

7

Corporate Ombudsman Association

February to May 1987

OMBUDSMAN OMBUDSMAN

Issue Two
Fall, 1986

The Impact of Ombudsman Work

James T. Ziegenfuss, Jr. PhD.

At the Ombudsman Conference in 1986, there was a brief presentation and some discussion of the impact/payoffs to ombudsman work. One way to organize these findings is to categorize the ombudsman's host organization as follows:

Ombudsmen impact the corporate *culture* by: creating a sense of fairness; demonstrating belief in/value of corporate listening; demonstrating the value of communication; and creating a ritual related to problem solving.

Ombudsmen impact the *technical* work by: acting as a mechanism for confronting and solving technical problems and conflicts; and by increasing technical quality assurance (as a feedback system).

Ombudsmen impact the *structure* of the corporation: as a legitimate authority for complaint response; by providing mechanisms for handling organizational complexity; and by increasing professionalism.

Ombudsmen impact the *psychological* system by: increasing quality of working life, including morale, sense of control, commitment, loyalty; and by decreasing personality conflict blockages to productivity.

Ombudsmen impact *management*: as a planned approach to problem solving; by developing the problem-solving abilities of management, and by reducing turnover. In short, the effects on the organization are both broad and deep — a worthwhile investment.

A Personal Transition

My Fellow Colleagues,

As I write this article, I am filled with very mixed feelings. I am leaving my job as an ombudsman at AT&T, and this will impact on my place in the Corporate Ombudsman Association. My conviction about the contribution the ombudsman can make in the world of corporate work life is unlimited. Yet many changes are taking place within AT&T and Bell Labs, and one of these led me to the conclusion that the function and role of ombudsperson will not serve the vision I had for it.

There has been enormous support from my boss, Vice President Lee Tuomenoksa, for the values the ombudsperson represented to the people and this organization. When he recently announced that he is retiring, I sadly realized our shared vision would be lost.

This carries with it mixed feelings. First the feelings of gratitude for your choice of me as President-elect of the Association. A great deal of commitment, and affection, went into the creation of this association with Mary Rowe and Chris McEachern. From the three of us, it grew and blossomed into all of you. The sad feeling comes when I tell you that serving in this honored position is no longer possible.

I also leave with a happy heart because of all that has happened in recent years. There remains the conviction that the ombudsman function *has* made a difference, and my organization will never be the same as it was before the function existed. People have been heard, and critical issues have been dealt with effectively. On many occasions I have been told the ombudsperson was the reason individuals found hope and

satisfaction in their life at work. Our Area in AT&T made the greatest improvement concerning issues raised through an extensive organization survey. When Lee Tuomenoksa was asked why, his answer was simply: "We had an ombudsperson!"

Several ombudsmen made a public statement about the needs and value we bring to organizational life in *Fortune Magazine*, November 24, 1986, in an article entitled: "Listen to Your Whistleblower." I am happy other organizations continue to offer support and see value in what the Office of Ombudsman contributes.

My disappointment is made lighter because I have known each of you, no matter how fleeting the relationship. My belief in the role, and function, and purposes it serves, remains unchanged. For this reason my sadness is far outweighed by the power alive in many other organizations. The organizations you serve so well cannot but be better places to work because of your efforts.

My hope for each of you is that your organization, your management, and your colleagues will continue to value and acknowledge the rich contribution you make. The hope of creating productive, quality organizations rests not only with technology or bottom-line profitability, but in creating a climate where individual concerns do not block what is possible. I realize I made a contribution — may each of you continue to do the same.

Thank you for the times we have shared, and I wish you continued success in your efforts.

Martha Maselko
Martha Maselko

News

MARY P. ROWE
Special Assistant to the President
JULY 20 1987
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OMBUDSMAN

1986 Ombudsman Conference Addresses Corporate Ethics, Diversity, and Conflict

The third annual conference of the Corporate Ombudsman Association was held in St. Louis, Missouri on May 14-16, 1986.

Attending the conference were 58 people who serve a designated ombudsman function; they represented 30 companies. Several independent researchers interested in the development and growth of the ombudsman function were also present.

Mary Rowe, Special Assistant to the President of MIT, and President of the Corporate Ombudsman Association, presided over the meeting, emphasizing the need to maintain confidentiality concerning issues and/or case studies that would be discussed. She then defined the purpose of the corporate ombudsman function as one of addressing work-related problems within their respective organizations, and of identifying new areas of concern within the workplace. The skills used in this function include: conciliation, mediation, and influencing systems change.

Carole Trocchio, Liaison Department Manager of The Southland Corporation, then addressed the group on the subject of ethics in the corporate environment. Following this presentation, Ms. Trocchio led a panel of six ombudsmen from various companies in an analysis of a case study involving business ethics. Members of the audience participated by offering opinions, practices, and philosophy within the ombudsman function as they relate to ethical business practices. Several case studies touched on topics such as cultural differences in the workplace, and how to handle difficult employees.

