

Making the Quandary of Take Your Children to Work Day into a Win for Ethics and Compliance

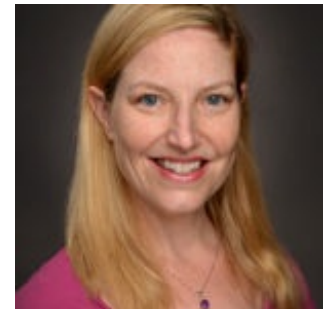
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Take Your Children to Work Day was originally conceived by the Ms. Foundation in 1993 to encourage young girls to gain confidence about their futures by spending time in the workplace. In 2003, sons were added and the focus shifted to inspiring all children to link their education to their career aspirations.



Exploring Purpose and Meaning at Work

In the decades since its inception, parents have had an ongoing struggle to achieve the “holy grail” of work/life balance. So, taking children to work has additional significance for parents as well. As our children learn that we have lives beyond theirs where we seek purpose and meaning in our daily work, hopefully they will place even greater value on their own education and understand why we cannot always be available to them on demand.

My daughter is seven and has had brief visits to my office mostly revolving around a fascination with my whiteboard. This year’s Take Our Children to Work Day was her first foray into the nuts and bolts of ethics and compliance. Another benefit of this annual event is that it affords a great opportunity for ethics and compliance professionals to connect with employees – through the eyes of their children.

Quandary: A Game for Ethical Decision-Making

Through some trial and error, I found the game QUANDARY, which has so many things to recommend it. You can play it in approximately 30 minutes; it gives players the opportunity to think critically and make thoughtful decisions; the outcomes vary depending on who is playing; and finally, the characters represent a diverse population, so there is a greater chance that players can see someone who looks like them on the screen. In QUANDARY, the players have populated a newly-formed colony and must find a way to live and work together when various issues arise.

In beta testing with my daughter, she discovered one of the four scenarios entitled “Water War” that intrigued her. This game, in which the colonists must find an alternative water source when their water become unpotable, seemed the perfect choice to help young people understand public trust, stewardship of public land, and dynamic problem-solving.

Public Servants Are Stewards for Public Resources

We began our session by briefly sharing with the employees and their children our Code of Ethics, which states that employees must: “maintain a constructive, creative, and practical attitude...and a deep sense of social responsibility.” The Code also emphasizes that the public entrusts county employees to protect the bounty of natural resources in Sarasota County – our world-class beaches, bay front, and, of course, the public’s drinking water.

The students really got this! We asked why fresh water is important, and nearly everyone contributed. Additionally, we happened to have the program coordinator of Keep Sarasota Beautiful in the audience to talk about water quality, safety, and how we can each contribute by keeping our beaches and waterways clean.

Weighing Alternatives and Developing Decision-Making

Then we began the game QUANDARY, where the colonists were charged with finding an alternative water source. Each colonist had either an opinion, such as “digging a new well will be too hard;” a fact, such as “we may be able to find a secondary water source once we start digging;” or a solution, such as “the community should take over the privately owned well.” The kids got points when they selected the correct category. This also gave us the opportunity to talk about why it is important to seek out facts and viable solutions in addition to listening to people’s opinions when trying to reach a viable solution. We talked about how we do this a lot in the ethics and compliance field when we assist employees with problems that can arise when running such a vast and complex system affecting so many people.

We had a great time thinking about the options, weighing our choices, and even trying to convince one another. The final resolution was a real win-win and involved one colonist suggesting that the group build a water park – all the students were on board with that idea!

Positive Feedback from Employees and Game Developers

Kimberly Shives, who brought her nine-year-old twins Macy and Luke said, “we loved it!” She plans on playing the game with her kids over the summer (it is free and accessible on any

tablet or computer). She liked the fact that parents and children got involved and felt that it was useful because decision-making is an important part of the daily lives of children and parents. She also stated that in her work at the county call center she receives a lot of calls about water quality, so it was a very relatable topic.

In planning for the event, I had several great conversations with the team at the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They use the game in schools throughout the country and were interested to hear about how we were planning to play it on Take Your Children to Work Day to engage children and their parents in ethical decision-making. Javier Prieto, Chief Operating Officer of the Center said the game is great for helping people understand applied or practical ethics in a unique way.

Prieto said he was pleased to see QUANDARY played for Take Your Children to Work, because it was great to see an organization utilize it as a way to potentially impact its ethical culture and build trust.

Because research has shown that carefully placed inspirational quotes can lead to more ethical behavior (see “When Those Inspiring Messages in Your E-mail May Actually Work,” Fast Company, Sreedhari Desai, PhD and Maryam Kouchaki, PhD), we have used a number of quotes related to ethics within the design of our code. Perhaps most fitting to this event is “Live so when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.” (H. Jackson Brown, Jr.)

It is as true that inviting our children to our workplace can inspire them as it is that their presence in our workplace can be inspiring for us. I found that the opportunity to share ideas around ethical decision-making with my daughter and the children of my co-workers on Take Your Children to Work Day to be an uplifting and memorable experience.