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Harvard Forum: Ombuds a Corporate Best Practice for #MeToo Era
*'Top ten' recommendation highlights role of ombuds as confidential,
credible resources for employees and executives*

Seattle, WA (28 January 2019) – The [International Ombudsman Association](http://www.ombudsassociation.org) (IOA) today sought to draw attention to and underscore a “top ten” list posted this month in [The Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance and Financial Regulation](https://www.harvardlawreview.org/), in which the author recommends ombuds as part of an effective corporate reform and risk mitigation strategy for the #MeToo era.

“[Companies should] establish a culture ombudsperson who reports to the board with a dotted line,” wrote Laurie Hays, Managing Director for Special Situations at Edelman, a global public relations firm. “As a credible resource for employees, many HR departments have been seriously damaged by #MeToo revelations because they didn’t act unless the CEO was on board. The ombudsman can receive complaints if victims are too afraid to talk to HR or management.”

Hays emphasizes the important role of an ombuds in dynamic and complex organizations. An organizational ombuds provides confidential, informal, independent, and impartial assistance to individuals through problem-solving methods such as reframing, conflict coaching, mediation, and shuttle diplomacy. In addition to responding to concerns and disputes brought forward, an ombuds can also identify trends, systemic problems, and organizational issues for high-level leaders and executives in a confidential manner.

“In this high-stakes era of the #MeToo movement, ombuds are trusted navigators for organizations experiencing the disruptive power of rapid social, political, economic, and technological change,” said IOA President Marcia Martinez-Helfman. “Ombuds around the world engage in constructive problem-solving within their organizations, which fosters a culture of respect, civility, and justice. Senior leaders and employees can turn to an ombuds as a trustworthy source of insight and guidance.”

Ombuds serve as an informal supplement to an organization’s formal reporting channels, often collaborating with HR, compliance officers, and other organizational units and their representatives as appropriate. Ombuds do not, however, oversee department functions or receive complaints formally on behalf of an organization, so therefore, does not serve as an agent of notice.

“Hays’s recommendation highlights the importance of ombuds in helping individuals safely surface sensitive issues,” said Martinez-Helfman. “Organizations keen to support their people, manage risk, and proactively address trouble spots that may otherwise go undetected by formal functions are wise to invest in an ombuds office. This best practice can help boards avert media disasters and governance crises while also encouraging a culture of accountability and respect.”

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About IOA: The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) is a member-led, professional association committed to supporting organizational ombuds worldwide. The Association’s nearly 900 members help others safely navigate conflict and change in corporations, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, government entities, and non-governmental organizations across the globe. IOA provides professional development, networking, mentoring, and other resources, as well as a robust and engaging [annual conference](http://www.ombudsassociation.org). Learn more at [ombudsassociation.org](http://www.ombudsassociation.org).