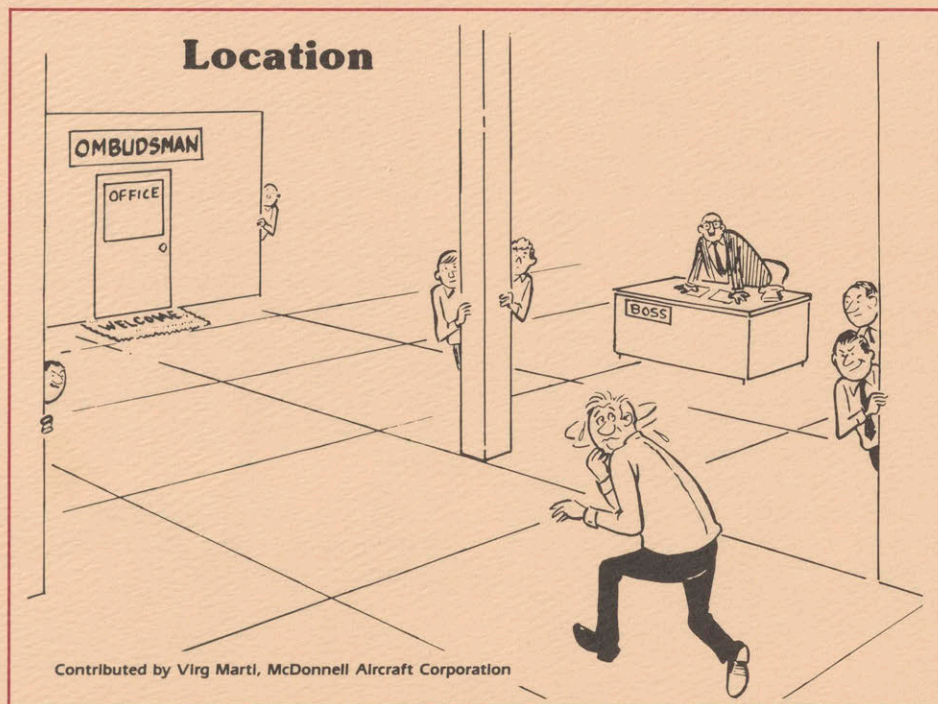
On Thursday, May 15, Lee Pledger, of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), presented a program called "Training for Diversity," and described how DEC uses core groups of employees to discuss issues involving Affirmative Action and valuing differences. He spoke about innate differences, such as race or sex, and how they impact participants on both professional and personal levels.

Researcher Lee Robbins shared the results of a recent survey he completed concerning the ombudsman function. Based on his research, an "ombuds" is defined as... "a neutral member of the corporation who provides confidential and informal assistance to employees in resolving work-related concerns, and is outside the normal management control structure." Activities of an ombud may include:

- responsive listening (including joint definition of the client's concern);
- coaching the client in the use of company procedure;
- an attempt at direct resolution by the client, including a fact-finding investigation;
- conciliation;
- referral to other helping agents or change agent groups (e.g., Personnel, EAP, etc.);
- mediation;
- referral for arbitration by higher management;
- generic intervention;
- advocacy of the client's case within a grievance procedure and arbitration.

Also on the program, researcher James Ziegenfuss, Jr. spoke about "Identifying Outcomes of Corporate Work: An Organizational Systems View." In his observation, the ombudsman function impacts the organizational structure through the organization's various subsystems: goals and values; technical; managerial; psychosocial; and structural.

A skills workshop, "Managing Conflict" was conducted by Jim Maselko, Organization Development Consultant with the firm of Block, Petrella, Weisbord, in Plainfield, N.J. Mr. Maselko discussed the problems in-



herent in dealing with conflict, especially the reluctance to confront an issue, the fear that someone will get hurt, and the fear that the situation will get out of control. Mr. Maselko offered a positive definition of conflict, which is: "Conflict is the consequence of differences that exist and need to be managed." He also identified the skills needed in the management of conflict.

How to set up an Ombudsman Office was the subject of a presentation by Virgil Marti, Vice President/Ombudsman of McDonnell Aircraft Corp. Mr. Marti initiated his ombudsman role in August 1985 and discussed his objectives and goals, the changing work environment, and the activities of his department. He discussed with the participants the appropriate placement of the office of the ombudsman in the organizational structure, as well as the ideal placement of the physical office. Mr. Marti also spoke about the importance of developing a network between the ombudsman and various other departments, and the importance of maintaining two-way communication with employees.

James Simon, Esq., and Jerome Weinstein, Esq., of Mintz, Levin, Ferris, Cohn, Ferris & Glovsky, P.C., discussed "Dealing with Mental Illness" and "Drug and Alcohol Problems In the Workplace," respectively. Mr. Simon addressed the problem of defining mental illness, and the duty to accommodate and provide opportunity for treatment. Mr. Weinstein addressed the impact of drug and alcohol use on the job, performance, and the pressures on employers to deal with these problems, including privacy rights and other tort liabilities.

