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No Compliance Tool Can Fix a Culture Where Shortcuts Go Unchallenged

Retaliation against compliance officers rarely looks dramatic — it looks like isolation, blocked development and quiet pressure to leave

by Natalia Gindler-Corsini — March 9, 2026 in Ethics, Opinion



The companies that survive misconduct aren't the ones with the most sophisticated monitoring tools, Prae Venire founder Natalia Gindler-Corsini argues: They're the ones whose leaders behave consistently whether or not anyone is watching. She says what erodes compliance effectiveness is rarely a policy gap.

Early in my corporate career, I learned a quiet truth about compliance: it rarely fails because companies lack policies, controls or frameworks. It fails because of people.

Compliance is delicate work. It deals directly with human weakness, ego, fear, ambition, insecurity. On paper, the mission is simple: prevent problems, detect misconduct and fix what goes wrong. It means standing between business pressure and ethical boundaries, often when those boundaries feel inconvenient.

Over the years, I've seen organizations invest heavily in compliance programs. Procedures were well-drafted, controls were thoughtfully designed, and frameworks made sense.

And still, progress can be uneven. Not because employees didn't understand the rules but because leadership didn't always embody them.

Shifting the corporate mindset is critical

In many corporate environments, especially in foreign subsidiaries, compliance is still viewed as the function that slows things down. [Anti-corruption](#) rules exist to prevent gifts or favors to government officials in exchange for unfair advantages. Yet when financial targets, and unspoken personal incentives, dominate every conversation, those safeguards begin to feel like obstacles. Compliance becomes *the problem* rather than the protection.

That mindset is powerful. And contagious.

I've seen reasonable professionals take audits personally. I've watched investigations trigger defensiveness instead of reflection. I've observed senior leaders quietly undermine compliance by excluding professionals from meetings, denying development or creating subtle pressure to resign. These behaviors don't appear in policy manuals, but they shape [culture](#) far more than any code of conduct ever could.

The hardest part of compliance isn't drafting procedures. It's navigating emotions.

[Investigations](#) and audits touch individuals' sense of identity and security. When people feel threatened, especially those driven by status, control or financial self-interest, they can become hostile. Some misuse authority to silence scrutiny. Others normalize shortcuts. Over time, ethical erosion becomes routine. It rarely happens all at once.

It starts quietly: tolerated exceptions, unchallenged assumptions, leadership silence, mixed signals between what is said and what is rewarded. There is no magic formula to stop it. No automated tool can replace ethical judgment.

I've also witnessed corporate environments where even internal legal counsel worked against compliance, where ethical concerns were dismissed simply because certain actions were technically legal. In those settings, [ethics](#) was treated as irrelevant if the law did not prohibit the behavior. Legal questions were managed; ethical risks were minimized. When legal permissibility becomes the only decision filter, compliance loses its voice.

That is when raising legitimate concerns can quietly turn someone into *the problem*.

Strong cultures lead by example

Well-designed cultures don't run themselves. They require constant reinforcement, especially when regulations change rapidly and guidance feels unclear. Strong organizations invest in ethical reasoning, not just rule awareness. They communicate expectations clearly. They surface blind spots early. They encourage questioning. They make it safe to slow down when something feels off.

Most importantly, they lead by example. Employees don't calibrate their behavior based on policy binders. They watch what leaders tolerate, reward or ignore. Ethics programs also do not stand on their own. They stand on the shoulders of people, often chief ethics & compliance officers (CECOs), who are expected to challenge power from inside the organization.

That role is not theoretical.

CECOs are routinely asked to question commercially attractive decisions or slow rushed deals. In strong organizations, this tension is healthy. In weak ones, it becomes dangerous. Retaliation rarely looks dramatic. More often it appears as isolation, loss of authority, blocked development or quiet pressure to leave. These actions may not violate written policies, but they destroy compliance effectiveness.

And when compliance is weakened, so is the company.

Today's compliance leaders must be empowered to act

That's why regulators now focus closely on whether compliance leaders have independence, access to the [board](#) and protection from retaliation. An organization cannot claim to have an effective compliance program if its compliance professionals operate under fear or isolation.

This matters even more today.

Regulatory priorities shift. Technologies evolve. External pressures rise. Companies may mistake periods of reduced public enforcement visibility for reduced risk. That is a dangerous illusion. Risk doesn't disappear; it moves.

In moments like these, organizations often search for new tools, new frameworks, new controls. But the most resilient companies don't start there. They return to fundamentals: ethical culture, leadership accountability and human judgment.

Policies and procedures matter but only when ethical minds absorb them naturally. In healthy cultures, controls reinforce judgment rather than replace it.

After years in this profession, one lesson stands out: Compliance doesn't fail because it's outdated. It fails when it's neglected. The companies that endure will not be those with the most dashboards or the most sophisticated systems. They will be the ones whose leaders choose integrity when it is inconvenient, who protect those who speak up, who understands that culture is not a slogan, it is a daily practice shaped by what leadership rewards, tolerates and ignores.

Because when rules fluctuate and pressure rises, there is only one durable advantage left: Leaders willing to protect values before profits and organizations courageous enough to follow.

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