



CASE STUDY:
Get It Done

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Part I

It had been a remarkable year for Mark. Since joining Big National Bank's investment banking division almost two years ago, he'd worked on some extraordinary deals and had already established a strong track record for getting things done. It was a dream job. Still, the pace had felt a bit grueling lately. The latest deal he was working on had required what felt like nonstop work on his part for the last few weeks, and he was starting to feel the fatigue. But he was first to admit that his work was also thrilling. Mark felt that he'd been particularly lucky in his landing at BigNat, having fallen into the de facto role as Taylor Smith's go-to analyst.

Taylor was one of the most successful VPs in the group, and this past year was probably one of his best. Taylor had a very solid client base, and he was increasingly getting a reputation for his creativity and innovation in deal sourcing and structuring. Mark and Taylor had certainly been riding a wave together for the past twelve months. Mark had decided that he wanted to make a push for promotion to associate next year, and was hopeful that his close work under Taylor would help get him there. And so Mark was certainly rooting for Taylor's promotion to MD this year, too; with Taylor as a MD, Mark's prospects at the bank would definitely improve.

But things got a little hairy for Mark one Monday morning in early December. Taylor had recently been tasked with managing a new transaction for a very important client: the Hydrangea Group, a large corporate conglomerate. The bank had provided underwriting and advisory services to Hydrangea many times in the past, and the firm historically had been a demanding client. This time, Hydrangea's executives had made a strategic decision to expand into the shipping sector. They found what they believed to be an attractive target to realize this vision: a small but growing shipping and freight company based in a Latin American country. The deal, however, was contingent on closing by year-end because the seller insisted on receiving the proceeds in the current fiscal year for tax purposes. Hydrangea needed to finance the acquisition and therefore needed a loan from BigNat quickly.

Taylor's team had a good meeting with Hydrangea that morning to discuss the possibility of the new transaction. If the deal was structured right and



done quickly, it had the potential to be extremely lucrative for Hydrangea's investors, and that would win BigNat more of the company's business. Mark was excited. Taylor was sure to give him a piece of the credit, as usual. Mark would learn a lot on the deal, and it would shine brightly in his reviews. Everyone left that Monday morning meeting with a lot of enthusiasm and a feeling of urgency to get down to it.

But the transaction was going to be stressful. For one thing, there was the time pressure. Hydrangea had been very clear that the transaction had to happen before year-end. For another, Hydrangea wanted to use one of its foreign subsidiaries to purchase the new company (for tax and structuring reasons). This meant that, technically speaking, BigNat would be providing loan financing to a new legal entity (i.e., the Hydrangea subsidiary). But details about the entity were a little fuzzy to Mark after the meeting. This made Mark anxious about his ability to move things forward quickly, because onboarding a new client could be painful and time consuming.

Mark knew his role. Taylor was going to be focused exclusively on the credit memo, and getting that polished and through the risk and investment committees. It fell to Mark, as the analyst on the deal, to liaise with compliance to make sure the required "Know Your Client" documentation was ready to go, so that a deal could be cleared prior to its execution. Anticipating a bumpy (and possibly drawn out) process, Mark went straight to his desk after the meeting to call Jeff, the compliance VP with whom he normally worked. He walked Jeff through the information that he had, and Jeff told him that he could turn things around within ten days. "That's for you, Mark. I can't tell you how underwater we are. We're juggling a lot of issues that need compliance input, and don't have the staff."

When Mark hung up the phone, he went straight to Taylor's office to go over the timeline. As he was knocking, Mark overheard Taylor promising Luke at Hydrangea turnaround by end-of-week. Mark's stomach tightened; he knew Taylor would propose an aggressive timeline, but was surprised at how condensed this one felt. He also knew Taylor was not going to go back on his promise to the client. That was not how Taylor worked.

Mark felt stuck. He was worried about being the bearer of bad news. Shouldn't he be able to just get it done and not bother Taylor with this



compliance stuff, he thought to himself? Last year, in Mark's first review at the bank, the chief piece of feedback he'd received from Taylor was that if he wanted to be promoted to Associate in two years, he needed to be able to navigate through roadblocks better. This seemed like a prime opportunity to demonstrate that he could do that. Otherwise, Mark worried that he might permanently be pegged as someone who couldn't solve problems independently.

