

Auditor Etiquette: Making a good impression

by J.P. Russell

An audit system manager recently told me that it was relatively easy to identify quality auditors who had good technical skills for collecting and evaluating data. What was really hard was to find auditors with good people skills (perhaps auditors need to go to charm school). Even though an auditor is not trying to win a popularity contest, the impressions that the auditor makes with auditee management, interviewees, and escorts can influence the audit and its effectiveness.

The moment an auditor makes contact with the auditee, he or she is making an impression. This true for both onsite audits as well as remote eAudits. The impression the auditor makes is a reflection of the auditee's expectations based on prior contact with the audit organization, the auditee's organizational culture, and each auditee's background and experiences. The auditor has no way of knowing these things unless he or she does some investigating.

The auditor could start by asking the audit program manager and/or audit client what prior contacts have been made with the auditee organization and what was discussed. This could provide a wealth of background information about who is involved, the formal and informal customers, why they want the audit, their concerns, any difficulties encountered when scheduling the audit, communication difficulties with the audit organization, the audit boss's impressions of the auditee personnel, the auditee organization, etc. This is a good technique to identify risks that

could have a significant effect on the audit objectives.

If an auditor is going to conduct a second-party audit, he or she could get on the Internet (or library) to find out about the organization or talk to the buyer in the purchasing department. If it is a public company, auditors can get copies of the quarterly reports. Most organizations have websites that describe the auditee's products and services.

For internal audits, auditors can seek out annual business plans or progress reports. All this information will help auditors better understand what is important to auditee management. It could keep auditors from saying the wrong things when talking to the auditee.

Every time auditors come into contact with an individual from the auditee organization, they must remember that they are representing the audit organization. What auditors say and do will have an effect on what the individual thinks about the auditor and his or her organization. People are constantly judging the demeanor of others toward them.

When conducting eAudits, auditors need to be very sensitive about how they phrase questions or statements in e-mails and chats. When using video in remote audits, auditors and auditees can view each other and that can help

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reduce anxiety.

Auditors must follow a code of ethics to ensure professionalism and consistency, but audit etiquette is also an important factor for good communication and cooperation. Etiquette is a code of behavior that helps people get along with one another. Impressions made by auditors may be the determining factor on whether they are invited back, whether the auditee chooses to do business with the audit organization again, and whether the audit service is recommended to others.

People expect and deserve a high level of professionalism from auditors.

For additional information about auditor etiquette, see "Russell's Rules of Etiquette for Auditors" at <http://www.jp-russell.com/etiquette.html>

About the author

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