

REPORT  
OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

October 2012 – October 2013

University of Louisville

OMBUDS RESPONSIBILITIES, DUTIES AND FUNCTION

An ombud's scope of duties and authority is limited and based on neutrality, independence, impartiality, and confidentiality. An ombuds must not disclose and must not be required to disclose any information provided in confidence with the exception of the statutory duty to inform of imminent harm to an identifiable person or abuse of elders or children. The ombuds should be able to develop, evaluate, and discuss options available to affected individuals and be capable of negotiating, facilitating, or mediating in conducting an inquiry. Another important role is education and identifying complaint patterns and trends and to make recommendations for the resolution of an individual complaint or a systemic problem to those persons who have the authority to act upon them.

An ombuds is not a substitute for a legal representative, personal representative, or advocate. Due to the informal, neutral, confidential, and independent work of the ombuds they typically do not have a role or engage in formal investigations, serve in any post that might compromise the neutrality of the office, receive notice to the organization, make binding decisions or mandate policies, or create or maintain records or reports to the organization. An ombuds may act as a personal coach to individuals who wish to transform themselves or the organizational culture.

An ombuds can be the eyes, ears, and intellect of an enlightened organization that recognizes the value and importance of alert and pro-active intervention of common and ordinary complaints, reflected as the value leadership places on the people who work in such a caring environment. It is a form of risk management with the added benefit of allowing people with a problem to work it out in an early and simple way, before it can get out of control or more difficult to manage.

During this period the ombuds conducted 16 university related teaching or training programs of at least one hour duration:

10 Professional Development (faculty and staff)

6 Student Centered Discussions

During this period the ombuds consulted with a minimum of 70 unique individuals:

34 Staff - Staff

32 Faculty - Faculty

4 Student - Faculty

These consultations may have involved several people over several meetings or telephone conversations but are counted as a single unit for the purpose of this report. The total number of people served may number in the hundreds. About 20 % of all cases involve staff-faculty issues.

## ISSUES

A repetitive issue of concern involves relationship weaknesses, due primarily to poor communication, lack of respect or trust, and a sense of not being recognized for contribution to the common effort. Supervisors and managers probably do not recognize that successful communication is a two-way street. An exchange of expectations is different from giving instructions, and many have said the breakdown of the professional relationship was sudden and unexpected. When actions are consistent with words trust can be achieved and often arises from interdependence with others to achieve positive outcomes. Cooperation cannot be compelled and workplace interactions, the foundation of confidence or belief felt toward another to overcome fear or doubt, are often found wanting. Trust contains a strong emotional component but we do not share expectations, agree to steps to attain those expectations, sanctions for unmet expectations, and measurements of outcomes. This is a fair process, but many employees complain they thought they were doing a good job only to be formally censured, usually under the guidance of Human Resources policies and procedures. Over 70% of employees are not fully engaged in their jobs and only 12% report having the leaders they need. 80% of employees who are dissatisfied with their direct manager were disengaged, while 70 % who lack confidence in the abilities of senior leadership are not fully engaged. 78% of workers in the U.S. have expressed that being recognized for their work is necessary for them to be motivated to do their job. (Gallup State of the American Workplace Poll)

A recent survey by Philippe Glaude indicates that about 74% of respondents indicate that engaging people in a dialogue happens either sometimes or rarely. The same people say that this ability is important or absolutely important in 94% of cases. When looking at the ability to ask insightful questions 65% expressed rarely or sometimes results and 96% of these people say this ability is important or absolutely important.

More faculty are utilizing the services of the ombuds this year over last as trust of the office has grown and successful practices are being shared. Because faculty must consult the ombuds prior to filing a grievance, it may be possible this process is responsible for the low grievance filing and that matters of concern are being attended to earlier and with a neutral third party as a facilitator.

