

Opening Address by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister in charge of the Civil Service, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Teo Chee Hean at the Excellence in Public Service Awards Ceremony on Friday, 25 May 2012, 4.40pm at Suntec Convention Centre Ballroom

Distinguished Guests,
Public Officers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am happy to be here with you at the Excellence in Public Service Awards ceremony, as part of this year's Public Service Week. This awards ceremony is about appreciating Public Service agencies and officers for their efforts to provide good service. So let me begin by thanking all of you for your hard work, and for being committed to being an excellent Public Service.

Adapting to an evolving context

2 As a Public Service, we are facing times of change. Globally, the economic outlook is uncertain, and we need to anticipate and respond to changes nimbly. Locally, society is becoming more plural and perspectives and expectations are more diverse. There will be different and diverse views on, for example, whether the sounds of children playing are happy signs of vibrancy in a community, or unwanted noise disturbances. Some call for the Government to play a greater role in regulating community behaviour, while others prefer more freedom to decide for themselves, what community can do.

3 As a Public Service, we have to adapt to these changes. We have just recited our Public Service pledge and renewed our commitment to our core values of Integrity, Service and Excellence. "Service" is our mission - ultimately we exist to serve Singapore, and her people. So we must continue to deliver good policies that are in the long term interests of the nation, and to implement these policies well. But to serve well is not only to produce good outcomes *for*

citizens, but also together **with** them. To do this, we have to be in tune with the pulse of Singapore society, and to draw on the collective wisdom of our people.

4 The Service Principles of Courtesy, Accessibility, Responsiveness and Effectiveness, or CARE in short, were introduced in 1995 to develop a culture of service excellence in the Public Service. They have helped us become more efficient and should remain the foundation of our service delivery. However, in line with the changing times, the Public Service Division decided to update the Service Principles, to ensure their continued relevance.

5 Last year, a study team of public officers across various agencies reviewed the Service Principles. They spoke to officers from public agencies and considered the work of international experts. From the team's recommendations, the Public Service is now adding three Principles to the foundation of CARE: people-centricity, mutual courtesy and respect, and shared responsibility for public good.

6 We hope that these Principles will guide the relationship between the Public Service and Singaporeans in the years to come. This is a relationship that puts people at the centre of what we do, and it is a relationship based on mutual respect; a relationship in which we all have a stake, and a role to play.

People-centricity: People are the core of what we do

7 The first of the new Service Principles is **people-centricity**: putting people at the core of what we do. This is of course not something new to the Service, but a timely reminder for public officers to know and relate well with the people we serve, and understand the needs and circumstances of individual Singaporeans better.

8 Let me share some positive examples to illustrate this principle. The first is Mr Lim Pang Whye from the Housing & Development Board.

Mr Lim has gone the extra mile to reach out to his customers to learn about their needs and concerns. For example, he meets some elderly rental housing residents weekly, in his personal

time, at their void deck. These meetings help Mr Lim to get to know them personally and understand their circumstances. He then tries his best to resolve any issues raised to him, so as to improve their lives. Mr Lim is well-liked by residents and colleagues alike, and he will be receiving the PS21 Star Service Award tonight.

9 Another PS21 Star Service Award winner who serves with passion and empathy is Mr Sum Cheong Kee from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports. Mr Sum is a Senior Probation Officer who takes time to understand his probationers, and engages their families and the community to support them as well. His tireless efforts and genuine concern for his probationers motivate them to lead fulfilling lives, both during and after probation.

10 One of Mr Sum's ex-probationers contacted him eleven years after leaving probation. He had studied hard for an accountancy certification and was doing well as an accountant. He said, "I hope that you can see that what you did as part of your daily job certainly has an important impact in a person's life".

11 Like Mr Lim and Mr Sum, all of you seated here today have made a difference to people's lives, in your own ways. Today, we have a total of 96 PS21 Star Service Award winners whose efforts have touched the lives of many. I commend all of you.

12 Public Service agencies also have a role in reaching out to the community, understanding their unique needs and tailoring initiatives to meet these needs. The Health Promotion Board (HPB), which is receiving the Best Practice Award for Stakeholder Engagement today, keeps the customer firmly in mind. It involves members of the People, Public and Private sectors as partners from the planning phase through to implementation. This ground-up approach helps HPB come up with solutions that are more creative and sustainable for the community.

13 For example, while planning for the Healthier Hawker Programme, which encourages healthier food choices, HPB consulted hawkers on their concerns. Based on the feedback, HPB then worked with a local food manufacturer and local chefs to develop healthy ingredients and recipes. The healthier solutions have been widely adopted by hawkers and well-received by the

community. At Yuhua Hawker Centre, where the programme started, most of the hawkers' sales have even increased by 20%! The programme hence benefitted both the community with healthier meals and the hawkers with more business.

