FRAUD TALK – EPISODE 96

No One Wants to Eat Lunch With the Investigator

Lyn Cameron, CFE, LL.B, is the senior director leading Microsoft's Financial Integrity Unit, and recently, she was elected to the ACFE's Board of Regents. In this episode, Cameron shares advice on what it takes to build a fulfilling career, oversee case management for complex fraud investigations and manage a team that's spread out all over the world.

Transcript

Courtney Howell: Hello and welcome to this month's episode of *Fraud Talk*. I'm Courtney Howell, community manager at the ACFE. Today, our guest is Lyn Cameron, senior director of the Financial Integrity Unit at Microsoft. We're very excited and honored to have Lyn on the show. Not only does she have a storied career as an investigator, but she's also recently been elected as one of the ACFE's 2020-2021 Board of Regents. Thank you for joining us today, Lyn.

Lyn Cameron: Thank you for having me.

Courtney: All right. We're just going to jump right in. but before we go too deep into the investigation side of things, I don't want to undersell the fact that you are a senior director at one of the largest corporations in the world. How did you get to where you are today?

Lyn: Sometimes I have to pinch myself when I realize where I am and where I came from. I grew up in a small town in Australia called Woy Woy, just outside of Sydney. Going back many, many years, my first job was in, I guess you could call it justice administration for a fancy name, but it's really, I was a court clerk. I saw the police officers, law enforcement officers, were having way more fun than I was, so I joined the Australian Federal Police. I worked there for nearly 14 years as a detective for the most part.

I was really lucky when I started. They'd started a new scheme where I was able to rotate through different areas within the AFP. I had some great mentors, so I got some great experience, and they worked in fraud. That's where my initial career in law enforcement took me. I started specializing in fraud and corruption at a pretty young age. I spent 13 and a half years with them. I then went to London and started working in the forensic practice at Anderson. Went over there for personal reasons, to be with my now-husband. That was a really great transition from law enforcement towards corporate investigations.

It made you understand that things are not necessarily black and white. It's not necessarily statute driven. You try to do the right thing for your client, and you're having to adapt all the time to different industries, different locations and countries serving your client. I got to work for the first time in many different countries and many different industries, so it was a really good bridging role. After a while in consulting, for me, I really wanted to then transition to working for one master, if you like. I can't think of a better phrase than that. Just to know the work that I was doing was in alignment with the direction of the company, and sometimes that's not the case when you're consulting.

I joined Cisco Systems as their Europe, Middle East and Africa investigator. A short time after that, I got invited to San Jose to start building and leading their global team. We started there, I think we were five or six when we started there. We built the team around the world, put in processes, put in case management solutions, which I think we'll talk more about. I also took over the ethics program at Cisco as well, and that was a fabulous experience, making sure that we had the right resources for our employees when they were facing a choice and they had to make a decision. That's what I feel an ethics program is about.

After seven years or so with Cisco, we moved back to the U.K. I was still managing the global team, which was just a bit tricky when they're based in the Pacific West Coast. I saw an opportunity coming through the desk by LinkedIn to come to Microsoft. Over to Microsoft, I got to be back at corporate headquarters, seen a lot of changes there. Again, building the team, building processes, building case management, watching a changing regulatory environment and a changing investigation landscape and then very much a changing culture in the company. It's been quite a trip. It's a long way from Woy Woy.

I'd say I'm not in Kansas anymore, but I really actually want to be there this week because of the Super Bowl.

Courtney: I'm sure it's a happening place right now. What I noticed while you were talking about your journey was that you had these pretty big pivots. You would move big company shift or your role would change. A lot of times our members are wondering, "How do I get into a different field?" or "How do I change my career into this different area?" What sort of advice do you have when people are considering those changes?

Lyn: I think people generally, especially in the investigation space, tend to label themselves and accept labels that they are an investigator. I *think*. They don't necessarily call out the competencies that you have and the skills that you have as an investigator. People say, "Well, you're an investigator. You investigate." Well no, I'm a project manager. I do data analysis. I do stakeholder engagement. I do cross-team collaboration. I deal with people. I bring out the best in people. There's all of these competencies that we all have and that we demonstrate. We're not real great at articulating when we're talking about ourselves.

In terms of when people are thinking about how do you pivot, think about what energizes you. What are you strong at? Because if you do something that you're really strong at, you'll enjoy it, but you can also then build on the next thing that you can be strong at. It's finding those adjacencies and knowing your strengths, but also recognizing all of the things that you bring to the table.

Courtney: That's great advice. One thing that you mentioned was case management and that's what we'll be focusing on a lot today. I imagine at Microsoft you get a lot of cases across your desk. Based off questions that we've gotten from our own members in our online community, a lot of people struggle with this aspect of investigation. How do you handle case management?

