

Ombuds Office Resources for Employment Conflicts

LISTENING

- Help the parties clarify the issues, disentangle complicated situations, and prioritize their concerns
- Offer a safe place to ventilate, reality test, organize thoughts and feelings

PROVIDING INFORMATION

- Provide access to guidelines and policies that may apply
- Educate about diversity, how difference in gender, age, cultural backgrounds, etc., may affect the workplace
- Make referrals to other resources, facilitate communication with other services or appropriate administrative units

OFFERING A RANGE OF OPTIONS

- Reframe issues to suggest options parties have not already thought of
- Assist parties in evaluating pros and cons of various options

HELP PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES – THE DIRECT APPROACH

- Plan, discuss, and possibly role play an upcoming meeting
- Coach parties on negotiation skills, constructive approaches
- Look over rough drafts of notes or letters, suggest how to avoid “red flags” of antagonism, emphasize civil tone

INFORMAL INTERVENTION AND SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

- With permission, Ombuds may act as third-party shuttle diplomats, going back and forth between disputants to clarify issues, initiate problem-solving process
- Transmit information in an impartial manner, clear up possible misunderstandings
- Explore options, identify areas of flexibility or “common ground”

MEDIATION

- Parties in conflict may meet in the presence of one or both Ombuds to have a facilitated discussion, to listen to each other’s concerns, to “clear the air” and enhance mutual respect
- Through the mediation process, parties may negotiate and search for agreement on “ground rules,” future steps
- If mutually acceptable, mediation process could result in a collaborative written statement (memo of intention or understanding), which could become an official record if approved by the supervisory “chain of command,” and could include mechanisms for future communication, enforcement, or other administrative follow-up

OTHER RESOURCES

- The Ombuds Office may assist in providing upward feedback on specific problems such as safety concerns, early warnings of problem areas, recommended system changes
- Generic approaches such as recommending training programs or reminders of policies and procedures

NOTE: In all functions, the Ombuds are designated neutrals, not advocates for any party or individual. All communications with the Ombuds are voluntary, and are considered confidential unless permission is granted to speak or act to facilitate resolution. The Ombuds Office offers informal alternatives, separate from the formal record-keeping or disciplinary process.