What is an Ombudsman? and
Skills to Address Conflict

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Ombudsmen assist in resolving problems and conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidential</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptions: sexual harassment, unlawful conduct, and threat of harm</td>
<td>Don’t take sides; consider interests and concerns of all parties</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Independent</th>
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<td>Don’t arbitrate; resist participating in formal legal processes</td>
<td>Reports visitor data and trends annually to head of institution</td>
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What does an Ombudsman do?

• Listens carefully to issue
• Helps identify options and strategies for resolution
• Identifies and clarifies policies and procedures
• Referral to other appropriate resources for resolution
• Facilitates conversations to resolve the issue
• Identifies trends & makes recommendations for systemic change
### Using the Ombuds Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions are decided by visitors</td>
<td>Agreements are non-binding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visits are as confidential as can be and “off the record”</td>
<td>No legal privilege with confidentiality</td>
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95% of visitors seek help to decide how to handle conflict by themselves
Issues that my office sees

• Grad student, postdoc, staff scientist, and faculty mentoring
• Collaborations
• Authorship
• Interpersonal
• Research integrity or misconduct
Academic Institutions with Ombudsmen

• List available

• NIH has one of the best offices in the country

Wayne Blair, UNC

Attitudes for Good Communication

• Empathy and understanding
• Everyone is doing their best
• There is always new information to learn
• This is a joint effort between all involved
• The only person you can control is you
Skills to talk about anything

• What to do
  – Share your facts
    • Facts are the least controversial and most persuasive
  – Tell your story
    • What you’re starting to conclude based on the facts
  – Ask for other’s paths
    • Encourage others to share their facts and stories

• How to do it
  – Talk tentatively—use the spirit of inquiry
    • State your story as a story, not a fact
  – Encourage other viewpoints
    • Make it safe for others to share their viewpoints
Tools to make it safe to talk

• Remain calm and empathetic
  – Open body language, semi-verbal language “uh-huh,” “I see”
• Ask
  – “what’s going on?” “I’d like to hear your concerns”
• Paraphrase
  – “let’s see if I got this right…”
• Contrast statements fix misunderstandings
  – “The last thing I want to do is imply that you’re not serious about your work. In fact, I think you’re very serious about it.”
• Stick to the facts
• Apologize when appropriate
For the majority culture

• Understanding and valuing diverse perspectives is a journey of awareness and takes effort
• It is unlikely that an unintended cultural offense will be directly addressed by the offended person
  – especially if the offender has greater power in the relationship
• It is not always the minority population’s responsibility to educate or become more like the majority
• It is everyone’s individual responsibility to
  – increase their awareness of diverse perspectives and
  – create an environment where all perspectives are valued and respected
    • This is vital to maintain academic excellence in the US
References for managing conflict

- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when the stakes are high*, Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler
- *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, Bernard Mayer
- *Influence Without Authority*, Allan Cohen and David Bradford
- *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher and William Ury
  - Also good for negotiating job offers
- *High Conflict People in Legal Disputes*, Bill Eddy
  - Guide on managing people with personality disorders
Contact Information

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