

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE MR TEO CHEE HEAN
AT THE PS21 STAR SERVICE AWARDS
ON 6 MAY 2009 AT THE BIOPOLIS AUDITORIUM**

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

Around the world, countries are confronting the challenges brought about by the unprecedented global economic crisis. Singapore has not been spared. Beyond economic woes, we also have to be ready to deal with other challenges and threats. The recent Influenza A (H1N1) outbreak is a reminder that our Public Service must remain vigilant and responsive.

In times like this, the role of the Public Service becomes even more critical. With the risk of a pandemic resulting from the Influenza A (H1N1), the Public Service is called upon to ensure that appropriate

precautionary measures are put in place. Our people also look to the Public Service to keep them informed about the situation, as well as for guidance as to what measures Singaporeans and residents here need to take to protect their own health and the health of everyone living or visiting here. We should not be unduly alarmed, but must be psychologically prepared that the outbreak may develop into a long-drawn pandemic that will affect not just Singapore but the whole world. We have done well during the SARS crisis six years ago and will need to draw on those lessons to help us address this current threat.

On the economic front, the Public Service will also have to help Singaporeans deal with the ongoing economic crisis. The Government announced a resilience package earlier this year. This package will help keep workers employed and viable companies stay afloat, so that people can continue to take care of themselves and their families.

Beyond the resilience package, many agencies have come up with ways to help Singaporeans during this difficult period. For example, the Public Utilities Board (PUB) recently launched a nation-

wide programme to install water-saving devices¹ in the homes of needy families with high water consumption. This will not only help them save at least 5% of their water bill, but also conserve water. The National Library Board started an Economic Survivor Series² of educational programmes to help mid-career job seekers, new graduates, and those who have been retrenched to develop the skills to cope with this difficult time and get back into the workforce.

You can play a part and make a difference too, by showing understanding, empathy, and sensitivity for people who are going through a challenging period. Let me recount an example on how an officer made a difference. A taxpayer with outstanding taxes approached IRAS to discuss his financial difficulties as he was also suffering from a serious medical condition. The IRAS officer listened patiently and sought to understand his whole situation, and not just his tax position. After establishing that his circumstances deserved special consideration, she discussed with him various possibilities.

¹ These water-saving devices include water-efficient showerheads, constant flow regulators, thimbles and water-saving bags.

² . NLB's Economic Survivor Series covers four key learning tracks namely: Learn-A-Skill, Career Planning & Development, Financial Literacy & Family Resilience, and Entrepreneurship.

She then helped to review his financial position and worked with him on a reasonable payment arrangement.

Improving Service Delivery

It is hard to predict how deep or long this economic downturn will be. While we help Singaporeans deal with the present difficulties, we should also look beyond this crisis, and position ourselves to emerge even stronger when the global economy picks up again. We should review our policies to ensure they are relevant, make sure our people are ready, and continue to invest in building capabilities.

At the same time, we have to continue to seek new ways to improve our service delivery to better serve members of the public. For example, to reduce waiting time for our customers, various agencies have introduced e-appointments. Tapping on the widespread use of mobile phones, many agencies have experimented with innovative ways to deliver services and information through mobile devices. For example, the Ministry of Education has started releasing posting results for Secondary 1 and the Joint

Admissions Exercise (for Singapore-Cambridge GCE 'O' Level certificate holders) via SMS.

Technology can also be used to help those who may not be familiar with using technology. The Land Transport Authority (LTA) is experimenting with a new traffic system to help the elderly. Using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) readers mounted on traffic light poles, the system can detect RFID cards held by the elderly, and correspondingly extend the “green man” timing to give the elderly more time to cross the road.

Recognising Our Service Stars

These innovations would not have come about if we do not have public officers who constantly ask themselves how they can better serve the public, officers who take the initiative to anticipate customer needs, and officers who go beyond the requirements of their job to help members of the public.

This evening, we recognise 100 outstanding public officers who exhibited exemplary behaviour and commitment and made an impact

on the people they serve. They truly exemplify the Public Service values: Integrity, Service, and Excellence. I congratulate all the winners.

I would have liked to tell you about all of them, unfortunately, we do not have time to recount all their stories. Let me tell you about three of the officers.

