

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR PETER ONG  
HEAD, CIVIL SERVICE,  
AT THE 2012 ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE DINNER AND  
PROMOTION CEREMONY  
27 MARCH 2012 AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, 745PM**

DPM Teo Chee Hean, Minister in-charge of the Civil Service, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs

Mr Eddie Teo, Chairman, Public Service Commission

Members of the Public Service Commission

Colleagues

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening and welcome to the 24<sup>th</sup> Administrative Service Dinner and Promotion Ceremony.

2. This annual event marks significant career milestones for our Administrative Officers. It is also an important occasion for us to reflect on our roles in the Public Service and to renew our commitment to the Service and to Singapore.

3. This evening, we are privileged to have Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean as our Guest-of-Honour.

4. I would also like to welcome colleagues from the various statutory boards and government departments who are holding Public Service Leadership appointments.

**Values for a Challenging Operating Environment**

5. The environment that the Singapore Public Service operates in has become, and will continue to be, increasingly complex and challenging.

6. Externally, the geo-strategic dynamics that confront us are undergoing major shifts. Emerging economies will increasingly account for a more significant share of global economic growth and they will want to have their say in how international affairs are decided. Resource scarcities and climate change will also amplify our physical and economic vulnerabilities.

7. Domestically, the profile, expectations and aspirations of our population will evolve and become more diverse. The citizens of today, especially the young, are more informed and assertive. They want to have a greater say in policies that affect their lives; they demand more accountability from the people who make and implement these policies. These changes are already happening, and inevitably, the Government's relationship with the people will change as well.

8. As Administrative Officers and Management Associates, many of us will find ourselves in positions where we face such change and challenges as we go about our work in formulating and implementing policies. We have to weigh short-term considerations against longer-term interests, and manage the trade-offs across the interests of different groups of Singaporeans. We will, no doubt, have occasion to reflect on how we as individual civil servants, and as a Service, should respond to these challenges.

9. Often, it is during uncertainty and change that organisations have to go back to their core values and re-examine how these values can serve as critical anchors.

10. For us in the Singapore Public Service, our values of Integrity, Service and Excellence guide us in how to act as individuals, shape our corporate instincts and motivate and inspire us towards our ideals.

11. The current set of Public Service Values was developed back in 2003 to strengthen the Public Service identity and reflect our shared ethos. These values are as relevant today as when they were first introduced.

## **Integrity**

12. Let me first talk about Integrity.

13. Given our role as stewards of public resources, regulators and enforcers of laws that apply to all, our citizens reasonably expect us to perform these duties with the highest standards of integrity and probity. In turn, they trust that the outcomes we seek in the discharge of our duties are not for personal gain but for the common good.

14. Over the years, the Singapore Public Service has been able to build and maintain the trust of the people whom we serve. In turn, policies have been implemented relatively smoothly. This virtuous cycle of trust between the Government and the public took many years to build, but it can also be lost quite easily.

15. In recent months, there have been public officers convicted for cheating. Others are investigated for alleged misconduct and the cases are still undergoing investigation. If the officers are found to have abused the trust placed in them, we will not hesitate to take firm and decisive action against

them. This is the only way we can preserve trust in the Public Service, and ensure that individual failings do not lead to systemic weaknesses.

16. Episodes like these undermine our reputation as a Public Service that is clean and incorrupt. It makes some wonder if the Public Service and the values we espouse are being eroded.

17. There are officers who have felt let down by these episodes. I share the same disappointment.

18. But these episodes notwithstanding, my faith in the integrity of public officers and in the Public Service as a whole has not wavered. I am heartened to note that the majority of our officers are ever determined to uphold the good name of the Service and are continuing to earn the public trust.

19. As leaders, let us continue to set the example for our officers to carry out their duties with integrity, and to guard against allowing anything that will erode the trust that Singaporeans have in the Public Service.

## **Service**

20. Our second value is Service.

21. We exist to serve. It is vital that we keep the interests of Singapore and the people of Singapore uppermost in all we do.

22. As I mentioned earlier, the public's demands and expectations of the Government have grown significantly over the years. This is especially seen in how they want the Government to deliver services to meet their needs.

23. From 2007 to 2011, our REACH feedback mechanism experienced a 200% increase in feedback volume through its various channels. Over the same period, the Land Transport Authority, whose activities touch the lives of Singaporeans on a daily basis, also experienced a similar 200% increase in feedback.

24. Queries from the public are also becoming more complex. They go beyond just asking for simple answers to seeking detailed explanations of agencies' positions, or the rationale for the design of certain policies.

