

Speaking Notes
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IPAC Nova Scotia AGM
“Excellence in Public Administration”
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Thank you for inviting me here today to talk about excellence in Public Administration.

I have been a public servant for 30 years, my first ten years with the Province and the next twenty with the federal government.

I have seen a lot.

I have had the pleasure of working with the Energy Council with the discovery and development of the first oil and gas fields.

I worked on the first offshore accord and the design of the GST while I was with the Province.

In the federal government I worked on many federal-provincial agreements including the tar ponds and the Halifax Harbour clean-up. When I look around the province, I have had the opportunity to work on just about every major development project in Nova Scotia. Where else but the public service could one have the opportunity to be involved in such a variety of work and to see the benefits first hand? It is quite rewarding and I take great pride in being a public servant.

In my thirty years in government, I have seen many examples of excellence, both in terms of excellence of service delivery and excellence in management and of course, I've also seen and experienced things that were not so excellent. I'd like to talk to you about my experiences.

Let's start with excellence in service delivery. The key in my mind is to provide services that are relevant and required.

How often have we seen clients trying to change who they are in order to meet government criteria. Yes, in some cases they weren't eligible and were never intended to have access to the programming, but in too many cases they should have been eligible and compromised their goals to meet government criteria. We should be designing and delivering programs and services that are relevant, cost-effective and reliable.

People dealing with the government should be treated fairly and honestly. Citizens should expect the highest ethical and professional standards from their government and its officials.

Citizens should not feel disconnected or remote from their government. Programs and services should not be hidden away behind a fog of confusing jargon and bureaucracy.

Leaders think of legacy – what is your legacy as a leader?

As leaders, we have the power to influence, as I already said, people management but also structure of organizations – so need to look critically at whether our organizations are relevant

to what, how and where we need to do business for Citizens so we remain effective and visible.

What if our clients are internal – same rule applies. Everything we do in government, front end offices, back end offices create an impact on how we serve Canadians. Let us not forget who pays us and they expect and deserve the best. **THOSE US ARE YOU AND ME.....**

Recognize that more and more there are weaknesses associated with conventional silo approaches. Leaders transcend turf issues by working together across respective jurisdictions and expect their staff to do the same.

Connect to your community and to your clients. Don't underestimate the value of outreach.

In the reality of pervasive globalization and fierce competition, we need to work more and not less together. We need to interact with others, not disengage to ensure strategies and policies to take advantage of our strengths for the betterment and better service to all Canadians.

Don't use jargon when we communicate with our clients. We often speak to each other that we forget that how we communicate tells people how much we respect them. If our language is not simple, we are sending the wrong signals.

When we think of relevant service, do we think it is relevant to us or it is relevant to the service recipient. Sometimes be that

service recipient and see how it looks. I know of a CEO in town who makes his management team members do some jobs in the organization for one day so they see what is happening on the ground. The impact on service improvement is remarkable.

I was on the first stream of provincial leadership program so understood very early on in my career how best to prepare for leadership in an institution and importance for training and mentorship in our quest for excellence.

In my career journey and in all the different positions I have occupied, I developed a list of my top things that bring excellence to public administration

Excellence through personal leadership

Be an example of the change you want to see. Be a role model and walk the talk. Embrace change and urgency of renewal. Still water becomes stagnant.

Communicate, communicate, communicate and reward efforts. Never miss an opportunity to say thank you and instill pride in the Public Service

You need to be excited about your work to inspire excitement. You need to be visibly engaged to inspire engagement.

Be impeccable with words. Impressions are hard to erase and we create impressions through words. If some employees think we are saying “we don’t care about them”, they will not care about us.

Remember this quote: I may be only one person and I am the person who can make a difference.

Don’t talk endlessly about things. Do them

Use your power to influence people management. As a leader, look critically whether we have the right recruitment, development and workplace strategies to ensure skills of people meet the needs of service to citizens. Leaders understand the people are “their most important” assets.

My most important one: Understand when good is good enough. Don’t overlook “good enough” in your search for perfection. Perfect does not equate to excellence if you have missed key things in your quest for perfection. Give an illustration – took me ten days to give a citizen a perfect response – A good response in two days would have had a greater impact.

Excellence through service transformation

How do I connect to clients – I am a face of their government and what do they see? I am a leader in their government and what do they see? Is it different? Indeed it is.

Think of an epithet – do I want it to say

I or they changed the look of the public service and the perceptions of Canadians about the public service

WHY

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What about efficiency and how we are spending money? What would we do if it was our own money?

Always aim for balance between oversight and flexibility and remove unproductive restrictions that prevent us from managing for results rather than managing by rules.

Excellence through responsiveness and adaptability to the changing context of governing. Leaders understand what alters now and in future the context of governing. Leaders anticipate the future and understand that public administration does not exist in a vacuum. We must respond to change, wherever it is coming from? Three huge determinants of change are:

Globalization

As national economies have become more interwoven through trade, investment and international treaties, globalization has moved domestic public policy issues into the international arena. Globalization has had a significant impact on the roles and responsibilities of departments. Leaders must recognize and operate within this global reality to maximize benefit to Canadians.

Societal values and need for transparency in government

Critically look and adjust your practices to respond to public demands for transparency and accountability.

Everything we do is subject to public scrutiny and should satisfy demand for accountability.

Technology

Embrace it. Know how to use it.

Always explore its potential for exponential improvements in the way we operate and deliver service.

Excellence through demonstrated commitment to ethics and values

What do I do and how do I do It?

Am I a visible model of ethics and values posted on our walls.

What are perceptions of me? What do I think people say about me.

In our leadership competencies, we say values and ethics means serving with integrity and respect.

So demonstrate values and ethics in our personal behavior. How do I use government assets? Leaders do things that are right because it is “in their code of ethics” and regardless of whether or not people are watching or we have tight scrutiny.

Leaders make transparent decisions without favoritism or bias.

Leaders care about public interest and the public good and they model and instill that commitment

Leaders provide fearless advice and act with the courage of his or her convictions.

Leaders care about diversity and build diverse, inclusive cultures

Leaders model and build a culture of respect.