Ombuds: Role and Function

The primary duties of an organizational Ombuds are to work with individuals and groups to explore and assist them in determining options to help resolve conflicts, problematic issues, concerns, or reach goals, and to bring systemic concerns to the attention of the organization for resolution.

An Ombuds:

- preserves the confidentiality of those seeking services,
- maintains a neutral/impartial position with respect to the concerns raised,
- works at an informal level of the organizational system, and
- is independent of formal organizational structures.

What an Ombuds does:

- Listens to understand. The Ombuds doesn’t listen to judge or to decide who is right or wrong, they listens to understand the issue from the individual’s perspective. This is a critical for developing options for resolution.
- Assists in reframing issues and developing and helping individuals evaluate options.
- Guides or coaches individuals to deal directly with other parties, including the use of formal resolution resources of the organization. An Ombuds often seeks to help individuals improve their skill and their confidence in giving voice to their concerns or goals directly.
- Refers individuals to appropriate resolution resources that can potentially resolve the issue.
- The Ombuds is a source of detection and early warning of new issues and a source of suggestions of systemic change to improve existing processes.

What an Ombuds does not do:

- Participate in formal investigations or play any role in a formal issue resolution process.
- Serve in any other organizational role that would compromise the neutrality of the Ombuds role.
- Make binding decisions or mandate policies.
- Create or maintain records or reports for the organization.

Skills, Training and Professional Requirements of Ombudsmen

The most important skills include active listening, communicating successfully with a diverse range of people.