

**OPENING ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE MR TEO CHEE HEAN AT THE EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS CEREMONY ON FRIDAY, 13 MAY 2011, 2 P.M AT SUNTEC CONVENTION CENTRE BALLROOM**

Distinguished Guests,  
Public Officers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am delighted to join you once again for the Excellence in Public Service Awards. This year, we are also launching the Public Service Week in conjunction with today's ceremony. This is the fourth year since we started the Public Service Week; a week set aside for the Service to rededicate itself to its role in building Singapore.

2. We have just witnessed a watershed General Election. There is a clear desire by our people, Singaporeans, for their voices to be heard. PM has clearly articulated that we must listen more to design policies which benefit Singaporeans and secure support from them. How can this be better done? What can public officers do to improve engagement with our citizens?

## **Role of the Public Service**

3. The Singapore Public Service has always worked closely with the political leadership to design and implement sound policies and deliver high quality public services to our citizens and customers. Singapore has a good record of Public Service which public officers can justifiably take pride in. Going forward, the Public Service has a key role to play as we seek to transform the way we govern; the way we formulate policies and the way we deliver public services. We need to do this in a way which will connect with the citizens.

4. Indeed, as the Singapore society becomes more diverse and what our citizens want and expect become more wide-ranging, the challenges faced by our public officers will also grow in terms of magnitude and complexity. It is neither effective nor sustainable for the Public Service to try to solve all these problems on our own. We need to tap on the collective wisdom and knowledge of the people and stakeholders to help tackle the challenges. We need to create an environment where public officers can work hand-in-glove with the people they serve to address the issues and create greater public value. Ultimately this involvement will help create a Singapore where citizens can feel engaged and have shared ownership of the challenges and look for

solutions together. This will provide the foundation for a more resilient and cohesive society.

5. The Public Service has adopted such an approach for a while now in specific areas. We have recognised the contribution of stakeholders and customers who work with us to co-create solutions. So let me illustrate with a few examples drawn from the winners of this year's awards.

### **Engaging the community**

6. A deserving winner in the "stakeholder engagement" category of the Best Practice Awards this year is Northlight School. The school has been actively collaborating with stakeholders and partners right from the conception stage to design a customised programme for students with difficulties handling the mainstream educational curriculum. To ensure that its students are equipped with the right skills, values and attitudes, Northlight School put in extra effort to engage its stakeholders, parents, potential employers of the students, sponsors and donors frequently and meaningfully, taking in their advice and suggestions.

7. This stakeholder engagement helped Northlight School to get resources for scholarships and bursaries, increase opportunities for industrial attachments and obtain technical equipment for their students. The result is a school which prides itself on providing meaningful education and gives students a second chance to achieve their aspirations. Northlight has earned the appreciation and gratitude of students who have benefited immensely from a school programme designed to bring the best out of them.

8. The stakeholders and partners too have benefited tremendously from their involvement. The school has published a few books capturing their journeys. The book titles speak for themselves and of the lessons learnt – One is “Courage to Teach”, another is entitled “Transformed by the Mission – stories of hope and change”. Two more are simply titled “Heartwork@Northlight”. They share stories from partners, parents, students and teachers touched by the Northlight mission. Northlight School has shown us the power of inspiration and the multiplied power of harnessing contributions from the community.

## **Star Customers**

9. Now let's take a look at things from the perspective of the consumers of public services. Having dedicated and service-oriented public officers is only part of the process to finding good solutions. If we want good outcomes, we need good service providers. We also need citizens and customers to provide constructive feedback and work with our officers to improve service levels and outcomes for the public. We have since 2009 honoured customers who have contributed towards this.

10. One of these customers is Dr Moh Chong Tau. He is the CEO of Makino Asia Pte Ltd and Honorary Secretary of the Singapore Precision Engineering and Tooling Association. Dr Moh played an instrumental role in helping the Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) build a facility to co-locate complex equipment companies whose operations were sensitive to vibration. Despite his busy schedule, he was actively involved in helping JTC from the initial feasibility study to the conceptual and design stages. He made the effort to personally share his experience and subject matter expertise with JTC staff. He also provided detailed floor plans and opened up his facility to allow JTC to conduct studies on infrastructural requirements.

