

## OMBUDS

Ombuds are specially trained “designated neutral” individuals who listen to concerns and clarify issues. Ombuds neither advocate for employees nor for management. An Ombuds is an independent, neutral, confidential resource that advocates for and facilitates fair process and appropriate systemic change.

The Ombuds helps individuals determine how to address their concerns, exploring the pros and cons of different options. Depending on the issue, the Ombuds can conduct a discrete fact-finding inquiry and present recommendations. With the individual’s concurrence, the Ombuds can talk with appropriate organization officials. The Ombuds also can, with the agreement of all parties, informally mediate a dispute.

The Office of the Ombuds is not part of an organization’s “formal” management structure. It does not make policy or conduct formal investigations. It is the safest place to discuss one’s concerns, conflicts, complaints, or disputes, in total confidence and outside of formal channels, without fear of reprisals or retaliation.

The Office of the Ombuds keeps no formal records. Contacting the Ombuds is not the same as contacting a company representative. It does not formally place an organization “on notice” which, depending on the nature of the issue, might require the organization to take immediate action. If an individual wants to put an organization on notice the issue must be escalated to one of the available formal channels.

Organizational Ombuds are bound by the International Ombudsman Association’s Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice which mandate adherence to independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality. An individual can be certain that any communications with the Ombuds will be held in strict confidence. If an Ombuds is served with a subpoena or court order to disclose information, the Office will seek judicial protection for this confidentiality, which has been upheld by the courts.

The Ombuds will not discuss an issue with anyone or take action on the issue unless the individual authorizes the Ombuds to present the concern to an appropriate office in the organization. However, where there is imminent risk of physical harm or serious jeopardy to the organization’s well-being, the Ombuds will bring the issue forward while making every effort to maintain the confidentiality of the individual.

Finally, in its role as a change facilitator, the Ombuds acts as a catalyst in promoting systemic reforms that will enhance

performance and reduce risk to the organization. As well, periodic reports, thoughtfully generic in nature to preserve confidentiality, identify trends and issues that deserve review and action by the Board of Directors and senior management of an organization.

For an analysis of the critical role of the Board, see [Board Champions for the Ombudsman](#), an article from the May 2008 issue of *Directors Monthly*, the newsletter of the National Association of Corporate Directors.

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