Lyn: I think I'll take it back a little first to fundamentals. Some people can get quite spun up about all the things that you need in case management, but to me, it's really quite simple. You need to track the work that you do, document it in a factual manner and you need to have somewhere secure to store or gather the artifacts or evidence that you're gathering. They're essentially the basic two elements. Layer onto that, information that you may want as a manager or management about trends and the resourcing and things like that. That's when you start to get to the importance of the data points that you capture if you have a case management solution.

If we break it down to the basics, case management is when I come to somebody and say, "Give me your case. Show me what you have done." I can take it and read it and understand what has happened and how people got to conclusions or how they got to the point that they got to. I believe that any person, any third party — and these days that may well be a regulator — should be able to come in and understand what you did and why you did it and how you got to the conclusion that you got. Also, sometimes have it clear that you didn't do something and why you didn't do it so that you can own the halls if need be. That's the fundamentals.

In terms of what do we do and how we do it…everywhere there's room for improvement and we're really trying to improve all the time. A shameful plug, we use all of Microsoft products. Full disclosure there. We use Office 365 product dynamics, a CRM solution. Within that, I'm constantly iterating in order to capture the things that I need to capture, but we're also trying to save the keystroke to automate as much as we can. That's not automate the mental process. It's to save on any unnecessary steps or administrative steps.

My team, we'll have a case come in, we will capture data points about the type of case it is that we can then use in analytics. Then it'll get assigned to an investigator, and they will document in case notes the things that they do. One of the things that we do too, we work with a lot of the lawyers within the company, and they work very much via email. What we have automated so that when we're communicating with our attorneys, we can send those emails directly into our case notes and make them and save them as well. That's an important time-saving step.

We'll capture our interviews and our interview notes. The data around the interview will be captured in the case management solution with a recording or the interview notes will be captured in the evidence repository, which in our case is a SharePoint solution connected to our case management. What's really key too, is trying to understand the complexity of the case so that I can report out on things.

We do have a case complexity measurement, all the things that makes it hard for the investigator to do the job. Do we have the language? How many subjects are there, how many issues are we looking at, how far back does it go? All of those are punched in to give us an idea of how complex the case is. To be honest, that's work we've really got to keep moving on and take it to the next generation. We then connect it to our Power BI solution, and that's where the data that you have within your case management solution becomes critical to management.

What are the themes? How you're aggregating the data. What are the themes? Are there hot pockets? Are there hot topics? Are there new things? How are our resources being deployed? It's one area I have a burden to compared to another. Wherever you have a rich data source, you've got the ability to slice it and dice it in a way that helps you improve your practice, helps you manage your resources, helps you take the pressure off when there's too much pressure on somebody as well. Then finally, it allows you to do quality assurance review.

I have a practice whereby one of the investigators will go in and through cases and make sure that everything that they said is there, is there. From that, we're developing best practices about how we actually document the content. At the high level, that's what I think is key to the case management, but it's something that we're continually iterating.

I think in any big organization, the idea would be one case management solution for the entire company, which includes the reporting or escalation avenues. To be able to capture across the company, emails, phone calls, helplines, and have them all go into a single case management solution. That is the ideal.

Appreciate that in many, many companies, Microsoft included, that may not be the case, but that's what, say would be the ideal. That way, there's a single source of truth for the company as well. To smaller companies or individuals, take it back to the basics. It's all about documenting your activity and gathering your evidence and keeping it secure.

Courtney: That was going to be my next area. As you mentioned, there's a large variety of companies out there who all have different needs and resources and things. For people who may be working with a smaller team or less resources, going back to the basics would be key. Is there anything else you would think is a big difference between working for such a huge company and then a smaller one?

Lyn: Scale is the big difference, but even for a smaller team, you've got to have business continuity too. You got to be able to, if somebody goes out, be it personal reasons or any reason really. They walk out. They win the lottery. The next man up, next person up has to step in and see what they've done and where they've done it. If that's not well-recorded in a manner that the right people can access, that's going to result in a couple of negative things. There'll be duplicated work done. The people that are subject to investigations in a corporate space, this is a worst day of their life. Imagine having to relive it because somebody went off and won the lottery.

If you think of the employee experience there, making sure that we have the continuity and there's no delays, I think that's really important. In the smaller teams, it's really just the difference is scale and potentially, tools. In establishing a case management system or approach, I would urge people just to think about what do you want to know about your team or your investigations? I hear many people talk about, our cases are getting harder or they're getting bigger or whatever. A lot of that becomes anecdotal, and if it's anecdotal, it doesn't count.

If you can use the data from your case management solution to show how things have changed, there's your business case for additional resources to build the team, or alternatively, to identify the themes and the trends that the company needs to address. There's so many benefits to having good, rich data associated with investigations.

Courtney: That's on my next topic. You're so intuitive!

