

## Things I now know since the IOA training and membership

Working as an Organizational Ombud in a country where Classical Ombudsing is historically well entrenched as a means of redress, change, and transformation is challenging. Having worked previously for South African Industry Bodies to further transformation, including the university at which I now serve as an Ombud, I had a great deal to un-learn and adjustments to make. Without the IOA training on the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice this would have been impossible. My lessons learnt included:

- Separating in my own mind and practice the fundamental differences between Classical and Organizational Ombudsing.
- Thorough understanding of the four cornerstone principles, namely Impartial, Independent, Confidential, and Informal (even though the latter leads to dubious interpretations within South Africa).
- Now I know that while I may not be a regular watchdog, I serve as an early warning system or at least a watchdog of a different breed.
- I have experienced the power of quality listening, full suspension of judgment, enquiring to understand, and paraphrasing to deepen that understanding.
- I know now that providing options returns the power to the visitor, and that not being one's advocate does not mean I do not care. Mary Rowe told me once that "being an invisible visible is okay".
- I also know now that impartiality helps to deliver fairness – a matter that until becoming an Ombud I had believed was a given characteristic as opposed to a skill that can be learnt (where willingness exists).
- The IOA Ethics enable me to educate both the visitor and myself at every start of a new visitor-issue concerning the four principles, which also allows the visitor's expectation to be managed.
- The readily available support from the IOA community makes even the lonely parts of the role bearable, especially the support and encouragement provided by Mary Rowe (and many others) who are readily available regardless of the differences between our time zones. I'm the first to tell you that truly the world has become smaller and that *Ubuntu* has a new meaning.
- Participation in committees such as the International and Conferencing Committees help to further understand and share in the IOA vision as an organization.
- Given a chance to choose a profession, I would choose Ombudsing all over again.