Discussion questions

- What does your gut tell you about what Mark should do?
- How is Taylor's leadership style and behavior influencing Mark's actions?
- Is it Mark's job to solve the problem with compliance?
- What is, in fact, the real nature of Mark's problem on Monday afternoon? How do you think he felt?
- Should compliance be more customer-focused?



Part II

The next morning, Mark resolved to deal with the compliance issue on his own, or at least handle the issue as much as he could, before bugging Taylor. Even though this case was a little different, he felt he could persuade Jeff, given the urgency and the potential payoff.

“Jeff, Mark here. Thanks again for working to get this done. As it turns out, we need approval to happen in a tighter time frame—four working days, at most. Can you make this a priority?”

“Hi, Mark. I’m not sure. We’re really backed up on KYC processing at the moment, and yours is the fifth deal on my list. To be honest, I don’t think I can make that timeline happen. By the way, we need more info on the legal entity identifier for the subsidiary you mentioned on the phone yesterday. The name you gave me must be a nickname, because we aren’t able to diligence this new company.”

Mark felt exasperated. It was the opposite of how he’d hoped the conversation would go. What was Taylor going to think? He’d be frustrated that his timeline couldn’t be met, but there was no way he was going to want to pester Hydrangea for more information when time was of the essence and they’d been through the BigNat’s KYC process a dozen times before. And knowing Taylor, Mark knew he definitely was not going to want to tip the bank’s hand that the deal might be getting bogged down in compliance. Taylor trusted him. How could he get this done?

Mark thought that maybe he should just give compliance what he had on file for the last deal BigNat arranged for Hydrangea. The subsidiaries weren’t exactly the same, but they seemed closely affiliated. And even if the information wasn’t one hundred percent accurate, it could be close enough. Besides, couldn’t he just update the file later?

Mark asked a few other junior bankers what they thought. Chris, an analyst with one more year of experience than Mark, said his opinion was that Mark should definitely just fudge it. Chris reminded Mark of the last analyst under Taylor who pushed back on the timeline for an important client. Taylor



flipped out and never tapped her to work with him again. Besides, it was just an administrative issue and they'd been working with Hydrangea for years.

Still not satisfied, Mark asked another associate on the floor, Laura. Laura paused. She wasn't so sure, and suggested that if Mark was really uncomfortable he should just stand up to Taylor and tell him it couldn't be done.

Discussion questions

- What should Mark do? Are there options he may not have considered?
- Which takes precedence: getting a deal done or complying with an internal due diligence rule?
- When is it acceptable to question a compliance requirement or a judgment call made by compliance staff?



Part III

On Wednesday afternoon, Mark decided to loop Taylor in. After all, it had been three days and the client was expecting to move forward by COB Friday. Maybe Taylor would understand. After all, Mark had continued to press compliance and was unable to push the deadline up.

As luck would have it (or not), just as Mark went into Taylor's office, Taylor was hanging up the phone with Luke, his main contact at Hydrangea. It had not been a good call. Luke expressed his concern that, as it was, BigNat was taking too long with approvals and they were worried about missing their end-of-year target. Luke wanted the deal approved within 24 hours, or he might have to take the business elsewhere.

Mark knew he now had to tell Taylor about the compliance issue—even though he was pretty sure how he would respond, given the tone of his call with Luke. As expected, Taylor blew up. “That’s a joke. If those guys in compliance would just work past six p.m., this would never be an issue. I mean, they’re not being commercial in their thinking at all.”

Taylor cooled down. “I’ll just call Amanda. She’ll get it. She can make this a priority.” Amanda was the partner on the desk. Mark knew it was a common practice in the investment banking division: when compliance was slowing things down, and the deal was big enough, a high-octane call from a partner was usually enough to push the compliance team into working harder, faster, or less thoroughly than they’d like. Taylor seemed resolved. “Leave this with me for now, Mark. And let’s schedule time to discuss how I expect you to handle situations like this in the future. You have to be a lot more aggressive with these guys if you want to be commercial and make it far here. Yes, it’s important to think about risk, but sometimes the compliance team is too cautious. That’s when you need to step up for your client, got it?”

Mark felt uneasy, but was there anything left for him to do?



Discussion questions

- What does your gut tell you about what Mark should do? What are his options at this point? Is he obligated to do anything more? If so, why?
- Is there something Mark could have done on Monday afternoon that might have changed the way that Taylor reacted on Wednesday afternoon?
- How would you coach Mark on what to do next?
- Would Mark have felt less anxious about confronting Taylor if Taylor were a woman?