

OMBUDS SOLUTIONSSM

Communication to reduce costs & increase productivity

David Pauker
dpauker@att.net
415.609.3000

WHY AN OMBUDS?

Ombuds are trusted navigators

Now, in a time of accelerated and disruptive political, economic, technological and social change, *organizational ombuds* serve as trusted navigators, engaged by organizations to inform critical decisions and maximize their positive impact. Ombuds help survey the terrain, assess risk, monitor trends, address challenges, and advocate for fair process. Around the world, ombuds proactively solve problems.

Organizations with highly engaged employees have 10%-15% higher profits. The favorable ROI of an ombuds will be reflected on your top and bottom lines. Ombuds provide a transformative force to:

- ❖ Develop and support more just, engaged and inclusive organizational cultures based on respect, safety and fairness – what some call *Cultures of Safety* or *Just Cultures* – that reduce costs, produce more reliable outcomes, increase productivity, improve workplaces, and inspire employee loyalty.
- ❖ Empower individuals and organizations to overcome disputes, conflicts and barriers that otherwise would hamper performance, precipitate unpredictable outcomes, and lead to expensive formal processes.
- ❖ Identify systemic trends and assess risks to help leaders make more informed business, policy and management decisions.
- ❖ Enable organizations to anticipate liability, avoid litigation and reduce costly damage to brands, relationships and reputations.
- ❖ Pressure-test new ideas, initiatives and proposed actions.
- ❖ Conduct training and education, coaching, and facilitation for individuals, teams, departments and organizations facing challenges.
- ❖ Complement and support HR, legal, compliance, diversity, organizational development and other departments.

A pathway through problems

An ombuds is a visible commitment to a culture that empowers individuals and organizations to reach their full potential. For example, an ombuds provides everyone in your organization a no-barrier, first-stop for securing guidance, insight and information to constructively manage tough workplace issues. By helping its ‘visitors’ discover options and often generate their own solutions before problems escalate, the ombuds empowers them and develops their skills for coping. Resulting increased competence and satisfaction develop self-responsibility and boost productivity.



In addition, the ombuds provides early warning alerts, recommendations, and non-identifiable statistical data to senior management regarding emerging areas for organizational concern. Outward facing businesses – such as hospitality and retail where 90% of employees have direct customer contact and may unconsciously express negative feelings – may particularly benefit from improved satisfaction, safety and fairness. Where there are unions, it may be advantageous to present the program as a joint company-union benefit.

An ombuds complements, but does not replace, your organization’s formal channels, such as EEO and grievance procedures. Its communication expertise supports and provides valuable insight for your HR,

diversity and organizational development offices. The Ombuds does not have authority to establish, change, or set aside any rules, policies, or management decisions.

Of course, ombuds can also work to support critical relationships outside the organization – for example, with customers and clients, suppliers, contractors, joint-venturers, and strategic partners.

A wealth of benefits

Ombuds recognize conflict is often the crucible through which individuals, organizations and communities must pass before real change, justice and progress can be achieved. When conflict is well managed (and studies show 85% of employees report experiencing workplace conflict), there is better consumer experience, improved productivity, and enhanced organizational identity (it's easier to attract the best employees and the stock price increases). Results include more controllable risk, reduced costs, sustainable growth, and measurable progress.

Ombuds also provide management with a venue for strategizing and practicing difficult conversations and implementations. Outcomes become more predictable, situations more manageable. There is favorable ROI for an ombuds:

- ❖ *Tangible benefits include:* (a) measurable decrease in legal liabilities and resources required to support grievances and lawsuits; (b) measurable decline in employee burnout and turnover, resulting in reduced absenteeism, presenteeism, and replacement costs; and (c) potentially measurable mitigation of health care costs by lowering conflict related stress that contributes to threatening conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease.
- ❖ *Intangible benefits include:* (a) opportunity to control risk as others have not; (b) better global information that provides early warning and recommendations for developing areas of organizational concern; and (c) solving problems confidentially, without costly legal processes, written records, arbitrations, or public embarrassment. In addition, solving tough problems before they become expensive ones not only lowers compliance costs and facilitates better job focus with more productivity, it enables more predictable and efficient allocation of resources.

The value of responsible discretion

Ombuds adhere to 4 Fundamental (ethical) Principles: confidentiality, informality, neutrality, and independence:

- ❖ *What ombuds can do:* Ombuds help 'visitors' better understand their issues and identify their options. Ombuds hold all communications in strict confidence. Ombuds may provide conflict and communications coaching, and may offer to support visitors as they pursue one of their options. With the visitor's permission ombuds may make informal inquiries to gather data and understanding. If appropriate, and with the permission of all the parties, ombuds may facilitate a conversation or even mediate the conflict. Ombuds may also explain company policies or make referrals to other offices.
- ❖ *What ombuds cannot do:* Ombuds cannot make decisions for anyone or require any person to take action to resolve any issue. Ombuds cannot give legal advice or testify on behalf of anyone in a dispute. Ombuds will not provide psychological counseling; will not serve as an advocate for any party; will not engage in any formal investigation; and will not inquire into the application or interpretation of a collective bargaining agreement or other union matters. Ombuds will not become involved in a case for which a formal process has begun or take part in a formal process or appeal.

Confidentiality, informality, neutrality and independence make it possible for consequential issues to safely come to light and be resolved, including:

- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Abuse, bullying, stalking
- Stress, depression, exhaustion
- Promotion, demotion, disciplinary
- Legal, P.R. vulnerabilities
- Conflicts with supervisors, co-workers, subordinates
- Potential violence
- Waste, fraud and (alleged) criminal activity
- Difficult team members
- Violations of policy
- Equity/inclusion - incl. gender, minority, religious, disability, LGBTQ
- Ethical issues
- Drinking, drugs
- Policies, procedures systems
- Redress wrongs, unfairness
- Performance reviews
- Preparing for difficult conversations
- Whistleblowing, fear of retaliation