

**A FACILITATED DISCUSSION ON  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND  
MANAGEMENT.**

**PRESENTATION ON THE SUB-  
TOPIC:**

**“DEALING WITH RESISTANCE  
AND DIFFICULT PEOPLE.”**

**BY:**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Let me start by stating that the primary job of the Ombudsman is to manage and resolve conflict between complainants and respondents as well as other persons on the side of the two (2) parties.

In the light of the above, it must be noted that dealing with resistance tendencies and meeting difficult people is an un-avoidable and integral part of core complaint handling in the Ombudsman Institution.

Therefore, in order to achieve success in the attempt to resolve cases brought before it, an Ombudsman must adopt mechanisms that will enable it manage any form of resistance and the difficult persons encountered in the course of investigations and resolution of cases.

## **2. WHAT IS RESISTANCE?**

Resistance here simply means an attempt to counter an on-going investigation process by an individual, group of persons or an organization. Such attempt could include but not limited to; refusal to respond to letters, refusal to implement recommendations, refusal to give access to information, giving false information, refusal to grant access to premises etc.

## **3. WHO ARE DIFFICULT PEOPLE?**

People who are usually not ready to cooperate with the process and outcome of Investigation are often seen as difficult people. They are often persons that are hard to manage, problematic, temperamental,

uncooperative, troublesome, unreasonable and most times unwilling to obey authority. In this paper, I will also be referring them as “ persons with unreasonable conduct”.

#### **4. INDICATORS OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

- a) Persons, who appear to be temperamental, agitated, egoistic, angry or easily irritated during discussions.
- b) Any person who cannot be satisfied in spite of visible efforts made to satisfy him or her.
- c) Persons who make unreasonable and outrageous demands.
- d) People who cannot “let go” or shift grounds during resolution of a matter.
- e) Persons that are argumentative and aggressive
- f) Persons who feel they are always right and it has to be done their way,

#### **5. INDICATORS OF RESISTANCE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Mostly, the staff of the Ombudsman face resistance in the course of investigation from both individuals and responding bodies which include the following among others;

- a) Blatant refusal to respond to letters of enquiries
- b) Refusal to give access to information to further resolution of a case
- c) Refusal to grant Investigation Officers access to Offices or premises identified for investigation.
- d) Refusal to implement recommendations

- e) Responding organizations sending low ranking officers to meetings and case conferences.
- f) Complainant giving false or misleading information.
- g) Interference, obstruction and sometimes physical assault on investigation officers or staff of the Ombudsman while on duty.

## 6. DEALING WITH RESISTANCE AND DIFFICULT PEOPLE

To ensure success in case management and resolution, certain steps need to be taken to deal with resistance and difficult people such as the following:

### **a) Adequate training and Guidance**

Ombudsmen operatives need to be trained and re-trained particularly as it relates to peoples physiological and psychological traits as well as specific behavioral patterns. The need for professionalism in conflict handling cannot be overemphasized. Hence, comprehensive training of operatives/investigators on an ongoing basis is fundamental to staff developing and maintaining confidence to deal with resistance and unreasonable conduct from people.

### **b) Credibility and Integrity;**

The strength of the Ombudsman lies in its integrity and the respect it has from the members of the public. Resistance will be reduced to the minimum if the Ombudsman is well respected by members of the public. Efforts must be made at all time to ensure that the Ombudsman and its staff

conduct themselves with respect, transparency and honesty in the discharge of their duties.

**c) Use of Mediation and negotiation skills:**

Use of ADR skills such as mediation and negotiation will make it easier for operatives to manage difficult people while resolving cases. These skills make resolution of conflict more friendly and simple.

**d) More public awareness**

This approach or methodology is essentially to create awareness or public enlightenment on the existence, activities and legal instruments establishing the Ombudsman in connection to dispensation of social justice in the Country. People are likely to be more cooperative when they are better enlightened.

**e) Ensure ownership and control**

In the process of resolving conflicts, the Ombudsman needs to exercise control and ownership over the complaints. This is because experience has shown that the most primary trigger for most unreasonable conduct by parties in a conflict is likely to be the struggle for control over how the conflict is resolved. It should be understood that this struggle for control is primarily due to ignorance.

**f) Use of the powers to Report**

This approach is occasionally explored to put a difficult person on his / her knees. It naturally reduces the resistance level of such person or affected organization that could be blacklisted. The Ombudsman is empowered to report any form of resistance through the media. This approach could be used when all other avenues fail. Over the time it has proved to be a useful tool to weaken resistance from people or organizations.

**g) Having adequate knowledge of the conflict**

To squarely deal with resistance and difficult people either a complainant or respondent, the Ombudsman and its operatives have to be well informed and better equipped with all relevant facts and figures to speak with great authority and exudes confidence in the discharge of his / her statutory functions.

**h) Good communication**

To avoid unnecessary resistance and unreasonable conduct from parties to a conflict, the Ombudsman and its operatives need to provide clear, timely and firm communications with parties throughout the processes. Negative assumptions and suspicions are likely to arise if parties are not properly informed.

### **I) Managing unrealistic expectations**

It is very important that parties' expectations are properly managed right from the beginning of the process of resolving a conflict. People sometimes have unrealistic expectations of the processes and outcome of resolving conflicts they are parties to. Care, therefore must be taken to handle such expectations, so that they don't become the reasons for resistance and unreasonable conduct in the long run.

### **CONCLUSION**

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to note that the methods that can be employed by the ombudsman to mitigate resistance and difficult people in resolving cases lodged before it are inexhaustible. I want to use this opportunity to remind us that as Ombudsmen, our business is resolving conflicts that border on administrative injustices. In doing this, we must not forget that we are the surgeons of administration, the rock upon which democracy rest. Therefore, while doing our business let us be more careful in handling people and organizations we interact with, with patience and understanding, so that our efforts will not be vain.

Thank you all.