25. Where the feedback pertains to the work of individual agencies, we must address them within the service standards we have set for ourselves. However, gaps in service delivery may emerge for issues that do not fall neatly within a single agency.

26. We have implemented the 'No Wrong Door' policy for quite some time. But implementation is not always that simple. Sometimes there is simply no "Right Door" yet for some emergent issues that our people face.

27. Dealing with the nuisance created by animals and birds is an example. For good reasons, we have allocated responsibilities to agencies based on the nature of the intervention required, rather than the type of animal or bird involved. NParks is responsible for pruning trees that have large numbers of nests. NEA ensures that operators of food outlets observe good housekeeping practices, so that food waste does not become an easy source of food for animals.

28. However, from the public's perspective, they just want the Government to deal with the animal nuisance. The problem gets more complicated when the animal in question moves and in doing so, crosses organisational boundaries. How we respond to these cross-cutting service issues will directly reflect our ability to work as a networked Government, rather than as individual agencies.

29. In the spirit of service, we should see all this as an opportunity for us to spark a fresh wave of service innovation.

30. During the recent debate on PSD's budget, DPM Teo announced that the PS21 Office would be piloting the First Responder Protocol to deal with animal-related issues with AVA as the First Responder. Over time, we aim to broaden this approach to cover more service delivery areas, such as municipal cleaning, where again, the responsibilities straddle different agencies.

31. Providing quality service does not just come from organising ourselves better, but it may also require us to improve policy design upstream. Some people have commented that the Government is quite prolific at conceiving new schemes. This is because we want to respond to new needs, and target them to meet the specific needs of the intended beneficiaries. This may lead to a proliferation of schemes that become complex and challenging to administer and access. This is something we must continuously review, so that our schemes stay simple.

32. Going forward, service delivery must remain a key focus for public service leaders. As leaders, we must develop and exercise good judgment and empathy in dealing with challenging service issues. We must be prepared to facilitate more speedy escalation of issues up the decision chains, and to deal with the public's immediate needs first and then sort out inter-agency issues backend.

33. In serving the public, we must be discerning to know that not all issues raised lend themselves to public sector solutions or interventions. For example, what is perceived to be noisy behaviour in a public area can also be seen as citizens having a good time on a week end. We will need effective laws to set boundaries on how people should behave in the public space, but it will not be possible to legislate every aspect of inter-personal relationships that impact on life in this urban environment we call home.

34. At the end of the day, beyond the solutions we can work out at the systems level, all of us need to be imbued with a personal sense of public

service – to know that it is more than just a job we are doing and that it comes from a personal drive to serve our fellow Singaporeans better.

## **Excellence**

35. This leads me to Excellence, our third value, which is about being the best Public Service that we can be. Allow me to provide two examples that exemplify Excellence.

36. We are all aware of how many of our colleagues served with distinction as election officials during the two elections last year. They did their work with high standards of professionalism and impartiality, exhibiting the spirit of excellence under very demanding circumstances.

37. Another good example is Ms Yang Shufen from NParks who was involved in the Tekong mangrove restoration project. She experimented with planting different mangrove species based on their suitability to the diverse conditions along the coast. As her work follows the tides, she sometimes has to go out to Pulau Tekong on a boat in the wee hours of the morning. Getting knee-deep in mud and fighting swarms of mangrove insects, Shufen quietly goes about her daily work with passion and commitment.

38. So whether it is serving in a major election effort which is aired 'live' on national TV, or plodding away in unseen insect-infested offshore islands, our public officers must continue to serve with distinction and excellence.

39. At the systems level, Excellence is about being able to plan for the longer term interests of Singapore and Singaporeans; being able to react and adapt swiftly and effectively to rapidly changing circumstances. Very often, this path of excellence requires us to take unconventional approaches that have not been tried before.

40. We must continue with this. As individual public officers, as public sector leaders, and as a Public Service, we must do our best to put in place strategies and policies that will ensure that Singapore remains exceptional, as a nation that remains strong, inclusive and prosperous in a challenging world.

## **Conclusion**

41. 74 of you will receive your promotion certificates tonight. I congratulate you all. This is not only a recognition of your invaluable contributions to the Public Service, but also a reflection of our faith in you to bring the Public Service and Singapore to greater heights.

42. We will shortly pledge to be a first class Public Service, worthy of Singapore. Guided by our core values, let us work hard as a team to achieve this.

43. Thank you very much.

44. It is now my honour to invite Deputy Prime Minister Teo to address us.

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