

# *Singapore Government*

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**ADDRESS BY MR PETER CHEN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE,  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND MINISTRY OF TRADE AND  
INDUSTRY AT THE 2000 EXCELLENT SERVICE AWARD (EXSA)  
PRESENTATION CEREMONY  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2000 AT 9.00 AM  
AT THE HARBOUR PAVILION, WORLD TRADE CENTRE**

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

### **SERVICE EXCELLENCE IN THE NEW ECONOMY**

1. I am pleased to be here today to officiate at the Excellent Service Award presentation ceremony. When the Productivity and Standards Board invited me to be the guest-of-honour again this year, I readily accepted. I believe service excellence has become even more important to Singapore now that we are transforming into a knowledge-based economy.

### **CREATING WEALTH THROUGH CUSTOMER RETENTION AND KNOWLEDGE**

2. If you have a unique product, you can have a competitive edge over your competitors. However, unique products become common very quickly in today's competitive and technologically advanced environment, as competitors learn, copy and improve on them. The only distinguishing factor is customer service, leading to customer retention. If you can provide a unique and delighting experience for your customer, it will most likely earn you a satisfied customer who will come back to you again and again.

3. Organisations such as eBay, Cisco, Synet Service Group and IBM have successfully capitalised on the link between customer service, customer retention and profitability. Their secret is to keep the customer engaged after the sale. eBay created a "Personal Search" feature that sends out an e-mail note to customers when an item of their interest would be auctioned. Cisco created a separate organisation - Customer Advocacy - that focuses on conferences, programmes and communication to keep customers engaged. It includes Web trends, business issues, and peer sharing. Companies with best practices in customer retention measure retention performance and put a premium on creating wealth through knowledge.

4. In the New Economy, knowledge plays a vital role in improving the efficiency of production and distribution processes, and in improving the quality, quantity and variety of products and services. Organisations with better knowledge are winners in the markets because knowledge allows them to distinguish themselves from the competition. Similarly, nations endowed with more and better knowledge are more competitive because they are better equipped to tap and exploit the knowledge.

5. For organisations in Singapore, it is now more important than ever that we keep abreast of the changes and find new ways to meet the ever-rising customer expectations. Let me cite some of the new service ideas developed in some organisations.

6. **United Airlines** installed special seats with built-in massage rollers. **Virgin Airlines** went one step further - on certain long distance flights, they even put a massage therapist on board!

7. **Dell Computers** allows its customers to design their own computer on its website with complete information on product, inventory and pricing and then delivers the specially designed and ordered computer right to their doorstep!

8. At **Cold Storage** in Singapore, customers can do their grocery shopping via the Internet, telephone, and facsimile and have their purchases delivered. Cold Storage was the first supermarket in Singapore to introduce virtual grocery shopping.

9. These examples are service organisations, which constantly find innovative ways to delight customers.

## **TOTAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

10. Service delivery is about a total customer experience. Organisations need to be innovative to create a wonderful experience for customers, but ultimately, it is how the staff handles the customers that defines that experience. The point where staff interacts with the customer is the moment of truth. Hence, organisations need to get all levels of staff on board in the quest for service quality. The staff's mindset must be changed and skills must be continuously upgraded to deliver excellent service. Only by staff having the right attitudes such as a positive outlook, being people-oriented, showing personalised responsiveness, having good product/ service knowledge, being reliable, being resourceful and having a customer-first mindset can organisations win the race. I believe the Excellent Service Award will help to set high standards and produce many more excellent service providers, as we learn from the winners of today's awards.

## **EXCELLENT SERVICE AWARD AND SINGAPORE GOLD CIRCLE**

11. The Excellent Service Award is now in its 6th year. This year, we are acknowledging the excellent performance of about 3,300 service providers from 115 organisations. This is an increase of 30% over 1999 and brings the total number of award recipients to more than 10,000 in six years. It is heartening to know that this award receives strong support from the service sector.

12. Unfortunately, this strong support does not automatically translate to high standards of service excellence every time. Let me explain. While organisations do recognise and reward their employees for service excellence, they often do not try to translate these standards into their corporate service standards. The standards will thus remain the individual employees' own standards and overall service standard will not be raised. In fact, the Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, himself, pointed out in October that the quality of service here was not up

to par with many of the places he had visited. With the tourism industry bringing in more than \$10 billion and record 7.6 million visitors this year, Singapore cannot afford to overlook the quality of service and warmth offered to visitors. We have to look for innovative ways to continuously raise our service quality standards. I urge the service industry to rise up to this challenge.

## **EXSA WINNERS**

13. Many of this year's Excellent Service Award winners deserve special mention. Let me cite a few exemplary models from each of the award categories. Ms Saroja Pillay is a Senior Public Affairs Assistant with the Transit Link Pte Ltd. She exemplifies many of you here today - courteous, helpful and positive. Ms Saroja is sensitive to the needs of her customers. She takes the initiative to help the elderly and the handicapped to file their reports without waiting for them to approach her. On one occasion, Ms Saroja not only helped a commuter to buy a bus concession stamp, she also took the trouble to hand it to him personally after office hours. She will be receiving the Silver Award today.

14. Mr Lim Siang Koon is a senior bus captain with the Singapore Bus Services. He has been working in the company since 1974. In his 26 years of service, Mr Lim has received many commendations from the management and the public for his courtesy and honesty. He was once commended for his public spiritedness in assisting a female passenger who had been molested. In addition, Mr Lim also actively participates in productivity improvement to raise the organisation's customer service standards. Today, he will be receiving the Gold Award.

15. Star Award recipients give that extra something, that leaves on them star-qualities. They willingly go the extra mile to ensure the satisfaction of their customers. Miss Mazni Mohamed from Ken Air did just that. Even after she made her sale, Miss Mazni continued to service the customer by monitoring and keeping the customer informed. Even when she went on leave, she was still concerned about this customer. When she resumed her duties, the first thing she did was to call the customer and see if things were all right and going according to plan. This personalised responsiveness is the reason why Ms Mazni deserves her Star Award.

16. This year, we have seven Superstar winners. All are exemplary service staff who have left their mark on the customers that they have served. One of them is Ms Sylvia Sim, a guest relations officer from The Westin Stamford and The Westin Plaza. She assisted a guest to retrieve \$30 from a taxi driver who had

driven off without returning the change. On another occasion, she pacified and charmed an irritated guest who was very unhappy about the Hotel's new breakfast policy. Miss Sim has even personally helped a guest to mend a tear in the trousers. One hotel guest was so touched by her excellent service that he said he would hire Ms Sim without hesitation, should she ever live in his country. High praise indeed! Regular guests to the hotel ask for Ms Sylvia Sim during their stay there. As one guest commented, "She should always be considered the most valuable employee." Well done, Ms Sim!

**Conclusion**

17. I congratulate all the award winners for your dedication to service excellence! You have made a difference in your organisations. I look forward to your maintaining and even surpassing your own level of service excellence. Thank you.

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