

# ***Ombuds Office Columbia University***

## **Resources for Employment Conflicts**

### **LISTENING**

Help the parties clarify the issues, disentangle complicated situations, and prioritize their concerns

Offer a safe place to ventilate, reality test, organize thoughts and feelings

### **PROVIDING INFORMATION**

Provide access to guidelines and policies that may apply

Educate about diversity, how difference in gender, age, cultural backgrounds, etc., may affect the workplace

Make referrals to other resources, facilitate communication with other services or appropriate administrative units

### **OFFERING A RANGE OF OPTIONS**

Reframe issues to suggest options parties have not already thought of

Assist parties in evaluating pros and cons of various options

### **HELP PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES – THE DIRECT APPROACH**

Plan, discuss, and possibly role play an upcoming meeting

Coach parties on negotiation skills, constructive approaches

Look over rough drafts of notes or letters, suggest how to avoid “red flags” of antagonism, emphasize civil tone

### **INFORMAL INTERVENTION AND SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY**

With permission, Ombuds Officers may act as third-party shuttle diplomats, going back and forth between disputants to clarify issues, initiate problem-solving process

Transmit information in an impartial manner, clear up possible misunderstandings

Explore options, identify areas of flexibility or “common ground”

### **MEDIATION**

Parties in conflict may meet in the presence of one or both of the Ombuds Officers to have a facilitated discussion, to listen to each other’s concerns, to “clear the air” and enhance mutual respect

Through the mediation process, parties may negotiate and search for agreement on “ground rules,” future steps

If mutually acceptable, mediation process could result in a collaborative written statement (memo of intention or understanding), which could become an official record if approved by the supervisory “chain of command,” and could include mechanisms for future communication, enforcement, or other administrative follow-up

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

Ombuds Office may assist in providing upward feedback on specific problems such as safety concerns, early warnings of problem areas, recommended system changes

Generic approaches such as recommending training programs or reminders of policies and procedures

**NOTE:** In all functions, the Ombuds Officers are designated neutrals, not advocates for any party or individual.

All communications with the Ombuds Officers are voluntary, and are considered confidential unless permission is granted to speak or act to facilitate resolution. The Ombuds Office offers informal alternatives, separate from the formal record-keeping or disciplinary process.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ombuds>  
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