



JIOA

Journal of the International Ombudsman Association

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Dear Readers,

Early in 2017, the JIOA Editorial Board discussed whether the Journal could provide a platform for considering the ombuds role in light of recent political controversies, such as the Brexit vote or the Trump presidency. As people who work regularly with conflict and controversy we recognize that there are almost always multiple perspectives on, and values related to, any given event, policy, or idea. We appreciate the importance of spaces in which those perspectives can be shared, considered, engaged. We understand how important it is that we be respectful of these differences. The foundational ombuds principle of impartiality and neutrality is an indicator of that respect.

In partisan and contentious times our impartiality is more important than ever. As ombuds we want everyone to feel comfortable approaching us whatever their political affiliation. And we want our profession to be welcoming to ombuds of a full range of political beliefs themselves. Indeed, diversity amongst ombuds practitioners helps us best meet the diverse needs of ombuds' constituencies.

At the same time, as ombuds we are also concerned with civility, fairness, and honesty. Our commitment to neutrality and impartiality is supported by an (unspoken) assumption that the organizations in which we work are committed to civility and truthfulness. We cannot perform our jobs appropriately when there is a blatant disregard for truthfulness and civility is not honored. In these circumstances staying silent can seem like exchanging impartiality for impotence.

This holds both in our work and in our lives as private citizens. Most ombuds are cautious about their outside-the-job political activities and careful to not have their political affiliations known. Some eschew involvement in political causes altogether, not wanting to contaminate their role and reputation as an impartial ombuds. But these are not ordinary times, and many of our previously held assumptions are being tested. The contentious and consequential nature of the issues we face raises new challenges and questions for the ombuds community.

The JIOA is meant to be a space in which sensitive yet essential problems of practice can be engaged forthrightly and in good faith. It is also a space to think abstractly and aspirationally about our profession. As ombuds we know how the framing of a problem is

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essential to its eventual resolution. Shannon Lynn Burton, co-editor of JIOA, has ably situated the ombuds role at this time in a broader context using Planned Happenstance Theory. Her article, [Ombudsing in the New Era](#), and this preamble to it represent the Editorial Board's effort and invitation to stimulate thought and engage the global ombuds community in conversation about how and why we do our work, and what it means to ombuds effectively in this moment.

The Editorial Board is hoping to elicit a full range of opinions and perspectives from our readers on this theme. We welcome you all to share your thoughts and questions, both as official submissions for peer-reviewed publication or as informal contributions to a larger collective dialogue that the Journal can facilitate. We appreciate that there may be a need for anonymity and will honor it as requested.

Writings related to any of the following are particularly welcome:

- Managing the dual mandate: Visitor concerns and systemic issues
- Maintaining neutrality in a hyper-politicized environment
- Creating openings for civil disagreement
- Convening "brave" conversations
- The role of ombuds in public meetings
- Addressing anxiety in the organization
- Credibility, alternate facts, and truthfulness
- Practitioner authenticity and ombuds as private citizens
- Fostering social cohesion
- Ombuds as risk-taker

Our perception of the importance and timeliness of such a theme may be presumptuous. Perhaps many of you do not find it relevant or even legitimate. But given the Journal's goal "to allow IOA members, other ombudsmen, and other professionals to reach out to their colleagues with their ideas, research findings, theories, and recommendations for best practices and to engage in ongoing discussions of critical issues," we would be remiss, as its stewards, not to ask.

Sincerely,

The JIOA Editorial Board

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