



Ask an Ombudsman! Ombudsman's Office launches mini-series on iSeek

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Many people around the world celebrate Conflict Resolution Day today to raise awareness about peaceful means of resolving conflicts.

Marking this year's Conflict Resolution Day on 20 October 2011, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services (UNOMS) launches a mini-series on iSeek to give practical advice to staff members on how to deal with everyday conflicts in the work place.

This first part of the mini-series "Ask an Ombudsman!" focuses on "difficult conversations".

Difficult conversation ahead? Be at ease!

Your colleague listens to loud music the whole day? Your supervisor is rude and bothersome? Your supervisee is not open to constructive feedback? Sound familiar?

While differences in style, leadership and personality may lead to perceptions like the above and are relatively "normal", it is our ability to transform these situations into constructive and nurturing dialogues that can make our working environment special.

However, establishing a constructive conversation with someone who might not have the same understanding as ourselves can be challenging. Perhaps this is even more true, when we are caught in a vulnerable or stressful moment. In these situations it is natural to fall into easy and very human patterns like defensiveness, withdrawal or even resignation and retaliation.

Luckily, there are ways to take control of difficult situations and to deal with them proactively and positively.

Here are some tips on how to approach a "difficult conversation".

- 1. Prepare and formulate a plan to determine a course of action!**
Write down the behaviours that cause the conflict and write down how you have handled the difficult situation so far. Which of your responses seemed to aggravate the situation, which seemed to improve the situation? What is your course of action? Should you raise the issue in a conversation?
- 2. Review your plan with a person you trust!**
Share your course of action with a trustworthy colleague and practice the conversation. Practice possible ways to raise the issue without getting emotional or blaming the other party.
- 3. Create a learning conversation!**
Raise the issue with the other party at a time that is agreeable to both of you. Explore and inquire about their story, be interested, ask questions and paraphrase back to demonstrate, check your understanding and acknowledge feelings. Share your story by describing your feelings without attributions or blame: "When you do X, I feel..." and make clear what's at stake for you.

4. Look for options that work for both of you!

Find possible solutions for both of you and focus on the future working relationship with the other party than on past events.

The Ombudsman's office provides informal and impartial conflict resolution services to the staff of the Secretariat, the funds and programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS) and UNHCR and helps to resolve conflict through informal means such as conflict coaching, facilitation, shuttle diplomacy and mediation.

Find out more at www.un.org/ombudsman.