



# Alumni Spotlight

**Stephanie Davis, Volkswagen Group of America's chief compliance officer, focuses on building relationships and seizing opportunities.**

## Creating a company culture and the importance of diversity



In her relatively young but accomplished career, Stephanie Davis, Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) of Volkswagen Group of America (VWGoA), has found both personal and professional success by building relationships, accepting challenges and seizing opportunities.

Growing up, she wanted to become a pediatric oncology doctor, but law turned out to be her true calling and passion. "My parents knew that I was destined to become a lawyer, but never pushed me," she recalled. "They let me find my way, and I eventually did."

After graduating law school, she went to work for compliance departments in several energy industry firms. Right about the time she was looking for a new opportunity, a recruiter contacted her and asked if she would be interested in interviewing with KPMG for a position in their compliance department as part of a "transformation" initiative. Her husband, a partner in a consulting firm, encouraged her to apply.

"I looked at the job as a great challenge and great opportunity," she stated. "Working for a Big Four firm was a big leap for me, but I decided to take the chance." Clearly, it turned out well for both Stephanie and KPMG.

### The KPMG experience

"The first partner I worked for, Julie Luecht was incredibly helpful and really showed me the ropes," said Stephanie.

"She taught me what I needed to do to succeed here, including how to reach my goals, understand metrics, and examine data from different perspectives."

She recalls appreciating KPMG's culture and its commitment to diversity, women, and alternative work arrangements for both working mothers and fathers. Stephanie also speaks highly of the incredibly supportive environment she enjoyed with her peers and the partners she worked with. In fact, her relationship with Principal Ken Koch opened the door to her current position with VWGoA.

### And then came VWGoA

Ken, the Lead Partner on the VWGoA account, asked Stephanie to join him in making a presentation regarding an engagement. Although they did not win the business, Ken asked her to join the VWGoA account team.

"I showed up early every day at VWGoA headquarters and established a great working relationship with VWGoA personnel," she recalled. "Over time, I think they began to see me as a member of their team." As time went on, she also established relationships with VWGoA's general counsel and some other executives.

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This relationship with the general counsel led to asking what her future plans were. Stephanie stated that she was very happy at KPMG, but if they ever wanted to hire a Chief Compliance Officer, she'd be very interested. Several weeks later, they offered her the job as CCO. "It was another big leap and another big challenge," she noted. "But it also was an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

As CCO, she is responsible for VWGoA's compliance, integrity, ethics, and risk programs. "I am working to improve their compliance programs and establish new ones that are needed," Stephanie stated.

Her team is focusing on establishing a culture of compliance, complete with an ethics hotline, whistleblower policies and compliance training programs. She noted that she has received a great deal of support from VWGoA management. "In fact, after we rewrote the code of conduct, we asked for an executive to sign the opening letter to demonstrate management support," she said. "It turned out that every one of the CEO's direct reports wanted to and did sign it."

### The value of diversity

Stephanie stressed the importance of diversity when it comes to building a team. "People often take different paths to get to where they are," she observed. "When I assembled my team, I looked for people who brought something different to the table in terms of backgrounds and experiences, with different perspectives and ways of thinking. I believe that this makes our department and organization better."

For example, she noted that her compliance group includes a CPA, someone with international experience, and another trained in risk management. She is looking to hire a data and analytics team member this year. "They all offer different ways of looking at an issue and we often offer multiple options on how to deliver solutions."

### The other side of life

Although her job at VWGoA is both consuming and rewarding, Stephanie takes time to enjoy non-work-related activities. She enjoys reading, doing yoga, and taking spinning classes. Plus, she relishes cooking and traveling with her husband.

Stephanie also is a big advocate and supporter of several charities, including the Julie Billiard Schools, two Catholic special-needs schools in Cleveland and Akron, Ohio that her sister runs as CEO.

### Advice for young professionals

Stephanie offered the advice below to professionals who are early in their careers or considering new opportunities.

**Build relationships:** This is one of the cornerstones of any job you have. Sure, you need to be extremely knowledgeable and deliver impeccable work. But if you are someone who just sits at your desk and sends out emails, you are less likely to make an impression on people you work with — and that includes clients — and it will be harder for you to advance your career.

**Communicate:** This goes hand in hand with building relationships. For example, within the first 30 days of becoming CCO, I made a point of meeting or calling every key VWGoA executive. If I did not already know them, I would introduce myself, explain what I was trying to accomplish, and ask for their support and assistance. Not only did this help establish or strengthen my relationship with them, it helped me get their buy-in.

**Make the best of it:** You should be able to take away something positive from every job, even if it is that you do not want to do it again. Try to find something interesting about the job and do it well. You never know when you'll make an impression on someone that can lead to a bigger opportunity. If nothing else, you might be able to establish a friendship or build a relationship with a colleague.

**Seize opportunities:** Finally, if you get an opportunity to do something special, especially if you are passionate about it, you have to strongly consider it, even if it is a stretch or outside of your comfort zone. You do not want to look back with regret.

Stephanie said she would always be grateful to KPMG for being so supportive, both during her time here and in her decision to leave for VWGoA. "Far from standing in my way, my supervisor and others encouraged me to take the VWGoA job, saying it was an incredible opportunity," she recalled. "I'll never have anything but positive things to say about KPMG and my time there."

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