Lyn: I should not have read the questions beforehand!

Courtney: No, it's great. I was going to ask about benchmarking and this is what you're talking about. You need that information in order to know what's going on and being able to communicate that with your higher-ups or whoever is going to be providing those resources for you. How would someone go about starting to develop those or what would that look like?

Lyn: Firstly, I do a lot of benchmarking with the other members of the Corporate Alliance, the ACFE Corporate Alliance, so I get a lot of very rich data points from them. The really cool thing in the investigation space is that most people aren't willing to share the content or the subject of investigations. People in the compliance world are more than happy to talk about best practices and sharing best practices.

Build your network within the compliance space, and you'll have a rich universe of people to tap off on as far as benchmarking goes. Another thing that we did was bring in one of the Big Four firms to review the quality of our investigations practice. They measured our practice against a number of criteria, basically where we were on a maturity continuum. I found that's really a healthy thing too. That's something you can do yourselves, even in a small team. If you think about the elements of your investigation practice, what does really immature look like and what does aspirational look like and where are you and met that? Then what do I want to do to move it further along?

That's something any small practice can do. It's just about taking the time to break it down and think about how you want to move it. Definitely, community in the compliance space, absolutely critical to getting benchmarking data.

Courtney: Now, we're going to do a hypothetical situation. Let's say, you've got your case management. It's swimming along just fine. Everything's going great, but then something big comes in and just knocks you completely off course. How would you and your team adapt to something like that?

Lyn: That's a really important point. My team is located all around the world. They're in Redmond, Asia, Middle East, Europe. In the most part, they're geography focused. They're focused on their regions, but we're a global team and we prioritize things based on risk. I have a central team that has the intake and does some preliminary steps and assessment. If something big came in, and I deemed it to be the priority of the company, I'd work out which people in my team around the world are best suited for this particular investigation, and the highest risk, highest priority gets the resources.

Now that has a positive and a negative effect. You've really got to be very critical when you think about what is high risk, high priority. Sometimes the sky's falling for a lot of people. Something that might be urgent today, a couple of steps taken then releases the pressure valve on it and we can get back to businesses as usual. The flip side of that is, if everything new and shiny comes in as high risk and high priority, you've got cases that are real cases that have real impacts that are sitting there and not being dealt with. The longer that they sit there, the worse it is for the employee experience, the risk for the company, and it then becomes a higher priority by virtue of how old it is.

Aging is a real thing that you really have to focus on, and it's those run-of-the-mill things that don't get as much attention, and you actually have to make a conscious effort to put attention to them. We will deal with high risk as the No. 1 priority, and we'll put the right resources on it and we’re constantly adjusting and tweaking. We also run a process within our team, working with the lawyers, where we’re meeting very regularly and going through the dockets and working out what's sitting, what shouldn't be sitting, what's got some obstacles that we need to remove.

Courtney: Cool. Age would play a pretty big factor on deciding, "This one, well it's been here for a while now so we need to move with that.”

Lyn: Yes. It's a really tricky thing to deal with because there's a lot of different elements. Of course, if it's something big and major and high risk, you got to go to that first. Every person who raises a concern or escalates an issue, the company has to do something about it. We owe it to them. We want to have a speak-up culture. Any company would want to have a speak-up culture. You're going to diminish that if you don't take action to validate people's concerns. Aging is probably one of the things that we get the most criticism for. We can't go and explain to everyone, "Well, we had this big case here,” and things like that. But we have to really work hard at focusing on those things.

I do some aging analysis on cases. We've identified that the ones that are just a little bit trickier than a quick hit but not rising to a high-risk manner, they're the ones that tend to be put aside more readily. We have to have a concerted effort. What can we do? Sometimes those are the cases that we will move around to somebody who has bandwidth or somebody else who has…We have all different skills in the team. Some people can get through things very, very quickly, while still doing a professional job and not cutting corners and are more suited to perhaps getting rid of some of those age cases. When I say getting rid of them…doing the work so that the company can make an informed business decision on the outcome.

Courtney: Very interesting. Over the past few months or so, what sort of trends have you seen emerging in corporate investigations that you think others should be aware of?

Lyn: I think the regulatory landscape is a key factor. It's constantly changing. I really couldn't even talk about it today because it's probably changed since yesterday. Also, for us, we're a global team. We have to think about U.S. regulators, European regulators, British regulators, all around the world. Then on top of that, you've got the various employment laws, and of course, privacy has been a big issue as well. I think, in investigations, that's a really important factor to ensure that you're complying with privacy laws and knowing basically the framework within which you can do your investigations because that will vary, country to country.

Sometimes you'll have some competing factors and conflicts of laws if you like, and making sure that you have the right people in place that are helping you make the decision so that you, as an investigator, don't cross the line or do something, with the best intent that would be okay somewhere else but not okay in that jurisdiction. I think that's really very challenging to navigate.