Shared responsibility for public good: We all have a part to play

14 This brings me to the second new Service Principle: shared responsibility for public good. The relationship between the Public Service and those it serves is a special one – it is more than transactional. Unlike the private sector, the Public Service often cannot choose its customers, and vice versa. Both Singaporeans and the Public Service have a shared interest in using public resources prudently, and a shared responsibility to create and maintain wider public good. Going back to the earlier example, the Healthier Hawker Programme might not have been so well-received if not for the efforts of local community members, such as the hawkers' willingness to use healthier ingredients, and local grassroots leaders' help to publicise it. Indeed, we should all explore how we can best contribute to different initiatives in our own ways.

15 This afternoon, we are giving out the Star Customer Awards to five customers who have been exemplary in contributing to better public outcomes through their partnership with public agencies.

16 Mr Song Yew Kee has been actively involved with the Singapore Civil Defence Force since 1997. He contributes feedback regularly and participates in dialogues to help shape programmes for the community.

17 Last year, Mr Song helped address the evacuation needs of the disabled during fire emergencies. He volunteered his time to work with the SCDF to draw up a new set of guidelines. These guidelines have been adopted by the building industry and will ensure that the disabled are not left behind in fire emergencies. I would like to thank Mr Song and the other star customers who have volunteered their time and effort to work with our agencies for public good.

Mutual courtesy and respect: Let's be kind to one another

18 The third and final new Service Principle is mutual courtesy and respect. I have spoken about how we are striving for a good relationship, with both the Public Service and the people playing a part. However, while we try our best to serve our customers well, we cannot always make everyone happy. But even then, there should be courtesy and respect in all our interactions.

19 Most Singaporeans are courteous and reasonable, and our officers find it a pleasure to serve them. But every now and then, there are individuals who are overly demanding, and can sometimes even be abusive, especially when public agencies have to say no. So public officers have to understand that, and learn to put across difficult responses. For instance, the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) once had to deal with a customer who was upset about receiving a summons. At first, he blamed the agency for not replying to his appeal with a hard copy letter, even though he had first sent an email and the agency had replied via email. When the agency turned down his appeal, the customer then wrote back with expletives, threats and curses. For cases like this, we must protect our officers from verbal and physical abuse.

20 We also owe it to everyone to make sure that a small minority of difficult customers do not take up an undue share of public resources. We need to be fair and attend to other customers too. Last year, there was a customer who approached a number of public agencies with feedback, but refused to accept their responses, no matter how they tried to explain. He persisted in calling public officers repeatedly, sometimes even verbally abusing them when they picked up the calls. And I understand that he made about **two hundred** phone calls to different public officers, in one morning. It is difficult to serve customers like him well, and yet, still be able to accord the due amount of attention to other customers. Sometimes, there needs to be a balance.

21 As a Public Service, we should work hand-in-hand with citizens for the good of Singapore's future. But it will take effort from both partners for this relationship to bear fruit. To our officers, do your best to serve our customers well.

To supervisors, please support your staff. Encourage them to provide prompt and courteous service, give our officers our full support, and help them when they face customers who are

difficult to serve. But perhaps most important is for all of us to remember to always be kind to one another.

Role of organisations in enabling a people-centric culture

23 While public officers need to embrace and demonstrate these Principles, agencies need to lead by example and apply them to their employees. Excellent organisations empower and enable officers by being employee-centric.

24 Let me share with you how the National Library Board has been employee-centric. NLB is receiving the Public Service Premier Award today. While pursuing organisational excellence, NLB does not forget to take good care of its employees, and support them in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and a good work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements, like part-time work and staggered working hours, are available for to help to balance the demands of work and personal life. A health incentive scheme is in place to reward officers who improve in areas like cholesterol and blood pressure levels. NLB also provides tips, and even engages trainers, for officers to be more active at their workplace.

25 Just as citizens play a part in our service relationship, officers play a part in building a great workplace as well. To bring about this outcome, NLB officers participate in engagement surveys to contribute in designing staff programmes which can meet their needs better.

26 NLB is one of the ten organisations receiving the Public Service Awards today. I would like to congratulate these organisations, and also the five organisations which have won the Best Practice Awards. I hope that agencies can continue to inspire one another towards excellence through mutual sharing and learning.

Conclusion

27 Let me congratulate all the winners gathered here – 15 organisations and 101 individuals in all. I am proud to see that we have agencies, public officers and citizens who are committed to working together to make Singapore a better home for all of us. You are a source of inspiration for all of us, and I thank you for your dedication and passion to serve.

28 I wish all of you a pleasant evening ahead. Thank you.