## MEDITATION

The Office of the Ombuds is working with Get Healthy Now and Dr. Pradeep Deshpande, professor emeritus, to bring about a program for the university community to raise individual consciousness and, thereby, the consciousness of the collective to enhance personal interactions, satisfaction, creativity, and compassion. Research indicates that empathy and compassion are higher in people who meditate regularly, and meditation diminishes age-related effects on gray matter in the brain and reduces the decline of cognitive functions. Compassionate management should be a core value at the University of Louisville. Compassion boosts employee well-being and health and the more we are compassionately connected the better we feel and the more others are there to support us when we need it, as we all will at some time. Care and compassion are not separate from being professional or doing the work of the university but are a natural and living representation of people's humanity in the workplace.

## P.E.A.C.E.

Workplace conflict creates stress, destroys morale, decreases motivation, and reduces job satisfaction. Given the negative consequences of conflict, most people do not choose to exacerbate these behaviors and act or react because they do not have the skills to deal with conflict in the workplace.

When people learn more productive ways to interact, they can communicate differently, and workplace relationships can improve. The framework of a skills-development program is built on the precepts of conflict resolution and transformation, including perception clarification, empathetic listening, appreciation of diversity, collaborative problem-solving, and emotional intelligence (P.E.A.C.E. was developed by Dr. LaVena Wilkin, Director of graduate studies at Sullivan University, Louisville, Kentucky).

For interventions to be effective, they must address the root causes and antecedents of the conflict. Communication and perceptions are at the root of almost every conflict, so these are fundamental components of any ombud's interaction. Additionally, self-awareness, empathy, and emotional intelligence have a positive effect on workplace aggression. Self-awareness helps people become attuned to their emotions so they understand the motivations behind their actions and communications. Likewise, empathy allows people to understand the other person's feelings and view the world through his or her lens. Finally, when people understand the role emotions play in their responses, they are less likely to react to negative situations in a destructive manner.

Although presented separately, the precepts of P.E.A.C.E. are not linear. In fact, they overlap and build upon one another. For example, perceptions are clarified by empathetically listening, appreciating diversity, and employing emotional intelligence. Each of these will support collaborative problem solving, which is more respectful, satisfying, affiliative, and empowering.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The ombuds office has an online and anonymous kindness/civility survey capability for use within departments or schools to encourage open discussion of prevailing matters or issues of importance. The three question survey asks how we are treating each other on a scale of one to five, what acts of kindness have been witnessed by colleagues lately as well as any concerns regarding social media involving the group, and what concerns one may have regarding this particular workplace. Responses come to the ombuds and the information may be shared with the group in a facilitated discussion. The numerical score establishes a baseline and the survey can be repeated periodically to measure climate changes and identify issues for discussion. This can be an effective management tool if we embrace the philosophy that people are important and should be treated as human capital. Core values promoting trust, diversity, personal and professional growth, mutual respect, civility, and productive communication should be absolute necessities for our university to thrive and compete. Managers have been reluctant to utilize this method of raising and addressing concerns and matters of importance to employees, perhaps as a perceived threat to managerial authority and control. The most effective leaders at leading and adapting to change at any level in the organization are those that have the highest level of emotional intelligence. The components of knowledge, skills, and abilities that comprise emotional intelligence can be learned. Leadership competencies of adaptability, decision making, team building, and communication are essential to a healthy workplace with an emotionally healthy workforce. Deans should encourage department chairs to experiment with resources and tools offered by the ombuds office.

Tony Belak

ADDENDUM to OMBUDS REPORT

October – December

Calendar Year 2013

During this period the Ombuds consulted with ten faculty members on a variety of issues dealing with inter-personal matters, compensation, or inter-departmental conflicts.

During this period the Ombuds consulted with six staff matters and one case involving three graduate students in one department.

During this period the Ombuds met with nine graduate students in a PLAN training session.

FINAL TALLY:

During the calendar year 2013 the Ombuds conducted 17 university related teaching or training programs of at least one hour duration:

10 Professional Development (faculty and staff)

7 Student Centered

During calendar year 2013 the Ombuds consulted with a minimum of 89 unique individuals:

44 Staff – Staff

38 Faculty – Faculty (Administration)

7 Student – Faculty

These consultations may have involved several people over several meetings or telephonic conversations but are counted only once for this report.