



*“MEA is always the first place we go as a sounding board.”*

And Hoshino knows sound. As the American operation of Japanese company, Hoshino Gakki, Hoshino markets and distributes Ibanez guitars and Tama drums to music stores servicing musicians and rock bands all over the country. President Bill Reim has been with the company since 1981—and the company has been with MEA since 1983.

Last year, when Hoshino faced unionization challenges in its Pennsylvania warehouses, they turned to MEA. Says Bill, “In that kind of situation, you have to understand what is required by law before you act. MEA was our first port of call in finding out what had to be done.”

Reim says MEA was not only able to offer advice, they also introduced him to other MEA members who had faced similar challenges. “There’s no insight like what you get from those who’ve lived through a similar

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## Keeping Members Current and Compliant



*As Director of MEA’s HR Services, Holly DePalma manages the Member hotline. She brings 15 years of HR leadership experience in both large organizations as well as entrepreneurial start ups. So when Holly answers the hotline, she’s bringing her own experience to the phone. Here she talks about how the hotline can help keep Members current and compliant.*

### What is the MEA Member Hotline?

The Hotline is an MEA Member resource that gives Members Human Resource support services that are accurate, reliable, consistent, and personalized to their business needs.

### How does your own professional experience help you manage hotline calls?

I was an internal HR Director for several different kinds of organizations: large and small, union and non-union, start-up/entrepreneurial, and large bureaucratic companies. With respect to compliance and employee relations issues, I’ve seen my fair share! In general, I understand the issues our members are facing on a day-to-day basis and enjoy helping people solve their problems.

### Is the hotline staffed in-house or outsourced?

We have a team of MEA staff who answer all hotline calls. The hotline is open Monday through Friday, 9 to 5, and we field about 1,600 calls a year. 90% of those calls are handled in house—we only refer about 10% out to our legal team. Our staff has the knowledge and experience to know how to answer a call and when to escalate a concern to an attorney. When we do refer a member to legal, by the way, there’s no extra charge for that consult—it’s considered part of the hotline service.

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situation,” he says. And MEA provided that networking opportunity.

When Hoshino first started with MEA almost 30 years ago, MEA functioned as the company’s outsourced HR department. Since then the company has grown to over 100 employees in the United States, and Hoshino now has its own HR manager—but they still rely on MEA. “We really value knowing we have access to legal information right away. That’s really important to us.”

Retaining membership in MEA is a “no-brainer,” says Reim.



*Bill Reim  
President, US Operations  
Hoshino*

***“It’s an affordable option that provides a lot of great services.”***

## What kinds of questions do you typically field on the hotline?

Sometimes the question is as simple as how to deal with government or vendor forms. The caller may not be familiar with the paperwork and may be looking for advice on how to respond. Other times the caller may already have the answer to their own question, but is looking for an objective third party affirmation. When you’re the sole HR person in a company you can sometimes feel as if you’re on an island by yourself, so it’s good to have someone to bounce ideas off. The hotline gets a number of those kinds of calls as well.

## What are the most frequent hotline topics?

Probably the topic about which we receive the most calls is the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and also the Fair Labor Standards ACT (FLSA). A large majority of the other calls have to do with internal policy development and administration.

## How do you ensure consistent responses on the hotline?

We track all incoming calls in a database, with notes. So if a Member calls in on a Monday with a question and talks with one person here and then calls back several days later for a follow-up call and reaches another MEA staff member, the notes on the first call are in the system, which provides continuity for the caller. We also meet as a team on a regular basis to review hotline calls and cases, so we’re all in the loop on what kinds of issues are confronting our Members. And we develop best practices from those case studies.

## What’s the oddest question you ever had to answer on the hotline?

Let’s see... my favorite question was about requirements to hire someone who was a convicted felon!

## How can the hotline help keep MEA Members current and compliant?

There are a number of tasks and initiatives that require HR oversight on a regular basis, such as employee postings or, say, the I-9 self-audit. A quick call to the hotline can let a Member know if there have been any changes in the paperwork or the regulations.

## Do you wish you’d had access to the MEA hotline when you were an HR Director?

YES! So many times as an in house HRD I would call a former colleague or a lawyer friend because I had to talk through an issue that I KNEW I had the right answer to, but just wanted to bounce my situation off of someone who understood the situation. It can be lonely working in HR! It’s great to provide support to folks on the front lines!