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Blog

Interested in an Ethical Culture? Build an Ombuds Program

On 22 Jun, 2015

By John Zinsser

Guest post by [John W. Zinsser](#), [Pacifica Human Communications, LLC](#).

Grievances cannot be redressed unless they are known, and they cannot be kno deemed affronts and the messengers punished as offenders, who will hencefortl crime, hope becomes despair. - Ben Franklin

Benjamin Franklin never worked for a *Fortune* 500 company, but his analysis uncannily describes today's corporate compliance culture. The massive increase of compliance operations (last year alone JP Morgan Chase added 13,500 compliance personnel) has occurred while the reporting of issues has actually declined. The growth in compliance begs the question: Why can't people easily point out problems and know they will be addressed? Why do we believe that a massive and expanding corporate apparatus will ensure that what should happen actually does? Isn't this a consistent false hope? It hasn't worked yet.

In fact, research such as the Ethics Resource Center's [2013 National Business Ethics Survey](#) demonstrates that as [compliance programs](#) become more rigorous, the percentage of employees reporting the illegal or unethical behavior they witness has di in rigorous compliance cultures report wrong-doing less often, they also do not ask que then limits the chances to reduce or prevent developing problems.

The truths described above are one important reason why the majority of the global wc disengaged (i.e. unhappy, unproductive and liable to spread negativity to coworkers). (reports only 13% of the workforce is engaged and interested in making their workplace Franklin's prophetic statement: Fewer complaints (because of increasingly formalized ("despair." Isn't there a better way?

Although Poor Richard didn't know about it, there is a mechanism for employees of all to raise any concern or ask a needed question — an organizational ombuds program.

Properly constructed and executed organizational ombuds programs provide those who

- Consider possible solutions;
- Navigate the complexity of today's organizations;
- Sound out an idea; and
- Build a plan of action to address a situation.

As a result of being involved in these activities, the ombuds program is positioned to raise awareness of key issues the organization faces.

Properly aligned, embedded, and integrated (AEI) ombuds programs make dramatic and efficient contributions in companies. Designated as neutral, an organizational ombuds program efficiently manages work-related issues. This informal function can also advance organizational upward and outward feedback to generate systems improvements.

This function lowers legal and disputing costs by resolving issues at the lowest level. Cross-functional organizational functions (Compliance, HR, Legal, Safety, etc.) by helping guide those who are in the location.

AEI ombuds programs also aid organizations to live their espoused values, including being transparent. Ombudsman Steve Cordery estimates the ombuds function is responsible for up to 25% of a company's legal system. Eaton Corporation, a *Corporate Responsibility* magazine 2013 top 10 "Best Corporate Responsibility" tool for assuring they "Do Business Right." Data from another *Fortune* 100 company in specific use of the ombuds function correlates with higher safety and lower time-loss in the workplace.

Because organizational ombuds programs are independent, neutral, informal and confidential, they provide a "no-agenda/take-no-sides" channel where employees of every level have the best chance to be heard. Ombuds program users remain responsible for the issue and in control of the process. Employees are more likely to come forward to share observed wrong-doing and organizational involvement in selection of the resolution method, especially when combined with a legal proposition allows ombuds help organizations assure that what should happen, actually happens.

So where would you prefer to work?

A: A compliance-driven organization? Or

B: An ethical company with an empowering culture of engagement and trust where problems are solved?

I think we know which company Benjamin Franklin would invest in.

Almost everyone I ask chooses the company that commits to solve problems, behave ethically, and provide a safe and empowering tool: an organizational ombuds program.

Learn more about organizational ombuds programs:

Website

- [ConflictBenefit.com \(Pacifica\)](#)

Articles

- [Schenck, Andrea and John Zinnser \(2014\) "Prepared to Be Valuable: Positioning Ombuds Association, Vol. 7, No. 1.](#)
- [Bogoslaw, David. "Ombuds programs: creating a culture of trust rather than complianc](#)
- [Paper delivered at the 2015 Society of Petroleum Engineers E&P Health, Safety, Secu M. Bonnivier, M.C. Brooke-Lander, M. R. Lewis\) The Organizational Ombuds Office an in an Organization.](#)

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