Courtney: I know. Just hearing you talk about, you need to know laws here, you need to know laws here, what sort of other challenges might arise from teams that are spread out geographically?

Lyn: That is more about a people issue. I've worked remote from my headquarters. In this work, it's really isolating. Nobody wants to go and have lunch with the corporate investigators, okay? It's isolating. It's also, by its nature of the work, even though you don't conduct yourself in this manner, it's kind of adversarial. You're always having to land, "I need to have a meeting with you. I need to interview you about this." That's pretty stressful for the employees and for the investigator. Trying to make them feel part of a team, building that connective tissue within the team, within your bigger groups, very challenging and takes a lot of effort.

I have, as I said, a team all around the world. I have managers and then I have people within those teams, but just from a personal perspective, I make sure that I have meetings with each one of my team members, individually, and in their timezone too. I'll take calls at five o'clock in the morning to speak to my team members in India or Dubai or something like that. Making sure people are connecting with the virtual team members.

Even thinking about the taxonomy of it. They're *remote*. Well, we're remote to them too. Us and them, onshore, offshore…all of those are labeling terms and not conducive to one team. It's hard work. We're learning all the time, and I've certainly made some mistakes over the years but that's important.

Then also, understanding the diversity of culture and background and approach. The reason we have diverse teams is to bring all of that to the team. But to be inclusive, you've got to have some empathy. You got to understand where people are coming from. You don't want everybody to be this carbon copy of yourself. You want that difference but you also have to appreciate and understand that difference.

Courtney: What do you think are some of the most important traits for a manager to hone and develop? Because you're talking about, I'll have to have conversations at 5:00 or I need to understand differences. What sort of traits?

Lyn: Got to be a good human. Be a good human first.

Courtney: Good advice.

Lyn: We actually have, at Microsoft, some manager values, I think. I'm not sure if I'm using the right language there, but in terms of model, coach and care. Model the behavior that you want your team to do and see. That includes things like shutting off, taking time to be with your family, not working 24 hours a day and not responding to an email like that [snaps]. Because that's not the nature of them. Modeling behavior and that also means modeling inclusive behavior. Making sure that people see that you're prepared to run a virtual meeting and make sure everybody's heard. That means that they feel safe to ensure that if they feel someone was being talked over or wasn't heard, they can interject and so on. Encouraging that cohesive culture.

Coaching is really important. When we talk of coaching, it's not so much in terms of, "Let me show you how to do this." It's more in terms of, "What are you thinking? How do you think you'll approach? What do you think would work with that approach?" Asking questions so that the individual can get to the conclusions themselves so that they can go through the thought process. It's coaching, not solutioning for people. I think as managers, we have a tendency to say, "Here's how you do it." And do it by showing. We're finding that coaching, and having people get to the way to do it is a better approach, but also, they'll come at it from a different angle too. You may get something different and better than what you thought. That's the coaching aspect.

Caring. Again, going back to being good humans. I tell my team, it is family first, work last. I really mean that. No matter what happens to them and their team, their family, I should say, that's where their priority is. When you're managing a team of individuals, you've got to remember that that individual is just not — I'm going to be coarse about it — they're not just a butt on the seat. They come with this complete package, and that might be a family at home. It might be the fact that they're 500 miles away from their sick mother. There's all of these other things that make them who they are. As a manager, you've got to be cognizant of that. If your team feels that you care about them, they just bring in such a wonderful performance. It's brilliant.

Courtney: It's always fun to work for someone who cares about you.

Lyn: Too true.

Courtney: We just have time for one more question. What advice do you have for those who are interested in a career in corporate investigations?

Lyn: Certainly build your network, for sure. Think about what you bring to the table. There are a lot of people in the world wanting to get into corporate investigations who have been in law enforcement, who've left the armed services, even who've been in the forensic groups. There's a lot of competition as well. Think about what you bring to the table. I'd urge anyone in law enforcement to try and take a next step, a middle step, before coming into corporate. Just be it in the consulting space or something similar, so that they can get that diversity of experience across different industries and so on.

Do your studies. Get qualification, be it CFE or anything, but have some theoretical background. Hone your common sense, very important. I think practicality is really important and also your interpersonal skills. We talk about fraud and fraud extermination and financial investigations, but at the end of the day, this is all about people. That's the key thing. It is people that go across all of it, who you interview, who you interact with, who you work for, who you work with. That would be my advice.

Courtney: Lovely advice. Well, thank you so much for chatting with us today.

Lyn: Pleasure.

Courtney: It's been so fun talking to you. If you enjoyed today's episode, you can find all episodes of *Fraud Talk* at ACFE.com/podcast or wherever you listen to podcasts. This is Courtney Howell, signing off.