

The meaning of fairness for an Ombuds

As many of us know, the practice of the ombuds includes independence, neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality. These core principles are essential to form the structural framework of an ombuds. Within this structure an ombuds may face challenging cases that may seem to be incapable of resolution unless fairness is also considered and accepted by both parties.

An ombuds desire to pursue fairness is the glue that underlies the framework. This may appear as a rationalization for an ombuds to advocate for one party or the other. However, fairness must be recognized by both parties to achieve a just result.

Being as impartial as possible does not mean leaving your compassion at the door. The most effective ombuds I know do not take sides, but nevertheless have a good heart to listen effectively and appreciate the individuals as a whole and the cause and effect of their conflict such as the pain they experience.

Granted, with all our diverse experience, we realize that fairness is defined differently by each individual. True fairness is not just about justice but also what is perceived as equitable treatment by both parties.

An ombuds often has confidential information such as past work issues, health factors and family issues on the parties facing the conflict. With their permission, such information may be released to justify an exception to the rules and policies of an organization. A policy that does not consider the human condition can potentially lead to unfair outcomes. Having a heart will help ensure true “fairness.”

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