Anti-Bribery and Corruption Basics

Bribery means offering, promising, giving, accepting or asking for something of value in order to influence a person's actions in their official or business role. Corruption is a wider word, often described as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. The UN Convention against Corruption, adopted in 2003, deals with corruption in general, while the ISO 37001 standard for anti-bribery management systems focuses on bribery. This video covers four basics: gifts, facilitation payments, red flags and speaking up.

1. Gifts and Hospitality

The first basic is gifts and hospitality. Small, occasional and open courtesies are a normal part of business, but they become a problem when they are meant to influence a decision. A simple test is to ask whether the gift is modest, open, infrequent and free of hidden strings. Cash gifts are not acceptable under most policies, and nothing should be given or accepted during a tender or a pending decision. Many companies also require gifts above a set value to be recorded or approved.

Example: At the end of the year, a pupil's family gives the teacher a thank-you card. Applying the gifts and hospitality test, the card is modest and open, so it is fine, while an expensive present just before exam marking would not be.

At work: A supplier offers Rami a luxury watch while a tender is open. Applying the gifts and hospitality test, he politely declines and tells his manager.

2. Facilitation Payments

The second basic is facilitation payments. These are small unofficial payments made to speed up a routine government action, such as a permit or a customs clearance. They are illegal in many countries, and most company policies forbid them, even when they are common locally. The rules are not identical everywhere, so employees should follow the stricter standard and ask when unsure. A payment made under a real threat to someone's safety is treated differently, and it should be reported at once.

Example: A clerk at a permit office hints that a small cash payment will move an application to the top of the pile. Applying the rule on facilitation payments, the applicant refuses and asks for the official fee and a receipt.

At work: A customs officer tells Rami that a shipment will be released today only for a small cash payment. Applying the rule on facilitation payments, he refuses, asks for the official fee list and informs his compliance team.

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3. Red Flags

The third basic is spotting red flags. A red flag is a warning sign that bribery may be involved, although it is not proof. Typical examples are requests for cash or for payment to a personal or offshore account, unusually high commissions, vague invoices, agents recommended by an official, and pressure to avoid paperwork. When a red flag appears, we should pause, ask questions and check the facts before going ahead.

Example: A stranger offers to arrange a driving licence without a test, for cash and without a receipt. Spotting these red flags, the person understands that something is wrong and walks away.

At work: A new agent asks Rami for a very high commission, paid in cash to a personal account abroad, with no clear invoice. Spotting these red flags, Rami pauses the contract and asks the compliance team to check the agent.

4. Speaking Up

The fourth basic is speaking up. Anyone who sees or suspects bribery should report it through the channels the organisation provides, such as a manager, the compliance team or a confidential hotline. The UN Convention against Corruption calls on countries to consider protecting people who report in good faith. Good organisations investigate reports fairly and do not punish people for honest concerns. Reporting early can stop a small problem from becoming a serious one.

Example: A resident sees an inspector accept cash from a shop owner and tells the city's complaints line. Speaking up, the resident gives dates and details, and the authority can investigate.

At work: Rami reports the agent's request to the confidential hotline. Speaking up, he protects the company, and the compliance team investigates while keeping his name confidential.

Conclusion

In summary, bribery and corruption harm fair competition and trust. Gifts stay modest and open, facilitation payments are avoided, red flags lead to questions, and concerns are reported early. The UN Convention against Corruption and ISO 37001 give international frameworks for prevention. Everyone has a role, and a simple rule applies: when unsure, stop and ask.

Sources

• United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): United Nations Convention against Corruption (adopted 2003; Articles 15 and 16 on bribery, Article 33 on protection of reporting persons) – https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/uncac.html
• United Nations (2004). United Nations Convention against Corruption, full text – https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN_Convention_Against_Corruption.pdf
• ISO 37001: anti-bribery management systems (International Organization for Standardization; the page also lists the newer edition) – https://www.iso.org/standard/65034.html
• ISO is the International Organization for Standardization. This video is an independent explanation in our own words and is not affiliated with or endorsed by ISO or the United Nations.

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