



How Does An Ombudsman Fit Into An Organization?

A Unique Role Relative To Other Organizational Services

An ombudsman does not replace but rather complements and supplements other resources within an organization (e.g., human resources, ethics, legal, EAP) by providing important functions that are not provided, in full, by these other services. These functions include (but are not limited to) the ombudsman's ability to:

- Provide a safe and confidential forum to surface individual, group and systemic problems
- Listen to and help clarify concerns
- Help identify underlying issues and interests
- Explore possible options through formal or informal channels
- Collect general data on emerging trends and patterns in the organization
- Make systemic recommendations for change

An ombudsman often works in concert with different services in an organization to help with resolution of concerns, but does so in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of the individual(s) who seek ombudsman services. Ombudsmen generally have access to most organizational records related to a case when needed.

Location, Location, Location

In order to support the neutral role of the ombudsman, the office should be situated in a location that is not in close proximity to management or any of the other offices (such as ethics or EEO) that may convey a sense of formality. Additionally, in support of the confidential role of the ombudsman, the ombudsman office should also be located in an accessible yet discrete place so that members of the organization do not feel that their contact with the ombudsman is in the public eye.

Perception of the Ombudsman's Relationship to the Organization

The International Ombudsman Association's Standards of Practice recommends the ombudsman report to the highest organizational level possible, whether the President, Board of Directors, Chancellor or CEO. The reality and perception must be that the ombudsman is impartial and independent of the management structure within the organization. Reporting to the highest organizational level possible also conveys the organization's commitment to listening and responding to issues and concerns that arise.