

Reproduced with permission from Prevention of Corporate Liability: Current Report, Part of: "Recession Means Job Security for Compliance Professions" 17 Prev. Corp. Liability 139 (Oct. 19, 2009). Copyright 2009 by The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. (800-372-1033) <<http://www.bna.com>>

Check Your Local Listings: Public TV Program Explores Ethics

A Boston-based independent television producer has created a program for public television that explores corporate compliance and ethics issues. Denny Swenson, the executive producer of "In Search of the Good Corporate Citizen," told BNA the show is aimed at a general audience but "the business community seems to really be embracing this as something fresh and new and something they can use."

The premier episode will air on Connecticut public television Oct. 20 and is being offered to public TV affiliates nationwide. Swenson provided BNA with a copy of the program. She has been sharing a portion of the hour-long show at recent compliance and ethics events, including the SCCE conference.

The episode, titled "Hitting the Numbers," features a panel discussion by compliance and ethics experts, moderated by Tom Donaldson, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. It also includes documentary-style profiles of two corporate executives who got caught up in high-profile scandals.

On vignette features Aaron Beam, who co-founded HealthSouth with Richard Scrushy and was a cooperating witness against him during Scrushy's 2005 fraud trial. Beam, HealthSouth's former chief financial officer, said he participated in "cooking the books" at the urging of Scrushy. "I didn't have the ethical bearing, the courage, or I was weak," he said in explaining his wrongdoing. Beam pled guilty to bank fraud and served three months in prison. Scrushy was acquitted.

Beam is now self employed as a landscaper. "My legacy is not a guy that started one of the largest health care companies in the history of the United States... My legacy is that I'm a felon and I committed fraud, and that is what I'll be remembered for," he said.

Beam "should have resigned early on when he realized he was working for an unethical person," Bill George said during the panel's discussion of the HealthSouth prosecution. George is the former CEO of Medtronic.

"These people... are supposed to be worried about people's health. Meanwhile, they are worried about serving Wall Street," George said. "You will eventually destroy your company if you do that."

The program also tells the story of Paul Moore, who was hired to evaluate risk at HBOS only to be fired by the British bank after blowing the whistle on

questionable sales practices. Here's how Moore describes his former co-workers: "They were like lemmings going behind the pied-pipers of the chief executives, who were being paid to take them all over the end of the cliff. A herd instinct creates such an energy that virtually nobody is going to have the courage to say stop because they will just get trampled.

Swenson said she views, "Hitting the Numbers" as a "pilot program" and hopes to follow up with more episodes. Feedback she has received so far suggests that ethics and compliance professionals want to "hear more about companies that are doing the right thing," she said. Swenson said she handed out 70 postcards seeking input after a clip at the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association annual conference in September, and 60 respondents asked if they could air the show at their company.

More information on "In Search of the Good Corporate Citizen" is available at <http://www.lightonpro.com>.