11. Dr Moh took a keen interest in the complex equipment project despite the fact that he was not looking at the additional space for his business expansion. His willingness to provide expert knowledge and assistance to help JTC build a user-centric facility is laudable. It is a prime example of how government agencies can tap on the expertise and knowledge of their customers and work together to co-create and build better solutions.

### **Individual Excellence in Service**

12. At the individual staff level, we salute public officers who have consistently demonstrated their commitment to high standards of service excellence. We have a total of 99 winners this year. From this pool, 11 officers will be conferred the PS21 Distinguished Star Service Award. These are officers who went beyond the call of duty to deliver excellent service. To inject an element of surprise and excitement to this year's event, I am not allowed to tell you who the winners are. The winners will only be announced later.

13. But to illustrate how personal commitment to the job at hand has helped our customers, permit me to mention two examples, in no order of merit, out of our 99 PS21 Star Service Award winners.

14. Ms Wendy Lim, a senior probation officer from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports has been instrumental in reforming the lives of many offenders, working closely with stakeholders, including families and enforcement agencies to help the probationers integrate back into society effectively. For example, when handling a teenage probationer who had mild cognitive impairment, Wendy skilfully balanced the need to be firm in handling errant behaviour with empathy and compassion. With Wendy's intensive supervision, the probationer was eventually employed by Bizlink Centre, which catered to his special needs while allowing him to be constructively engaged and financially independent.

15. Ms Evadne Chan from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an attaché handling administrative and consular affairs at the Singapore Embassy in Tokyo. Evadne attends to lots of requests for help. Despite the stress, she can always be counted on to respond to each promptly and professionally, often going beyond the call of duty to help Singaporeans in need. One notable example happened in 2009, when Evadne received news that a Singaporean family tragically lost a loved one in Osaka. Within four hours, Evadne travelled to Osaka to help the bereaved family with all the repatriation arrangements.

16. Officers such as Wendy and Evadne personify the core values of our Public Service to put Singapore and Singaporeans at the heart of all we do, whether here or overseas. I know their good work will be an inspiration to other public officers.

### **Organisational Excellence**

17. There are many other award winners here today, each with a story of excellence in service – 19 organisations and 103 individuals in all. We recognise their contributions and pay tribute to them. Their dedication and commitment to service exemplify the spirit we want to inculcate in each public officer, which is to serve the public and improve the lives of Singaporeans and businesses.

18. Before I end, I would like to emphasise that good officers can only do their work excellently in an environment committed to excellence. Hence let me also commend the winners of the various Organisational Awards. The Best Practice Award, which was introduced last year, recognises innovative and effective practices in specific areas of public sector governance. These include resource management, stakeholder engagement and regulation. This award also supports the sharing of



best practices among the public agencies. I hope the sharing will spread the learning and spawn new and even better ideas.

## **CONCLUSION**

19. In conclusion, let me congratulate all the winners gathered here as we mark the start of this year's Public Service Week. We have capable and committed people in the Service. We have excellent public agencies. In short, we have a Public Service that all of you and all Singaporeans can take pride in. In addition, we do have thoughtful and helpful citizens who are willing to go the extra mile for their fellow Singaporeans. We should encourage and engage them more actively.

20. But even as we recognise our achievements, we must never be satisfied with ourselves. We have to continue to work at creating an environment for innovation and learning; to build organisational capabilities and individual competencies to tackle new challenges. And as we seek to strengthen our engagement with the public whom we serve, we must listen actively and work closely with them on issues affecting them. It must be a more internally connected and seamless Government so that the services that we provide are more integrated and seamless.

21. I thank all of you for your dedication and commitment to serving our nation.

22. Thank you.

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