

Dear Colleagues,

I hope everyone had a wonderful break and I look forward to seeing you on campus.

Have you ever known someone who has never had a conflict?

Have you witnessed a difference between those who faced many challenges and conflicts in their lives successfully and those who have not?

Since rejoining Bentley in 2018, I have spoken with several colleagues who justifiably stress over a situation of conflict. Many of us take extra steps to avoid conflict and ignore it when it arises.

As ombuds in a university, a place where its mission is to teach, to develop, to transform, to embrace diverse opinions and different perspectives, *conflict*, although stressful at times, is needed to help with that mission. As we face our next conflict, I encourage us to view it as an opportunity to learn and to grow.

In the past, you may have seen some of the Reach initiatives focusing on the importance of active listening, focusing on interests and outcome versus positions, the value of an apology, accepting constructive feedback, the kindness in forgiving and the importance of collaboration. Almost 7 years ago, you may have seen a reach out initiative empowering us to resolve our conflict in a timely and constructive manner. This email is a friendly reminder.

When addressed in a timely and constructive way, conflicts can benefit both individuals and organizations. As Ombuds, I am more than happy to help mediate a situation. I also very much encourage and empower individuals who face a conflict to take the first step in addressing it.

To avoid escalation we are encouraged to reach out in a timely manner to the individual with whom we feel there is a conflict to let them know of our goal to find a mutually agreeable outcome. We may want to add the importance of our relationship and our desire to collaborate. Below are simple steps I have advised colleagues to consider:

1) Meet in person

*Find a neutral location or even meet for coffee or for a walk*

2) Identify and agree the causes of the conflict

*How and why is it affecting you and others?*

3) Identify your goal

*Be specific on the objectives you would like to achieve*

4) *Highlight and emphasize the similarities of your objectives*

5) Suggest potential solutions and engage the other party to do the same

*Envision a resolution*

6) Identify the benefits of a resolution

*How might this process benefit you and others moving forward?*

It is critical to listen and acknowledge what we hear, ask questions to clarify any points made and to communicate our views. It is also very important to apologize when warranted and to have the ability and kindness to forgive.

Wishing you all a wonderful semester and a very happy and healthy 2026.

Eliane Markoff- January 2026