



TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS 2017 PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION AWARDS CEREMONY

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Minister: Thanks very much, Gordon, it's all downhill from here. Can I acknowledge you, of course, and Drew, Kathy, the ACT Public Service being a part of all this, Andrew, on behalf of the sponsors, but most importantly all of you for being here today, people who are either leading innovation in public service or helping to mentor and foster innovation, or who are here to try and see ways in which you can get your own department to do more innovation.

Before I get to all that, and of course I also acknowledge the traditional owners on the way through, and the land on which we meet, can I say to you, Gordon, that you will be a real loss to the public service, on a number of levels. It's your vast experience across a number of portfolios, the fact that you brought to public service the diversity of experience before you came to the public service, and also the fact that your decency and integrity in upholding the highest values in the public service is something I think will hopefully be recognised in due course and commented on by the Prime Minister and others, but on this opportunity here in front of your peers, to say thank you for everything you've done. We're sorry you're leaving so early. Fifty-six is very young, let me tell you. But the fact of the matter is you've done a great job, you're going to be missed, and I'm sure we'll find ways to rope you back in, because one of the most important things we must do when people of your level of experience and integrity leave the public service, how do we use them in a future life, without tying you down too much and giving you that much sought after flexibility that you'll now be able to enjoy. A round of applause for Gordon.

Now, I was really looking forward to doing this event because it's a celebration. It's a very positive event. It's about the most positive thing I'll do today, I reckon, and I mean that sincerely in the sense that just watching the video there was a reminder to me of how much the public service has changed. I first joined the public service in 1979. I've been around for a while. If I ... Yeah, if I can describe the situation then where hierarchy was all important, you didn't find out what your supervisors thought until you went for a job and then you're told you didn't get the job. You didn't even see what referee's report they may have put in about you. But the fact that we now have a much greater openness, a much greater transparency, and also particularly now we are giving everybody permission to think more broadly, think outside the square, innovate ... Very important for the future of public service and for the future of the country.

We often talk about the quality of our public services in this country, both federal and state level, but particularly at federal, and that is a truism. It's like all these things, you can never stand still. There's a lot of competition out there. You look at some of the public services in the region, you look at the Singaporean public service, they operate different system, but you look at the way they operate. You can never say, "We know everything. There's nothing we can learn from anybody else." But what I find great about Australia is that at the federal level the public service is changing. It's innovating, embracing new ideas, embracing greater diversity. You can't achieve the full potential of a country or of an enterprise, or of an industry, or of a service like this if you don't fully embrace the talents of everybody. This is something which the public service, at the federal level in particular, has been a leader. There's more to do in areas like diversity, but you have been a leader. That's very important to the rest of society that you do this. That diversity is also part of picking up ideas and using them, wherever they come from.

I once remember reading, it was a Harvard professor, I forget his name now. I was doing a course in 2009. He was talking about the future workplace and he said it was non-

hierarchical, it was collaborative. You evaluate the ideas by their substance, not by who had put it forward. That's the sort of workplace we should always be aiming towards. Yes, there are always debates about how am I going to approach the minister about this or that, and how frank and fearless should I be? Is this really the right time to be frank and fearless on this particular occasion? My advice is good ministers will always appreciate getting frank and fearless advice. What they don't appreciate is always being told, I suppose, "No, no, you can't do that. You can't do that." You have to be able to relay that work to the objectives and the policies and programmes, if you like, the framework of the government of the day. In doing that, the obligation we owe ministers, always, is to make sure we're telling them when something may or may not work, or maybe there's a better way of doing this. