

MC-709

Box 36

Folder 4

Corporate Ombudsman Association board  
correspondence

1989-1991

CORPORATE OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION  
Minutes - Board of Directors  
Washington, D.C.  
January 10, 1991

Present: Simon, Riley, Garcia, Marti, Newcomb, Morrissey,  
Buckler, Murphy, Rowe, Gimlett

Absent: Duquet, Herbert, Trocchio, Luetjen, Montgomery,  
Thurman, Bolden

The meeting was called to order at 9:20 am by Mary Simon.

The minutes for September 20 and 21, 1990, were accepted as written.

Executive Officer

The "review audit" conducted in order for Jim Hendry to close out his responsibilities as Executive Officer was accepted by the Board. An itemized statement of expenses was approved and will be forwarded to Gene Herbert who could not be in attendance due to a last-minute emergency.

Future of Corporate Ombudsman Association

A lively discussion ensued on this subject, revolving around several issues: how to influence the course of what is happening in federal agencies with Ombudsmen; whether or not to change our name in order to reflect a broader constituency than just "corporate" ombudsmen (or internal vs. external ombudsmen); whether or not we want to actively seek more federal agency ombudsmen for membership status; is there a "generic" word which better reflects what we actually do; how many of us now are really only "corporate" anyway, etc. As to the issue of changing our name and/or seeking federal members, Mary Rowe will assess the "pros"; while Jan Newcomb will assess the "cons". The Board's attention was directed to the Administrative Conference of the United States Recommendations on Ombudsmen and also recent federal legislation on Alternate Dispute Resolution. The attorneys will address these recent developments in May, especially issues dealing with ombudsmen being exempt from investigations.

1991 Meeting

The meeting has been set for May 14-16, at the Omni North Star Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Rooms are \$89/night and a government rate is available for those who qualify. The next Board meeting will be the Tuesday morning before the annual meeting convenes. Registration fees will be \$150 each for members. Fifteen rooms will be held for board members for an extra night preceding the meeting. Brian Gimlett will redraft the agenda. It was agreed that Mary Rowe has authority to negotiate a reasonable fee for both Bramsen and a Stepko & Johnson representative to attend.

Riley and Herbert will arrange for printing of the conference agenda and biographies.

#### 1992 Annual Meeting

A site being considered is Cincinnati, Ohio.

#### Certificates

It was agreed that we definitely need to have certificates to give to anyone who completes the Ombudsman Training but that attendance at our annual meeting did not merit a certificate.

#### T-Shirts

Approximately 50 t-shirts remain (mostly extra-large). We will try to finish selling these at the annual meeting in May.

#### Training

Bob Morrissey and Brian Gimlett are designing an Ombudsman Training, specifically for those who are newly appointed ombudsmen, about to be appointed ombudsmen, or those who are thinking about starting an ombudsman function. The board approved going ahead with this project, shooting for a first training around the end of July.

#### Retirement Gift

The board approved expenditure of COA funds to pay for a clock to be given to Jim Hendry as a thank-you for serving as Executive Officer.

#### Checking Account

The board approved a resolution authorizing a bank account for COA to be administered by Gene Herbert, with Mary Rowe as a second signature.

#### Nominating Committee

We need nominations for one open slot on the board, a new Vice President/President-elect, and a slate of officers. Mary Simon will call "Luge" Luetjen and Tom Bolden in this regard. Some non-board members are also needed for this committee.

#### Newsletter

Kay Buckler has ample material for another issue and plans to publish in March 1991.

Shield Law

Bob Morrissey agreed to obtain the BNA report summarizing the recent UTC case involving Ann Bensinger and Ombudsman privilege. It was recommended that we highlight the latest developments and recommend a brochure or other publicity for ombudsmen on this subject in our newsletter.

Research

Ongoing research and writing includes:

The ombudsman as part of a dispute resolution system.

How to help a client help themselves.

Harrassment--what do people really want?

A Manager's Guide to Ombudsmen (to be published by Jossey Bass)

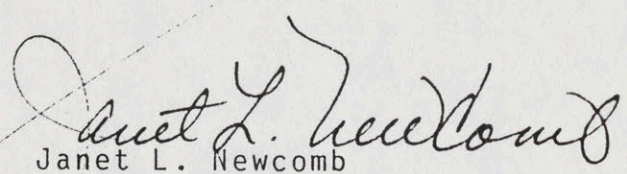
The cost-effectiveness of ombudsmen

Ombudsmen in health care

SPIDR/NIDR outreach

1-2 page survey to go out in fall newsletter (Rowe), similar to issues addressed in Newcomb survey but machine-scorable.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.



Janet L. Newcomb  
Secretary

**CORPORATE OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION  
1991 CONFERENCE EVALUATION**

1.	NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION	Excellent 59%	Good 41%	Fair	Poor
	CONTENT	49%	51%		
2.	MARY ROWE'S CRYSTAL BALL	Excellent 66%	Good 52%	Fair 2%	Poor
	CONTENT	59%	41%		
3.	LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES	Excellent 38%	Good 59%	Fair 3%	Poor
	CONTENT	46%	44%	7%	3%
4.	LEADING BY VALUES	Excellent 80%	Good 13%	Fair 7%	Poor
	CONTENT	75%	17%	7%	2%
5.	COPING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE	Excellent 42%	Good 43%	Fair 16%	Poor
	CONTENT	45%	35%	18%	2%
6.	MEDIATING SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS	Excellent 75%	Good 21%	Fair 2%	Poor 2%
	CONTENT	70%	21%	6%	3%
7.	CONFIDENTIALITY	Excellent 38%	Good 55%	Fair 7%	Poor
	CONTENT	43%	47%	10%	
8.	COST EFFECTIVENESS	Excellent 41%	Good 46%	Fair 12%	Poor
	CONTENT	45%	40%	15%	
9.	CONFERENCE OVERALL	Excellent 64%	Good 36%	Fair	Poor
	CONTENT	68%	32%		

To Mary!  
A real inspiration  
Love, Tony

Perneski helped begin  
the pervasive Bell Labs  
ombuds network  
with its dozen O's,  
including  
Mary Simon

5 Years Before The Ombudsmast

### Accepting A New Challenge

well  
known

"I know that people have problems out there I never even get to hear about. What I want you to do is to find them and help the people take care of them." That's how it all started. Up to that time I was doing my technical supervisor's job in a several thousand person strong, nationally prominent, R&D organization. The offer was made by the head of the organization, and I probably was offered the challenge because I often unofficially stepped beyond my regular role to help others. After a week's deliberation, I accepted the job under the conditions, that I report only to the head of the organization, have a free hand to solve problems my way, and can promise strict confidentiality to people who come to me for help. In return for acceptance of my conditions, I promised to make available aggregate statistics about problems I work on to any unit of the organization, as long as confidentiality is not compromised. My new assignment started immediately.

### Getting Started

My idea on how to do the job was to maintain as low a profile as possible while still becoming known to the people of the organization. I needed a title, an out of the limelight office with some support to insure a live telephone coverage, an indication of support from upper management, and a quick way to get people initially familiar with what I wanted to offer. The office was easy, as out of the way space is always available, sharing secretarial service took care of the telephone, and I helped compose a letter from the head of the organization which explained and supported the confidential, non-threatening help I was prepared to offer. I combined getting a title and publicity with some fun by running a contest wherein prizes were offered to the best three choices of a title for my function, and three best twenty five word essays describing what people expected from me. I received 500 responses which were judged by a voluntary panel representative of the organization. I happily accepted the title of "Alternative Communication Channel", and I still treasure those 500 responses.

### The Opposition Shows Up

Since the organization I was selected to serve was strictly a line organization within a much larger unit, an immediate response of staff functions from the larger unit questioned the effectiveness of the Alternative Communication Channel. A particular claim was that it would be redundant and be in competition with the existing staff functions which were there to help people. I countered this opposition by personally meeting with the managers who voiced their opposition and explained that I was an ally,

not an enemy, and intended to complement and supplement their services, and indeed refer people to them when they were the most skilled resources available. Thus started what probably was my first win-win solution to a conflict.

### Becoming Effective

Cases started coming in almost immediately, but not enough to occupy me full time. In working through the first few cases, it became apparent how much the full cooperation of all the management levels of my clientele organization was needed to solve most of the problems. Therefore I undertook a campaign to personally visit as many managers as possible, and to arrange a few minutes in their respective units' meetings to introduce myself and explain my function and how I intended to carry it out. During this period I developed my mission which is "To find the people's problems and fix them", and my vision, which is "To work myself out of a Job". The time for this campaign was well invested for it brought the support I needed from all levels of management to solve the increasing number of cases coming to me.

### Spreading My Wings

During the first full year approximately 200 individuals came in with problems to solve. The problems ran from very simple needs for information which mainly required steering people to the proper staff experts to a case involving a number of people over the whole year working on an EEO-Affirmative Action related problem. On average, 85% of the cases came to satisfactory win-win solutions, and 3.6 people were involved in each case. The most frequent problems involved people trying to transfer to new jobs within the organization, and less frequent were serious health problems involving alcoholism and emotional difficulties. In all, the case experience pointed to several generic issues requiring broader solutions that I could either support or propose. For example, I was able to support a drive for open job posting which solved the job transfer problem, and to propose and help implement participative management which helped solve a management employee communications problem. I became increasingly invited by local organizations to share my experiences with them or to help implement unit needs. About this time I felt a need to expand my information collection methods to better carry out my expanding function.

### Feeling the Vibes

Also about this time my organization was experiencing an increased rate of people exiting to other jobs. I decided to do one-on-one exit interviews to understand that problem and expand my information collection. Coincidentally, I was asked to conduct surveys of Affirmative Action groups within the organization. I initiated participative teams composed of members of the particular groups to do one-on-one personal interviews. From the exit interviews I collected data revealing possible management deficiencies and helped construct a management effectiveness Task Force to pinpoint the deficiencies and to propose actions to upper management. More about this later. From the Affirmative Action survey, I was able to help the organization understand and become sensitive to the issues of minorities, women, and of majority males. Many action items were undertaken, and the AA groups learned more about themselves. These surveys were successful enough to establish an ongoing two year cycle of AA surveys.

### Influencing The Organization

The information on Management deficiencies was particularly valuable since like all American companies, my organization was going through many changes while struggling to stay competitive in increasingly different economic times. It was obvious that our management needed changing from a academic science driven style to a product-market driven style. Special education programs were mandated to increase the business-management skills of managers. Also a custom tailored leadership-teamwork workshop was designed with the aid of outside consultants. Every manager attended the workshop within one years time. I was deeply involved in both of these endeavors as an inside consultant in both planning and implementing the programs. To date I consider this the highlight of my career, and feel I had some personal influence on each and every manager.

### Handling Tough Times

One of the problems my organization faced in the new competitive times was to become smaller. Over the last few years my organization had developed a reputation of caring for its employees and I was determined to help our managers maintain that reputation. As the force reduction started, I initiated getting managers whose job was eliminated in the reduction to become people brokers to help place our non-management people in search of new positions. When the problem became deep enough to strain the capabilities of our solving our own problems, I enlisted the aid of my corporate staff friends to provide assistance through a employment representative for each of our misplaced employees. With the exception of a few cases which needed specific solutions, the force reduction was completed on time and on target. Still, this task turned out to be the most difficult I have encountered.



## Where Do We Go From Here?

People doing a job such as mine are probably more unsure about our careers than anybody. First, we have relatively undefined jobs, depend on one or a few top managers for direct support (what happens if he/she leaves?), might tend to burnout because of the constant flow of problems we face, and have no career steps (e.g., ombudsman I, ombudsman II, etc.) to aspire to while remaining in the profession. However we do have a tremendous wealth of items bringing satisfaction to the job. Clients are taken care of, people find jobs, managers learn how to handle difficult situations, sometime dollars are saved. There are an ever increasing number of professional colleagues to share with (e.g., the Corporate Ombuds Association). Most of all, since we seem to be doing a good job, cooperation comes from all corners to help us do our job successfully. In every instance in this writing where the word I appears, you could assume that there was help and cooperation of all types to enable success to occur. I wouldn't want it any other way. It makes me want to stay in the job.

And by the way, I don't think I'll ever work myself out of a job.

Anonymous

## An Additional Two Years Before The Ombudsmast

Make no bones about it. The most debilitating experience that an organization can go through is an extended downsizing. The ramifications remain far beyond the date that the last people leave. The changes effect everyone, including the ombudsperson, who have to adjust to a new boss, new organizational forms, leaders, culture, low morale and cynicism among the work force. Change is the order of the day, and the ombudsperson must rebuild alliances, regain trusts, and work to turn the organization around from being reactive to being proactive. In many instances you have to lash yourself to the ombudsmast to make sure you are not swept overboard yourself. At such times you must renew your motivation as coming from simply helping someone through tough times! The rewards for being this way must come from your own soul, for the organization will be ill prepared to offer any other. Hold on for the seas will become calm once more.

Still Anonymous



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