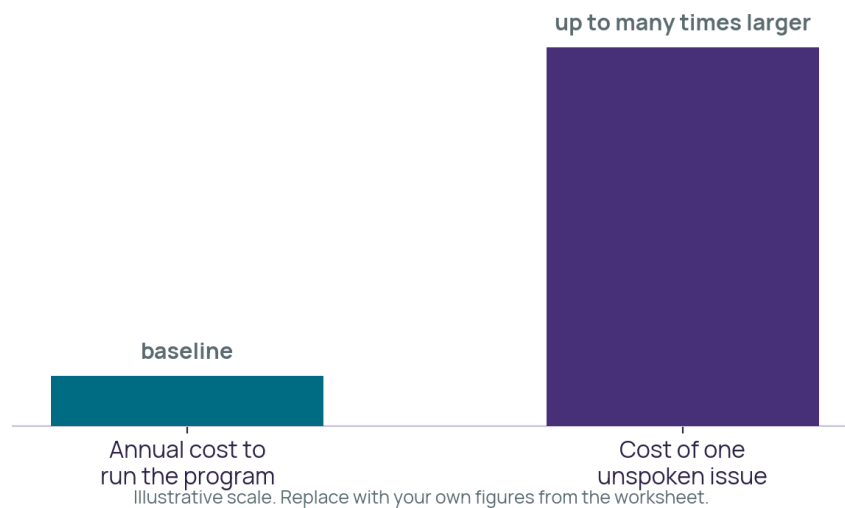


The Cost of Silence

What a quiet culture costs, and what a speak-up culture returns

When people do not feel safe raising concerns, the organization does not become problem-free. It becomes blind to its own problems. The cost shows up later, larger, and harder to contain. This briefing frames the trade in business terms and gives leadership a short checklist for setting the tone that makes the difference.

The bill does not disappear. It defers and grows.



Illustrative scale. The cost of a single unspoken issue routinely dwarfs the annual cost of the program meant to surface it.

What silence costs you	What a speak-up culture returns
Problems surface late, as crises rather than early warnings.	Risks are caught early, while they are still small and cheap to fix.
Misconduct and safety issues go unreported until external parties find them.	Issues are handled internally, on your terms, before they escalate.
Regulatory and legal exposure grows in the dark.	A documented, working program is a credit in any regulatory conversation.
Good people leave quietly, taking knowledge and trust with them.	Retention improves as people feel heard and see things change.
Repeated mistakes, because no one feels safe naming the first one.	Faster learning and fewer repeat failures across the organization.
Innovation stalls, since dissent and new ideas feel risky to voice.	Better decisions, because leaders hear the full picture in time to act.

The pattern behind the costs

Research on workplace voice consistently points the same direction. A large share of employees who see something wrong never report it, and fear of retaliation or a belief that nothing will change is the most common reason. The damage from a single unspoken issue, whether a safety failure, a fraud, or a harassment matter, routinely dwarfs the entire annual cost of running a healthy speak-up program. Silence is not the cheap option. It only defers the bill.

Make the case with your own numbers

Generic statistics rarely move a board. Your own do. Use this short worksheet to frame the trade in terms your leadership already tracks.

Question for your organization	Your figure
Estimated cost of your single largest avoidable incident in the last three years	
Annual cost to fully run and promote your speak-up program	
Voluntary turnover cost per departure, times exits linked to unaddressed concerns	
Estimated legal and regulatory exposure currently sitting unreported	

Tone From the Top

The leadership behaviors that decide whether people speak up

Culture follows what leaders do, not what the handbook says. People watch how senior leaders react to bad news and calibrate their own honesty accordingly. The checklist below is the short list of behaviors that, done consistently, signal that candor is genuinely welcome.

Set the tone

- Leaders state plainly and often that raising concerns is expected and valued.
- Senior leaders talk openly about mistakes, including their own, without spin.
- The first reaction to bad news is curiosity and thanks, not blame or defensiveness.
- Leaders ask for dissent in the room and reward the person who voices it.

Back it with action

- Resources for the speak-up program are protected, not the first thing cut.
- Retaliation is treated as a serious offense with real and visible consequences.
- Leaders close the loop publicly when a concern leads to a change.
- Speak-up trends and outcomes are a standing item on the board or executive agenda.

Hold the line over time

- The same standard applies to senior and high-performing people as to everyone else.
- Metrics that matter are tracked, such as time to acknowledge, follow-through, and reporter trust.
- Leaders resist the urge to shoot the messenger when the news is genuinely bad.
- Commitment is sustained after the launch, not allowed to fade once attention moves on.

The one test

If a board member asks an employee “would you feel safe raising a serious concern here, and do you believe it would lead to action,” the honest answer to that single question tells you more about your culture than any dashboard. Aim to be able to answer yes, and to prove it.

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If you would like help putting this into practice in your organization, I would be glad to talk.

Schedule a consultation today with me at sana.manjeshwar@ombudsana.com