

**SPEECH BY MR LEO YIP, HEAD, CIVIL SERVICE**  
**AT THE PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP DINNER**  
**ON 8 NOVEMBER 2017, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL**

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean

Chairman and Members of the Public Service Commission

Friends and Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good evening to all of you.

2. Let me start by thanking all my Public Service colleagues here this evening for your service and contributions to the Public Service and to Singapore. Let me also congratulate those of you newly appointed to the Public Service Leadership Programme (PSLP). Our PSLP officers, together with the Senior Public Service Leaders and Public Service Leaders (PSLs) who are also here this evening, you are, or will be part of the collective leadership of the Public Service.

3. At the Public Service Conference last month, we discussed how it was important for the Public Service to be more nimble and responsive. This evening, I want to speak about three traits that we need all PSLs and PSLP officers to exemplify.

- a. First, to be exemplars of the notion of One Public Service.
- b. Second, to drive and contribute to the transformation of the Public Service.
- c. And, third, to exemplify the leadership qualities that the Public Service will need more of, in order to be effective today and into the future.

In short, to Work as One, Drive Change and Lead Effectively.

## **Work as One: One Public Service**

4. Let me first speak about working as One Public Service, which DPM Teo referred to in his speech. The notion of “One Public Service” is not new and has been much discussed, but sometimes at a motherhood level. The practice of “One Public Service” needs to become a truly integral part of how we think and how all of us work. We all work for individual agencies. But yet we belong to One Public Service, with the common purpose of serving Singapore and the people of Singapore and to create a better future: a future where Singapore continues to distinguish itself on the global stage; where Singapore is a home that promises opportunity of better and more fulfilling lives for our people; and is a strong and cohesive society.

5. This passion to serve and this purpose is what binds you and me, and all of us in the Public Service: that we all belong and contribute to something larger. This is the basic idea behind working as Whole of Government.

6. As One Public Service, we must rise above narrow organisational interests. We must see the work of our division or organisation, not just in terms of what that unit wants to achieve, but also in terms of the Whole of Government – and indeed, of Singapore. This is the Whole of Government perspective. It means several things. It means that instead of guarding our turf, we allow the collective purpose to shape our thinking and actions. It means that instead of drawing boundaries, we seek out opportunities to collaborate. It means thinking not in terms of my own success but more about how to contribute to that larger purpose. It means we connect the dots, not shield ourselves off from working with others.

7. Let me cite an example, and I will talk about, as an example, Smart Nation. Smart Nation is an important priority to harness technology and digitalisation to transform the way we live, work and play. But Smart Nation is not just the work of the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office (SNDGO) or of GovTech. It cannot

succeed if all there is to Smart Nation is a series of disparate projects that we merely support or merely accommodate because we are asked to. Smart Nation must indeed be a Whole of Government movement to ride on the rapid advance and pervasive use of technology in order to deliver greater convenience to Singaporeans, connect communities, enhance quality of living, make our jobs more exciting, and our companies more competitive – and agencies across the Government, all of us, have a role to play in this.

8. Within Government too, our push to be a digital government means harnessing technology to share data more effectively across government. It means reinventing processes for more effective cross-agency planning and policymaking. It means revamping our service delivery processes, reengineering our operational and frontline processes, in order to serve the public seamlessly – seamlessly as One Public Service, not just as individual agencies.

9. We need to work together to advance the Government's priorities and improve lives for Singaporeans. As PSLs and PSLP officers, we are exemplars of what One Public Service means. We set the tone for whether our peers and our organisations think and act as a Whole of Government. If we, all of us here, do not think as One Public Service, we will not act as One Public Service. If we do not have a Whole of Government perspective, we cannot act as a Whole of Government. Our actions and decisions must be driven by that something bigger, that something deeper, which is the broader purpose of contributing to a Whole of Government effort to build a better Singapore. And we must see ourselves as part of that collective, in giving directions, in taking responsibility, and in being accountable. So embrace the opportunities – all of you – during your rotational postings to help you build a Whole of Government perspective and grow your networks across the agencies. You are then well placed to look across, connect the dots, and work more effectively across agency-boundaries as One Public Service.

