You have 24 hours to figure out why they feel the way they do and without that information there is no way you can have a successful encounter, particularly with a bully. Think about it, in 24

hours you have a chance to think of the “I should have said’s”. You will eliminate the “Ooh, I wish I had not said that” or as we call them in Minnesota, Jesseisms. Oddly enough the toughest part of “sleeping on it” is stopping the heated discussion until tomorrow.

Typically, when there is a heated exchange the temptation by both parties is to go at it until someone is lying on the floor beaten into submission. When I have shared this philosophy in the past people give me excuses why it won't work. “No Roy, I won't run away from my problems.” “No Roy, we don't have time.” “No Roy, Blah Blah Blah.” I am not suggesting you run away from your problems. You will waste far more time by fighting about it before you think about it. I am not even suggesting that passionate debates are incorrect, however like the Boy Scouts, you must always be prepared. You can't prepare in ten seconds.

The biggest challenge with this theory of stopping the conversation for 24 hours is that it is difficult to think of what to say that will convince the bully to wait until tomorrow without sounding awkward. It's tough to think of a way to convince the bully that the two of you should regroup tomorrow when the bully is two inches from your face, shaking, with spittle flying everywhere. You can think of something if you believe waiting is the right thing to do. Here are some suggestions: “Excuse me, but I have to go change my pants.” “Is that my mommy calling?” “Excuse me for a moment, I have to pick up my laundry.” “I need to go take my heart medicine.”

If they look away for a moment you could pull the fire alarm. Pretend to faint—they can't argue with you if you are lying on the floor with your eyes closed (don't forget to smile:-) I don't care what you say to them, but you need time to regroup. They will calm down, you will calm down, and you need time to think. They need time to think. Sometimes the problem will be gone the next day. I can't explain why, sometimes it just happens.

Don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting you do not deal with the bully. Don't crawl under a rock. Don't put off the issue forever, I'm suggesting that you just buy yourself some time and smile or at the very least look hungry.

By the way, the best way to buy some time is to be honest. Just tell them you need some time to think it over and get some more information and that you'd like to regroup tomorrow. Believe me it works better than a hissing contest. You or they may decide that it is not worth fighting over. Dealing with bullies in the compliance area is an all too often occurrence. You can alter the degree of pain by your actions. Take it easy and take some time. ■



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