Mr Masli Bin Tunot, a Senior Technical Officer with 20 years of service at the Public Utilities Board (PUB), has the needs of his customers foremost on his mind. Masli often went beyond the call of duty, including working overnight, to ensure that a customer's water supply is restored before the break of dawn. His quick thinking and good service attitude enables him to trace the source and troubleshoot problems which others could not solve. This won him many compliments. In one instance, even though Masli was unable to fully resolve a water pressure problem despite his best efforts, the customer was so appreciative that he wrote to express how he was "pleasantly surprised with such sincere service and it outweighs the end results".

Mr Sakthivel is LTA's Community Partnership Manager for the Northeast Zone. His strong motivation to improve the lives of the residents and his ability to solve problems won many of the residents' trust. He went beyond the boundaries of LTA and brought on board representatives from other agencies to work on issues in a Whole-of-Government manner. Through his efforts, Mr Sakthivel helped to completely transform the image of LTA in the minds of the residents and grassroots leaders.

Mr Jackson Ye from HDB is a familiar and welcomed face around Toa Payoh. Jackson's official job scope is administrative in nature, for example, to coordinate repair works between contractors and residents. But Jackson takes the initiative to go beyond the call of duty. He would also help the residents carry out minor repairs personally, so as to help them save time and cost. Jackson would even do so outside office hours, including using his own tools and equipment. His attitude also had a positive effect on his other colleagues. It was no surprise that one resident commended

Jackson for being “a mediator, a listening ear and an ambassador of HDB”.

A panel of judges helped us to select from among the 100 officers six who are worthy of the Distinguished Star Service Award. I thank Mr Peter Mainguy, General Manager at The Ritz Carlton Singapore, Mr Yap Kim Wah, Senior Vice President of Product & Services at Singapore Airlines, and Mr Mark Grieves, Head of Customer Experience at OCBC Bank, for giving their time and expertise.

Recognising Our Customers

The role of the Public Service is to serve the common good and safeguard Singapore’s interests. As much as we try, we may not be able to accede to every request we receive. It is important that we engage the people we serve and help them understand why sometimes we cannot give them exactly what they want, but reassure them that we will do our best to help them. It is helpful when our customers understand the constraints we face. They can help us

improve our service delivery, so everyone benefits from the improvements.

Last year, I spoke about how we should recognise individuals who have been particularly helpful and understanding as customers of the Public Service. Our panel of judges also helped us with the selection of outstanding customers. I am happy to announce that we are giving out the Star Customer Awards to three such individuals this evening.

Mr Andrew Yeo has been a regular contributor of feedback to the CPF Board over the last few years. He first reflected his unhappiness with the processing time for some applications at CPF Board in 2007. Initially, staff at CPF Board found him quite demanding, but they agreed that his feedback was valid. They worked on the issues he raised and eventually resolved them. Since then, Mr Yeo has provided numerous useful suggestions for CPF Board to improve its services. He is clearly a valuable customer of the CPF Board.

Mr Ong Bee Liat has been submitting invoices via the electronic system of the Accountant-General's Department (AGD). Other than convincing others to use the system, Mr Ong would proactively meet officers from the AGD to discuss how the system could be made more user-friendly. One of his suggestions – to provide more details in the purchase order to facilitate electronic billing – made it more convenient for both suppliers and government agencies.

Mr Khoo Swee Kok works in a construction company which employs many foreign workers. When he met officers from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to discuss manpower-related issues, he would provide feedback and suggestions to improve the processes. As a regular user of MOM's online work permit services, Mr Khoo felt that the submission of prior approval for work permits, which was done manually, could be done electronically. This was subsequently implemented by MOM and helped to greatly reduce the processing time from 14 working days to 1 working day.

As you can see, engaging and working with our customers, and bringing them on board as our partners has much benefits. I urge

every agency to continue to engage our customers to build up the partnership of trust and cooperation. I also encourage members of the public to work hand in hand with our officers and agencies to help improve services, but also to be understanding when we may not be able to accede to every request we receive.

Conclusion

This evening marks the start of the Public Service Week. It is a time for us to reaffirm our roles and commitment to serve Singapore. Although we come from different organisations and play different roles, we belong to one Public Service. Let us continue to work together to advance Singapore's interests and sustain a better future for Singaporeans.

I wish you a pleasant evening.

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