

**SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
AND MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AT THE  
PS21 STAR SERVICE AWARD CEREMONY 2007 ON 10 JULY  
2007 AT 6 PM AT HDB AUDITORIUM**

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Public Service,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good evening. I am happy to join you this evening for the PS21 Star Service Award Ceremony. I am also glad to know that about 100 family members of the Star Service Award recipients are also present.

**Leading in Customer Service**

2. A few weeks ago, global consulting firm Accenture released the findings of their latest study on "*Leadership in Customer Service*" among 22 governments. The Singapore government was ranked number 1, just ahead of Canada, which was number 1 previously. According to Accenture, 79 percent of Singaporeans felt that the Singapore Public Service had gotten better over the past 3 years.

3. This is possible because we have a Public Service that is not afraid to change, and public officers who proactively think of new and better ways of doing their jobs. But even as we celebrate this achievement, we cannot afford to be complacent. Though 79 percent of Singaporeans felt that the Singapore Public Service had improved, 100 percent of Singaporeans expect us to do even better. Globally and in Singapore, public expectations of governments are rising rapidly. We must continue to improve and innovate in order to retain the trust and support of the people we serve.

### **Rising Citizens' Expectations**

4. Let me cite a few areas where public expectations are evolving rapidly. First, access to services. Today, members of the public want access to government services through different channels. Some may prefer speaking with our public officers face-to-face or through the telephone. Those who are more IT savvy will use the Internet. Those constantly on the move may prefer SMS. Government agencies have to respond to this. For example, in response to feedback from taxpayers, IRAS set up an SMS service to allow individual taxpayers to check whether they need to file taxes.

5. Secondly, the public of today also expects government services to be connected. In other words, they expect the government to operate as one. The needs of our economy, society and citizenry have evolved and become more sophisticated. They often require services that cut across the responsibilities of different agencies. On the other hand, government agencies have also been given more autonomy – corporatised or become statutory boards - in order to develop deeper knowledge and provide better services in specialised areas. This has also increased the potential of fragmentation in service delivery.

6. For specific services, most members of the public know which agency to go to. For example, if you have a tax issue, you will go to IRAS; if you have a query on your CPF, you will check with the CPF Board. For these more clear cut cases, if a member of the public calls the wrong agency, I think it is reasonable for the public officer to just provide the right agency and the contact number to him or her. This should be sufficient to help the member of the public to reach the appropriate agency in the most convenient and speedy way.

7. But there will be times when members of the public have issues where they do not know which government department to go to. Sometimes, these are issues that fall under the purview of multiple agencies. The 'No Wrong Door' policy is a policy that was put in place to ensure that the Public Service works as one to help members of the public find the right place to address their issues. This policy supplements the various channels the Public Service has already put in place to help citizens find the right agency, for example the online Public Service Directory<sup>1</sup> and the e-citizen website, which provide information and contact details not by departments, but by functional areas and issues.

8. However, we do have some way to go to make the 'No Wrong Door' policy work as effectively as the public and the public service would like. Recently, a Sunday Times experiment found that several government agencies did not practise the 'No Wrong Door' policy. The implementation of the 'No Wrong Door' policy lies in public officers being able to make the connection for the members of public, who may not know which government department to go to for their queries. We still have some way to

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<sup>1</sup> [Http://www.psd.gov.sg](http://www.psd.gov.sg)

go to ensure that all public officers follow the spirit that underlies the idea of “many agencies, one government”.

9. Those of you who serve the public directly would also know that the public now expects customer service levels that are as good as, if not better than best practices in the private sector. The public is able to quickly point out areas where the public sector lags the private sector in innovative service delivery. This is a good thing. We should be willing to constantly adapt and innovate, and to learn from the best in the private sector.

### **Service in the Unique Public Sector Context**

10. Even as we strive to improve our service level and to learn from the private sector, we must remember that the Public Service is unique. What sets us apart from the private sector is that the Public Service exists to serve Singapore and all its residents. This is unlike the private sector, where companies can segment the market and choose the segment they wish to serve, focusing on just some customers while choosing not to serve others.

11. The Public Service cannot choose our customers. Where the public service can only be provided by the government, we

have the duty to serve everyone, and we cannot and should not turn away the citizens and residents we are expected to serve. Sometimes we have to deliver the service even when the customer might prefer that we do not – for example to serve him with a summon, or to send him a tax assessment.

12. In carrying out their work, public service agencies also have to balance serving the needs of individual customers against the collective needs of the public. The interests of the two may not always be the same. In some cases, a request by one member of the public can result in inconvenience or cost to other members of the public. For example, a person who wants to carry out renovation works late into the night would inconvenience his neighbours. Or further elevating service levels in response to the needs of a small number of people could cost taxpayers a lot more or result in a lower quality of service for other members of the public. Sometimes, it is the other way around. Serving the public good may inconvenience individual citizens, such as when we need to step up security measures at public places like the airport. But even so, the inconvenience can be mitigated by good public communications to explain the need for the measures, and how

members of the public can cooperate to minimize the inconvenience to themselves and others.

### **Quality Service – Key Tenet of the PS21 Movement**

13. So, in many ways, providing public services can be more complex than providing services in the private sector. Since the start of the PS21 movement 12 years ago, the Public Service has made a concerted effort to improve service quality. It has invested in inculcating a service excellence orientation and mindset among public officers. This is very important because at the end of the day, a key determinant of the quality of customer service we provide is the individual officer on the ground interacting with the public.

14. Tonight, we honour 80 public officers who have provided stellar service to the public. These officers have demonstrated a keen desire to better serve the public, going out of their way to help citizens resolve their issues. I would like to congratulate them for winning this year's PS21 Star Service Awards.

15. These award winners perform different functions in different agencies. Mr Neo Peng Tiong from MPA responded under tight

time constraints to assist a stranded ship which had its documents left in Malaysia. Ms Wong Yen Peng from Supreme Court made complex legal procedures and sophisticated jargon simple and clear for laymen. Mr Cedric Lau Chee Kiong from CPF handles difficult appeals patiently and investigates them thoroughly to help CPF members resolve their cases. These are just a few examples.

16. However, the award winners do not exist in isolation. They exist inside the larger system of the Public Service, and the Public Service must work as one to serve the public. Ms Yusidah Mohd Yunos from the National Archives was confronted by a demanding researcher, who was very upset after being bounced between several agencies. We are ourselves members of the public, and may have also encountered such situations. Yusidah managed to calm the furious researcher down, and took the responsibility to contact the appropriate agencies on his behalf. In this, Yusidah was supported by her agency as well as her counterparts from other agencies. Yusidah's supervisor supported her, and the various agencies she contacted were co-operative. Of course, none of this would have been possible if Yusidah did not take the responsibility and initiative to coordinate the Public Service's response. Good service is also helped by having good customers.



Besides recognising public officers who have provided excellent service, I have asked the PS21 Office to see how we can recognise members of the public who have been particularly helpful and understanding as customers. Public officers do appreciate good customers who not only help us carry out our tasks effectively, but also thank us with a smile.

### **Conclusion**

17. In delivering good service, many of you will face challenges, internal and external, at one time or another. Tonight, the award winners show us that we do not have to possess supernatural powers to serve our customers well. Very often, all it takes is a little heart and a little understanding, and a strong desire and effort to serve Singapore and all its residents with Integrity, Service, and Excellence.

18. I congratulate all the winners and wish all of you a pleasant evening. Thank you.

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