Ombuds Service Offerings for Whole Groups

A few of the reasons whole groups come to Ombuds:

• To improve communication
• To build collaboration
• To navigate change
• To manage a crisis
• To improve morale
• To prepare for strategic planning or retreats

Process Outline

1. **Leadership meets with Ombuds to:**
   - Discuss goals, clarify the process and its limitations, and set a time line for the process.
   - Decide what questions visitors should focus on during their 1:1 visit to Ombuds. The questions relate to specific goals the group is working towards. Some sample questions:
     - What’s working well?
     - What’s not working well?
     - What are your recommendations?
   - Coordinate with Ombuds Services to determine who among the Ombuds staff will meet with the team members (so that leadership can include that name when announcing this initiative).

2. **Ombuds Services makes a presentation to the group**
   - Presentation includes: what a visit to Ombuds will look like, how a visit might be helpful to the individual and group, Ombuds confidentiality, limitations of the process, next steps, Q&A.

3. **Leadership sends an e-mail to explain this initiative**
   - See last page of this document for talking points and a sample.
   - Please send Ombuds a copy of the announcement you make to your staff about this initiative so that Ombuds is in the loop.
4. **Individual visits to Ombuds**
   - Each individual comes to Ombuds Services for a confidential 1:1 visit.
   - What is a visit?
     - A visit starts with reviewing a *Privacy Agreement* which explains that Ombuds Services will not reveal the identity of any individual contacting the office, nor what was said during a visit without the express permission of the individual.
     - The ombuds then invites the visitor to think out loud about the workplace situation from the visitor's perspective. The ombuds listens, ask clarifying questions, and offers neutral, constructive acknowledgement.
     - The ombuds gives input about available resources: services Ombuds for Staff offers (such as mediation), UNM policies that offer guidance, and other resources available to UNM staff.
     - The ombuds explores with the visitor how they might approach the situation to improve communication and collaboration.

5. **After the 1:1 visits**
   - After the visits, leadership is encouraged to listen for staff concerns and ideas, listen to staff concerns, respond constructively, and generally notice if or how the team dynamics shift.
   - The group leader may meet with Ombuds Services again a few weeks after the individuals have completed their visits to think through next steps.
     - If desired and/or appropriate, Ombuds Services may make a presentation/educational workshop to the whole group.
     - If desired and/or appropriate, Ombuds Services may facilitate a conversation among all who were invited to have a visit. The focus of the conversation is based on the questions the leadership asked the visitors to focus on during their visits.
Consider including in your announcement of this initiative:

- Purpose of the initiative.
- That Ombuds Services is confidential, independent, neutral and informal.
- To call Ombuds by XXX date to schedule a visit. Specific name of Ombuds to ask for, if appropriate.
- Purpose of visits. Include any specific questions you’d like the visitor to explore during their visit.
- Offer Ombuds website for more information
  http://ombudsforstaff.unm.edu/index.html

Sample Language

Dear Staff,

Staff Ombuds Services offers a confidential, informal, neutral and independent process for UNM staff members who want to build workplace communication and collaborate to improve their workplace. Staff Ombuds Services is providing a process to all of our staff to facilitate communication about workplace concerns and how to improve things.

To begin this process, please call to schedule a confidential visit with Ombuds Services. Ombuds will not report who came in, nor the details of any visit. That visit is your opportunity to think out loud, off the record and with a neutral listener about:

1. What’s working well?
2. What’s not working well/ where we can improve?
3. Your recommendation.

This process of exploring the questions in a confidential setting with a neutral listener can prepare each of us for talking about them together, which is the next step. The point of this process is to encourage more open communication about workplace concerns and goals.

To that end, each of you are invited to call Ombuds Services (277-2993) by XXX (date) to schedule a confidential, informal visit with Ombuds Services. Plan for the visit to be between 1-2 hours. This is considered University business and so may be done on work time.

Here’s a link from their website on their principles and what you can expect:
http://ombudsforstaff.unm.edu/our-principles.html