Mary Rowe again addressed the participants as this productive third Ombudsman Conference was drawing to a close. Ms. Rowe asked the participants to vote on the 1986-7 Officers and Board of Directors for the Corporate Ombudsman Association.

CORPORATE OMBUDSMAN CONFERENCE

May 20-21, 1987
Marina Del Ray, California

Wednesday, May 20, 1987

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
8:30 - 9:05 a.m.	Welcome
9:00 - 9:45 a.m.	A CEO will share views regarding the value and impact of the Ombudsman function (a tentative commitment has been made by McDonnell Aircraft Corp.).
9:15 - 10:30 a.m.	A case study on ethics as it applies to the Ombudsman function in the corporate environment.
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 - 12:00 noon	The most recent research results obtained regarding the impact of the Corporate Ombudsman.
12:00 - 1:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 - 2:30 p.m.	Skill session on Negotiation. Exercises aimed at making you more aware of your own attitudes and behaviors. Opportunity to learn effective approaches to negotiating differences towards agreement.
2:30 - 2:45	Break
3:30 - 3:45 p.m.	Case study discussions on effective teamwork with other human resource departments in the organization.
2:45 - 5:00 p.m.	Dinner and evening event.

Thursday, May 21, 1987

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast
8:30 - 10:15 a.m.	Theory presentation and skill-building exercise on more effective ways to handle immoral, unsafe, and illegal problems.
10:15 - 10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30 - 12:00 noon	Legal Perspectives: Drug screening, AIDS and other critical issues faced by the Ombudsman of the '80s.
12:00 - 1:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 - 3:00 p.m.	System Feedback - Alternative ways to alert upper management to new problems and coming trends facing the organization; data collection, data analysis and data communications.
3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	Break
3:15 - 4:00 p.m.	"Retrenchment, Retraining and Retirement:" The Ombudsman role in assisting the organization to deal effectively with these problems.
4:00 - 5:00 p.m.	Goals, strategies and future direction of the Corporate Ombudsman Association.

Continued on page 4

Code of Ethics

This Code of Ethics was adopted by the Board of Directors at the last Directors' meeting:

I. The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, has the responsibility of maintaining strict confidentiality concerning matters that are brought to his/her attention. The only exception, at the sole discretion of the ombudsman, is in the instance of threat to the physical safety of others and/or threat to company assets. This duty to warn, however, shall be initiated only after the ombudsman has strongly counseled with the client involved to encourage the client to personally come forth. In the event the client still refuses, the ombudsman has an obligation to notify the client of the intended breach of confidentiality in this situation. Even then, the ombudsman has the responsibility and obligation to discuss the situation only with those who have a need to know.

II. The ombudsman has the responsibility to insure that any records or files pertaining to confidential discussions with clients are safe from inspection at all times by other employees, including management at all levels.

III. The ombudsman has the responsibility, when recommending actions as a result of impartial investigations, to make recommendations that will be equitable to all parties and reflect good business practice.

IV. The ombudsman has the responsibility to behave in a professional manner at all times, to maintain the credibility of the ombudsman function.

Conference

Continued from page 3

The following were unanimously elected: Mary Rowe, MIT, President; Martha Maselko, AT&T, President-Elect and Treasurer (see article on page 1); Carole Trocchio, The Southland Corporation, Vice President and Secretary. Members of the Board include: Lee Pledger, DEC; Lewis Redding, MIT; Kay Buckler, General Electric; Jim Hendry, The World Bank; and Virgil Marti, McDonnell Aircraft Corp.

Questionnaires Out Soon

The Research Committee will be sending out questionnaires to every known practicing corporate ombudsman before the first of the year. Everyone who fills out a questionnaire will immediately get back a new 20-page write-up of results of the last pilot survey, as a thank-you. (We can't send out the survey results before we get your questionnaires back; we want to be sure no one's answers are influenced in any way).

Association Dues Due

If you have not sent in your Ombudsman Association membership dues for 1987, please do so. Send \$75 for a full membership, or \$60 for an associate membership, to President Mary Rowe, MIT, 77 Massachusetts Ave., Room 10-213, Cambridge, MA 02139.

We hope you enjoyed reading this issue of the Ombudsman News. We welcome your comments, suggestions, and ideas about the newsletter or about the content of any article. We also welcome manuscripts, photographs, or artwork for consideration in future issues. Please send your material to: Carole Trocchio, The Southland Corp., 2828 North Haskell Ave., Dallas, TX 75221.

Fall, 1986

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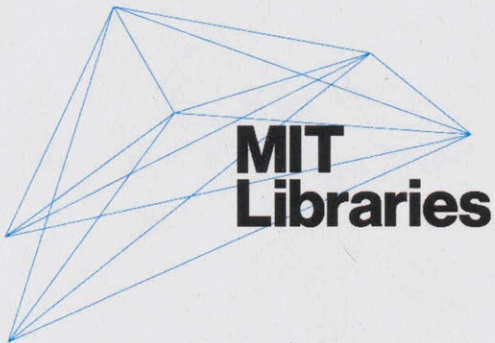
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