## **Drive Change: Transformation of the Public Service**

10. Let me turn to the second trait that we need to have, and this is to drive change. As PSLs and also PSLP officers who will be our future leaders, we must care deeply about the future of our organisations and of the Service. If not you, then who?

- a. Is the Public Service, and your organisation, truly ready for the future?
- b. Are we, as a government, truly ready for a future with an ageing population?
- c. Are we truly ready to harness the full potential of the digital age? Are we on the way to becoming a truly digital government?
- d. Are we making the big, bold, and difficult changes sorely needed to make all these work?

11. In Singapore, we are at inflexion points in our demography, economy and in our society. We are no longer facing the same challenges as we faced in the past. They are new challenges – more acute, more complex, more deep-seated. And therefore they require new solutions.

12. The Public Service needs to spearhead the transformations Singapore as a whole must make to continue thriving. Singapore has to restructure its economy, provide for a population with differing needs and aspirations, and ensure that we can ride the wave of new technology. But none of these goals can be achieved if we, the Public Service does not transform itself first. Transformation cannot just be management jargon. It must be real, impactful and meaningful across all our agencies and one core question is: How must we – across all public service agencies – fundamentally change the way our agencies operate in 2, 5, and 10 years' time so that we will be more effective in serving Singaporeans tomorrow? We will have to operate in a tighter manpower situation. Operate with smart technologies. Operate to deal with more complex challenges. This means transforming each and every agency.

13. We need to drive transformation at a Whole of Government level, agency level, but also for individual officers. How do we enable and support change for individual officers? How do we enable our officers to adapt, adjust and thrive in a more disruptive, digital environment? This means taking on new jobs and new roles because existing ones will be disrupted.

14. Public Sector Transformation means all of these. We need to organise ourselves better and refresh how we push ahead with this critical effort. All PSLs and every member of the PSLP community, must own this renewed Public Sector Transformation. This renewed push can only succeed with your contributions, support and energy.

### **Lead Effectively: Our Leadership Response**

15. This brings me to my final point, as PSLs, we need to lead effectively. As leaders, we need to give direction, inspire confidence, and demonstrate action to our officers. And we need to work together.

16. First, give direction and inspire confidence. A transformed Public Service will require a transformed leadership. For the Public Service to be ready for the future, we need to mount a new leadership response. We have to ask ourselves what new leadership skills we need to build individually and collectively, in order to lead effectively in this phase of fast, incessant, disruptive and ambiguous change. It is when the waters are uncharted that strong and visionary leadership is most needed. And it is also in periods of uncertainty and disruption that supportive, empathetic leadership is most needed to support our officers through change.

17. As PSLs, we must show our officers that transformation, innovation and enterprise in our Public Service are not just clichés that we only talk about. We must, by example, show what it means to be adaptive and entrepreneurial, adjust quickly to

new situations and experiment with new ideas and solutions. We must show what it means to make big and bold changes.

18. We must do two things equally well, and at the same time: Lead our organisations to deliver policies and services with excellence *today*, AND transform our organisations so they can be even better *tomorrow*. Both equally well and at the same time.

19. We must as leaders demonstrate and take action. We must have a bias for action. Think Big, Start Small, Act Fast, must be our mantra. Make things happen, starting with trials and test-beds if we need to first prove that they can work. But act, and do, not just conceptualise and ideate. As PSLs, we must also take the initiative to solve problems, even and especially where they cut across or fall off the margins of our organisational boundaries. We must take responsibility and not simply push difficult decisions up the hierarchy.

20. Finally, as one leadership community, we must show the way and what it means to work together. Your Permanent Secretaries are collectively taking the lead on all these initiatives in order to give that direction, inspire confidence, and demonstrate action. And we will, the group of Permanent Secretaries, in turn, engage with and work together with all of you, to make changes happen.

## **Conclusion**

21. To conclude, we are in very challenging times, for the Public Service and for Singapore. But there are as many opportunities, as there are challenges. If only we can organise ourselves better. If only we can transform ourselves successfully. If only we can demonstrate strong leadership. And we must and we will. Working together as One Public Service, we must turn this into an exciting future for the Public Service, and for Singapore and Singaporeans. As our PSLs and future leaders, all of you play an important role to drive change and lead effectively, and I ask that you join me in this journey.

22. Thank you very much everyone.

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