

I would like to discuss three issues this afternoon.<sup>1</sup> They are somewhat inter-related, but individually they represent ever-present challenges to managers. Now, I wouldn't want you to think that I wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and worry about these issues—they're not of that magnitude. And while I'm obviously speaking from the perspective of a federal public servant, I suspect that to varying degrees these are issues for provincial and municipal public servants as well, but I don't know whether my fellow panellists share my preoccupations.

The three issues are: Pace, Workforce Renewal and Values and Ethics.

One of the realities that all managers in public services face is the need to react quickly to new and emerging issues. All managers, regardless whether they work in the public or private sectors, and regardless whether we're talking about managers years ago, today or at some point in the future, have to decide how to deal with new realities. What I think has changed, and what I think is a particular reality of public service, is the pressure to respond immediately, and often before all the facts are known.

There are many explanations for this. We can blame (if that's the right word) technology—and many of us are addicted to our crackberries—those of us who work at the federal and provincial levels can blame Question Period; and we can blame the increasing competition in the media, especially the emergence of various 24-hour news channels with their voracious appetite and need for something new, right now!

I actually saw an example of this playing out on television a couple of nights ago when I watched the opening episode of *Jericho*. This program takes place in a small town in the US. In the opening episode there appears to be an explosion of an atomic bomb. All of the television and radio stations go dead, as does the cell phone network and the regular—old fashioned—land-line network. The town is isolated from the outside world (if the outside world still exists). In this set of circumstances, virtually everyone expects the mayor to know what is happening. It's quite obvious, though, that he is no better placed than anyone else to know what had actually occurred no more than an hour earlier, yet clearly the good citizens of Jericho think he should. And the fact that he doesn't is sufficient to undermine his authority at the very moment when he most needs it!

Now, we can say that this is just TV, but I think every senior public servant has faced situations like this when there is a need to know what is not yet known, and to act on that knowledge.

My second area of concern is the demographics facing the public service. As we all know, Canada, like most western countries, is facing a significant demographic challenge as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age. While the challenge for pension schemes and other social services is going to be significant—and I wouldn't want to minimize the challenges faced by my colleagues who have to worry about such things—I'm concerned about the impact on all our workplaces. A large number of public servants

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<sup>1</sup> These remarks are the personal views of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect the views of Correctional Services Canada

come from the baby boomer generation and they (I probably should say “we” because I’m technically part of that generation too) will be leaving the workplace over the next few years.

Now, some will say that this isn’t necessarily a bad thing—after all there will be hiring opportunities all around—and bringing new people into the work force is not a bad thing. However, we keep hearing dire things about our replacements: you in this room and people like you! We keep hearing that you are not interested in a career in one organization; that you won’t have much patience with some of our more bureaucratic practices and procedures; and that if you don’t like what we have to offer, you will either not come and work for us or, if you do, you will leave pretty quickly!

Don’t get me wrong: I am **not** making a judgement about your values and your expectations. Part of the value of bringing new people into an organization is that they challenge the old assumptions and ways of doing things. What will be a challenge, though, is how the public service adapts to your expectations and your ways of doing things. Adapt we will—we’ll have to—but, and this is a link to my last point, the public sector is not like others. There are limits to what we can and cannot do, and we do not always establish those limits ourselves—sometimes they are established for us by the public and their representatives: the politicians.

Given the increasing pace and challenges public servants face, we are called to respond and we are challenged to balance an ever increasing number of competing pressures. Given this, it is not surprising that there is sometimes a tendency to try to find an anchor or a guide: “when in doubt, do X”. Unfortunately these don’t really exist. (Never having worked in the private sector, I’d like to think that it’s easier there: the bottom line reigns supreme. I’m sure the reality is more complex, but from this side of the fence it sometimes seems so much easier over there!) For us, though, where do we look?

At the federal level, each department has its own piece of legislation that creates the department, provides for the appointment of a minister and a deputy minister and establishes—at least in broad terms—what the department is supposed to do. Would that it were that simple, though! We also have a whole range of legislation of general application that governs the way in which we go about our business

We have the *Financial Administration Act* that tells us whether and how we are able to spend money; we have the *Public Service Employment Act* that governs how we hire staff; we have the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* that governs things like collective bargaining; we have the *Official Languages Act (OLA)* that establishes where we are required to provide services in both English and French; there’s the *Employment Equity Act*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, certain sections of the *Canada Labour Code* dealing with the right to work in a safe environment and, of course, as part of the federal government, everything we do is subject to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

And there can be tensions among all these pieces of legislation. Let me give you an example of the type of tension that we sometimes have to resolve: as New Brunswick is

designated as a bilingual area under the *OLA*, staff have the right to be supervised in the language of their choice—so we have a positive obligation to staff managerial positions with people who are able to understand and use both English and French. But, not everyone who joins the Public Service is bilingual, and so when we run a competition for a supervisory position in Moncton—where CSC has its regional headquarters—we have to stop and consider how our unilingual staff in the other Atlantic provinces will be able to compete for the position. There is always language training, but there’s a backlog and there’s a cost to the department; the cost isn’t just the cost of the training itself there’s also the cost of staffing behind the person who is on language training. In the case of a department like CSC where we operate 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, in many cases we don’t have the luxury of reassigning work to other employees, so meeting our language of work obligations can (and often does) make it more difficult to stay within our budget.

The temptation is great, but we cannot choose one over the other; we have to respect and comply with all the pieces of legislation that govern our work. Why? Because our Public Service Values tell us that is what we have to do.

At the federal level, we have “codified” these values (but I would argue they apply to public servants at all levels) as follows:

- Democratic Values: Helping ministers, under law, to serve the public interest.
- Professional Values: Serving with competence, excellence, efficiency, objectivity and impartiality.
- Ethical Values: Acting at all times in such a way as to uphold the public trust.
- People Values: Demonstrating respect, fairness and courtesy in their dealings with both citizens and fellow public servants.

And so, in closing, we face many pressures. We have to make an initial response quickly, often without knowing all the information we would like to; we face significant challenges in renewing our workforces and sometimes we find that the so-called “easy” solutions are precluded because we work in the *public* service. Does this make working in the public sector a challenge? Yes, it does. But it also makes it a rewarding challenge. I hope that many of you will take up that challenge, you’ll be glad you did.