



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MAXIE CUFFIE, MP

**MINISTER OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION & COMMUNICATION**

**STRATEGIC VISIONING EXERCISE FOR THE PERSONNEL
DEPARTMENT**

February 17th, 2017

Murchison Brown Auditorium, City Hall

Salutations:

- Mr Beresford Riley, Chief Personnel Officer
- Ladies and gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking the Chief Personnel Officer for the invitation to participate in this morning's strategic planning exercise for the Personnel Department. Two week's ago I had the pleasure of delivering remarks at the ending of the consultancy for the Institutional Strengthening exercise for the Service Commission's Department. And I am extremely pleased to be here for the beginning of the Strat Plan Exercise of the Personnel Department.

The Service Commission's Department and the Personnel Department are the two legs that support the body of the Public Service. And they both need to be strong, fortified by regular exercise like these if we are to have any real chance of moving forward.

Today's session, facilitated by ODYSSE CONSULTinc Limited is as timely as it is relevant, as the Government seeks to re-engineer and re-energize a Public Service that has long languished for lack of resources, proper and deliberate planning, and leadership that knows what it wants and how to get it.

As today is all about strategic vision, let me start by sharing with you this Government's vision as well as my own as Minister of Public Administration and Communications. A fundamental aspect of this Government's vision, which we call Vision 2030, is for our institutions to be transformed to become more efficient, and focused on creating value

and delivering excellent service. I myself would like us to deliver a Public Service that is more customer-focused and results-oriented. The Public Service must enhance its effectiveness, public value, customer service, policy design and public engagement. We must remove the inefficiencies that are so much a part of doing business in and out of government in Trinidad and Tobago.

And at the heart of transforming our institutions, are the people we employ. Public officers need to be steeped in the right set of values if they are to contribute meaningfully to the development process. We need to be prepared to make the difficult and complex decisions that are sometimes necessary to serve the common good. This is the key job of the Personnel Department to ensure the staffing of our institutions with delivery focused and motivated individuals.

I'm certain you are all aware of the human resource challenges afflict the Public Service, but let me make mention of some which I have treated with since my inception as Minister of Public Administration and Communications:

- job classification and specification not being done in a timely manner;
- the backlog in supplying updated terms and conditions inclusive of roles and responsibilities;
- the division of services between the Service Commissions Department and the Personnel Department creating tensions which have led to delays in delivery.

These are by no means meant as accusations but rather acknowledgement that there are issues to be addressed.

There is no doubt that a defective public service makes for an ineffective government, and vice versa. You have the commitment of this Administration that we will do all that is necessary from our end to ensure that, notwithstanding the present straitened economic circumstances, the public service is properly resourced, adequately housed, and sufficiently motivated to provide a level of service that is second to none.

Good government requires good people. This has always been true, but its importance to the national community has probably never been more critical than it is today. Powerful forces -- globalization, economic competition that cuts across national borders, social and political upheavals, technological change, threats of terrorism, and a rapidly changing labor market -- place enormous burdens on governments. The success of any government to respond effectively to these challenges is dictated largely by its ability to recruit and retain a talented workforce.

This challenge is coupled with the need for new skills, attitudes and behaviors among public officials at all levels in order to respond effectively to the increasing complexity and number of demands placed on governments.

Developing an effective, competent and forward looking public service as well as strong but lean State institutions is one of the greatest challenges nations around the world face today. It is particularly crucial in developing countries, like ours, as good governance is one of the most

important factors, if not the most important factor, for the success of any development effort. How the public sector is structured therefore, how it operates and the role it performs within a country plays an important part in economic and social progress. In particular, the quality of its leadership has a great impact on the quality of service offered, which in turn affects the pace and progress of development.

In the past twenty years a number of national and international forces have contributed to significantly changing the role of the state, which has resulted in the need for new skills, attitudes and behaviours among public officials at all levels.

In fact, the core competencies for the public sector of the 21st century differ in many ways from the past, especially as the demands placed on public servants, in terms of skills, knowledge and competency, are rapidly increasing and becoming more complex. Even as we continue to grapple with these old challenges, new ones crop up daily which must also be addressed with urgency, as these too, have the capacity to either cripple or convert the public service.

The country's human resources capacity then, is critical to the quality of public administration, hence the absolute necessity of ensuring that today's strategic visioning exercise is more than just another all day meeting.

As we seek to strengthen the management of human capital in the public sector, it is also imperative that we revisit the core values and principles as outlined in the legislation governing the public service, examine the relevance of the current human resources management institutional

framework, review recruitment, remuneration and recognition strategies and incentives, and institutionalize workforce planning, among other initiatives.

The Personnel Department has not been gifted with immunity from the piercing gaze of public scrutiny, nor has it been spared the travails of unsuitable office accommodation, limited resources, inadequate staffing, and shifting political priorities.

The harsh reality is that many of our systems that got us to where we are, will not help us to get to where we want to be. The task of righting the ship can only be done by those entrusted with its leadership. Leaders who embody organizational values have a huge positive impact on whether the rest of the organization lives out those values. In other words, I need the Personnel Department to lead by example and get your house in order to be able to help rest of the public service do the same.

As organizational role models, the actions of leaders, your actions, send a more powerful message about acceptable behaviours than any published policies or statements. Conversely, leaders who demonstrate behaviours that run counter to espoused values breed cynicism, resentment, alienation and may even encourage staff to follow suit, to the detriment of the public service.

While the commitment by top management to articulate values and endorse policies and programmes throughout the Public Service is vital, leaders and managers at all levels must also “walk the talk” to model exemplary conduct and practices aligned to values, and to encourage

these in their staff. While this often means recognizing or rewarding activity that is consistent with values, it also means that you must be ready to challenge behaviours and actions that are not aligned to values, with clear processes in place to do this firmly, fairly and transparently.

Let me be clear, a great deal depends on the success of this strat plan exercise. The Public Service as a body is looking to the direction in which you steer it. I am here just to ensure that the left foot is aware where the right foot is going.

I await with great anticipation the results of today's proceedings. I look forward to the challenges that it will place on me as the Minister with responsibility for the Public Service, but I give you the assurance that together, we will make this work. This opportunity to change the face, fate and fortune of the Public Service in response to our economic challenges, is not likely to come our way again.

Let this be your guiding force in determining the strategic plan for your department. Let us commit ourselves both to the process and to the outcome.

I thank you for your attention, and wish you all best wishes for a productive undertaking.