

“Most Serious” Ombuds Mediation Cases

2026, AI with Mary Rowe assistance

The Ombuds who does mediation in serious cases might make special note of this service, perhaps on checklists.

All successful mediations that organizational ombuds (OOs) conduct add value. And some cases have disproportionately high value for participants and the organization because of their impact on risk, talent, emotions, and systems. Successful mediation in the [Most Serious Cases](#) that OOs face can matter very greatly to organizations as well as to the protagonists.

These are the mediations that avoid big downside costs (legal and financial issues, safety, ethics, reputational crises). They may protect or redeploy scarce talent instead of losing it in conflict—or unblock critical interfaces on which many people depend. Such mediations may enable real reintegration after formal processes and turn repeated case patterns into system change. They also may help shape leadership norms for how conflict is handled.

1. Mediations that prevent, mitigate, contain, or help in the aftermath of major risk.

Mediations are especially high value when they involve senior leaders or other key staff whose behavior or conflict style may expose the organization to claims of abuse, ethics or safety failures, or public or regulatory scrutiny.

Examples: Mediation between a senior leader and a senior complainant in a bullying matter (post-investigation, where continued working contact is inevitable). Mediation between a prominent technical expert and a compliance officer around safety/quality/financial concerns that could spill outside the organization.

2. Mediations that keep high-value staff from leaving in an unfortunate way. Mediation can be seen as high value when key engineers, clinicians, scientists, innovation leaders, or senior staff are in entrenched conflict with a manager or a peer with whom they must collaborate or with a key support function (e.g., HR, Legal). Successful mediation may find alternatives to a critical resignation or turn it into a planned, low-damage exit. Or it may allow internal redeployment instead of total loss and prevent a senior expert from becoming a vocal, negative ex-employee with sensitive knowledge.

Examples: High-value specialist vs. line manager—mediation leads to reassignment under a different manager instead of exit. Or two senior scientists whose feud is fracturing a lab—and jeopardizing grants—learn to make amends and change tactics.

3. Mediations that stabilize critical interfaces (often between leaders). Another form of high-value mediation is mediation among leaders (VP–VP, director–director, function head–bureau head) where their feud is cascading down to multiple teams. Strategic projects are stalling. Staff are “taking sides” and losing trust. The highest value is created when a visible leadership rift is turned into at least a “workable peace.” Agreements clarify how leaders will disagree and coordinate going forward.

Examples: Mediation between Head of Sales and Head of Operations whose conflict is wrecking delivery and morale helps these two to learn paths to avoid mutual clashes. Mediation among several leaders on a steering committee who are blocking one another’s

initiatives learn a lot more about the core interests of each—and return to supporting the organizational mission.

4. Mediations after serious formal processes (including high-value staff). These mediations may be critical when a leader or high-value staff member has been the subject or complainant in a formal process, and they must continue working with others involved. Their ongoing presence is vital (and their ongoing hostility seriously damaging).

Examples: Post-investigation mediation between a senior leader and a high-value opponent who remains in their unit identifies an effective way forward. In another example, team mediation after discipline of a high-profile manager helps to stabilize the team.

5. Mediations that expose and address systemic issues. Mediations among leaders or between high-value staff and leaders may reveal system/structural problems in role design, incentives, or culture and require real changes in policies, staffing, or governance.

Examples: Mediation between a senior physician leader and hospital operations about unsafe staffing leads to a redesign of shift assignments and improved resource allocation. Mediation between a star product manager and two VPs exposes misaligned KPIs; the KPIs are then changed.

6. Mediations involving leaders as role models. Leader–leader and leader–high-value staff mediations where the leaders choose mediation instead of power plays or quiet avoidance can result in an outcome (even if discreet) that becomes a helpful story throughout the organization: “Our leaders use constructive processes.” Such mediation is of the highest value when senior leaders explicitly acknowledge the process as legitimate (“we worked this through with a mediator”) in appropriate settings. High-value staff see that even powerful people are expected to address conflict effectively, not just suppress it.

Examples: Mediation among members of the executive team, after a strategic blow-up, follow with a shared message: “We had tough disagreements and used a structured process to work through them; you can do it too.”

Summary: In a large organization, the highest-value (“Most Serious Case”) mediations may include high-value staff whose departure or disengagement would be very costly. They may involve leaders at any level, but especially senior leaders, or “stars,” whose conflicts and behaviors ripple widely. These are often situations where the protagonists are tied to major risk, central to critical interfaces—and positioned to model better conflict norms.

Note: AI may display incomplete, inaccurate or offensive information.

This article draft is part of a Resource Repository designed to support identifying—and helping to quantify—the value of an Organizational Ombuds (OO). This Resource Repository is a work in progress. It is open to improvements, additions, deletions, critique, revision and random commentary. If any page in the repository is helpful, or needs revision, please let us know. Please contact Mary Rowe or other co-authors, if you can help to improve these pages or have another page to offer.