



Interview series Advisory board VCO In conversation with: Alexander Maclean

Interview by: *Angela Stap*

Introductie

The VCO has an Advisory Council; broad and multidisciplinary in composition. The purpose of the Council is to provide solicited and unsolicited advice to the Board, to take the VCO to the next level with suggestions, and to provide sounding boards. Over the next few months, you will be introduced to all five members. This month it's the turn of:



Alexander Maclean, Global Head of Compliance (and chief compliance officer) at Aegon. Aegon is an international player in insurance, pensions and asset management, and also has a bank. Aegon announced in October 2022

that its Dutch operations will merge with asr under the asr banner, with Aegon becoming a minority shareholder in asr

How would you describe your role as a member of the VCO Advisory Board?

I try to contribute ideas and be a sounding board for the VCO board.

What are your biggest motivations for serving on the Advisory Board?

Our field is evolving quite a bit, and I find it fun and necessary to help think about our role in our organizations and in society.

What else is on your bucketlist?

Haha, I'm not into lists. And besides, I am a contented person. But if I have to: I would like to go away for four weeks or more and tour around Spain and brush up my Spanish along the way. Together with my wife, of course, and I'm assuming that she would take the dogs with her!

Which person would you like to meet?

Another one of those questions. I don't have much talent for admiration. Recently I was in Birmingham, Alabama and visited the Civil Rights museum, and at that time I was also reading the biography of John Lewis, who worked a lot with Martin Luther King. Their dedication to the good cause and their nonviolence are very impressive, so maybe one of them?

What is your history with the VCO?

It's very short: I joined when I was asked to run for the Advisory Board; a matter of unknown, unloved, I'm afraid!

Why would you recommend membership of the VCO?

In particular, I think the knowledge sharing is a very important reason to be a member.

What is a key success factor for a professional in ethics, compliance and integrity?

An independent mindset, while being very knowledgeable and curious about the products and goals of the company you work for.

In what position did you start your career and what brought you into the field of ethics, compliance and integrity?

I am a jurist and spent the first 6 years of my career working as an attorney. There you learn to analyze well and draft documents, and in that field, an independent mindset (not slavishly serving your client) is also important. After that, I worked for several years as a corporate lawyer, in commerce and again as corporate lawyer/general counsel. When I was general counsel at ING in the NL banking organization I worked closely with Compliance and found their issues at least as interesting as mine and when there was an opportunity, I switched.

What do you think is the biggest challenge of being responsible for Compliance in an international organization where there is a big Anglo-Saxon angle?

In my opinion, in any international organization with a central function, the challenge is to be both leading and serving: the units have to comply with the regulations of the head office and at the same time the head office has to explain well 'what' and 'why' and also make it as easy as possible for the units to deliver what needs to be delivered. Finding a good balance in that is my biggest challenge.

What do you think a starting compliance officer should want to fill his or her first 100 days with?

Spend the first month talking to as many front-line people as possible, to really get to know the people and products of the business. Also ask about targets, KPIs, what are they being held accountable for, how are they being managed. The second month, get to know the compliance and risk and audit organization well: how are the programs put together, the policies etc.. And then, in the third month, make a plan and put it through governance. (spoiler alert: this never succeeds ...).



This interview is a publication of the Dutch Association of Compliance Professionals (VCO); the professional association for professionals in the field of Ethics, Compliance and Integrity since 2001.