

## **ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS**

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These notes describe matters raised by participants during the brainstorming session of the Whistleblowers Australia Strategy Workshop held in Melbourne on 28 June 1996.

The participants included individuals from NSW, Victoria and Queensland as well as representatives from the Whistleblower Support Group established in one of the major public sector organisations in Australia.

The participants brainstormed on the question:

“What support do whistleblowers in an organisation need?”

Three general areas of support were identified.

- \* Whistleblowers need to **trust** or be comfortable with/be reassured as to how they will be treated in the organisation.
- \* There needs to be a **culture of support within the organisation** for whistleblowers and whistleblowing.
- \* There needs to be a **community environment of support** for the contributions by whistleblowing and whistleblowers.

### **Trust**

This is the essence of the climate within an organisation that is necessary before whistleblowers are likely to come forward within those organisations.

### **Culture of Support within Organisation**

Many ideas were proposed for organisations to demonstrate genuineness in developing support programs for whistleblowers within their organisations.

- \* Multiple avenues should be made available to potential whistleblowers for the disclosure of waste, corruption etc, including
  - internal avenues (multiple)
  - external avenues
  - anonymous avenues
- \* Chief Executive Officers must take a personal and active role in recognising acts of whistleblowing for their value to the organisations and the loyalty and courage of whistleblowers for their disclosures.
- \* The protections afforded whistleblowers need to achieve the same profile and levels of acceptance as the categories of persons (females, aboriginals, migrants, handicapped persons) protected under EEO legislation.
- \* Employees need to be given training in the ethics of the organisation from their earliest employment.

- \* Systems of both one-on-one whistleblower support officers and case management officers need to be established.
- \* Past whistleblowers from within (and without) the organisation should be involved in whistleblower support.
- \* Practical advice should be given to potential visitors both on:
  - what they should consider before making a public interest disclosure
  - how they can best protect themselves against most forms of common reprisals.

These advices and practical hints (and warnings) should be included in organisational writings on their whistleblower support programs; else the organisation should refer their employees contemplating making a disclosure to an outside organisation (such as Whistleblowers Australia) who may be able to provide this information and advice.

- \* The duties statements of Senior and Middle Managers and their Performance Plans should include their responsibilities both with respect to wrong doing and also to the treatment of those who disclose wrongdoings.
- \* Whistleblowers should be advised of the outcomes of investigations into matters that were the subject of disclosures made by these whistleblowers.

### **Community Environment of Support**

The Whistleblower needs to feel they have support for their disclosures not only from within the organisation but also from the general community.

This favourable community environment, it was held, would be established by:

- \* the enactment of effective whistleblower protection legislation.
- \* a record of willing enforcement of the legislation by the appropriate authorities.
- \* a record of remedial outcomes effected by appropriate authorities to repair the lives and careers of whistleblowers injured by reprisals.

### **Conclusion**

The result of the brainstorming indicated:

- there are a lot of things that organisations can do to demonstrate actions as well as words in the support of whistleblowers amongst their own staff.
- there is a role for outside organisations such as Whistleblowers Australia in the development of whistleblowers support programs within organisations.
- organisations by themselves cannot achieve for whistleblowers the support whistleblowers need - the support must also exist in the general community.