

Ombudsman Communication Tools

BACKGROUND

Key to the morale of Sailors and their families is frequent and open communication from the command. Communication from the command to family members often occurs through the command's ombudsman.

KEY MESSAGES

- Commands may set up a telephone Careline containing current command news/information. Command families can call the Careline to obtain information.
- Phone trees/email can be used to get critical information out to family members quickly and easily.
- A command newsletter is beneficial and can be used to inform readers of community and Navy services, express the command's interest in the morale and welfare of family members, and encourage, inspire, and support families.
- To provide information about the Ombudsman Program, the command ombudsman should be invited to do brief presentations at command educational and social events.

STATEMENT

The primary communication tools used by the Ombudsman Program include a command newsletter, Careline, phone tree/email, and briefings.

Newsletter

An ombudsman newsletter has many advantages. By providing firsthand, accurate information, it:

- Reduces the number of phone calls received by the ombudsman.
- Reduces rumors.
- Allows information to reach a significant number of people at one time.
- Establishes the command ombudsman as a credible source of information.

The Navy Mail Center has the ability to completely produce and mail newsletters, delivering a professional newsletter at a reduced cost. The newsletter, in Microsoft Word, may be sent to Document Automation and Production Services (DAPS) at www.documentservices.dla.mil/dapsonline.html print and mail. Attach an updated mailing list using Microsoft Excel. The list is forwarded to the Navy Mail Center for the mailing process. Zip codes should be five digits for civilian addresses and nine digits for military addresses. Typically, each newsletter may be a maximum size of four 8½ X 11 pages, front and back. They are produced in black ink on white 20 lb. paper. Content and design are at

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the discretion of the command, but must be in accordance with Navy standards.

Careline

A Careline is a telephone line dedicated to the command. It may be a single recorded message updated by the command ombudsman or there may be options for the caller to listen to messages from the commanding officer, the chaplain, the Family Readiness Group, etc. Most commands house the equipment in a Navy facility and the message is remotely updated.

A Careline can be an opportunity to inform, educate, and support command families. It should be updated at least weekly to encourage families to call for current information. The Careline can be used to inform families about:

- Command news and information. This is particularly important when the command is deployed. An updated message from the CO/ XO/CMC is very well received by families who eagerly await news of their deployed loved ones.
- Upcoming command, FFSC, or base events.
- Family Readiness Group meetings and events.
- Information on issues such as disaster preparedness.

Phone Trees or Email

Often used by commands to easily and quickly get information to family members, phone trees or email are also extremely useful to facilitate communication during or after a crisis. Establishing a phone tree requires the permission of those listed on the command roster. Volunteers are identified who are willing to call 10–12 other family members. When necessary, they are then provided with a list of individuals to call and a written message to be relayed. Ombudsmen are instructed to use the phone tree as directed by the command. (Please note, that for large commands, phone trees may be impractical.) For email, a distribution list can be set up by obtaining permission to enter email addresses of those listed on the command roster. An email can then easily be sent to the entire list at once. The ombudsman should be advised that on email distribution lists the BCC (blind copy) address line should be used to enter each address. This provides confidentiality to the addressees as other cannot see their email address.

Briefings

To provide information about the Ombudsman Program, the ombudsman should be invited to do brief presentations at educational and social events. Connecting a name to a face is reassuring to many family members who might otherwise be reluctant to contact their ombudsman. Ombudsman may be invited to:

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- Brief Sailors as part of command indoc training. If the ombudsman works and cannot be available in person he/she can create a short videotape to be shown. At a minimum, a letter from the ombudsman should be included in welcome materials sent to those with orders to the command.
- Introduce themselves at deployment programs and give an overview of the Ombudsman Program.
- Be introduced at command social events such as picnics, parties, etc.
- Be on the agenda at Family Readiness Group meetings.

ACTION

The commanding officer should decide on the type and frequency of ombudsman communication with command members/families. If a command newsletter will be produced, newsletter guidelines, type of content, length, publication frequency, review and approval procedures, administrative support, and distribution must be determined.

RESOURCES

- Local FFSC ombudsman coordinator.
- Document Automation and Production Services (DAPS) at www.documentservices.dla.mil/dapsonline.html

CHECKLIST

- Determine the type and frequency of routine communications between the ombudsman and command families.
- Supply ombudsman with necessary materials and equipment such as phone line, computer, software, business cards, etc.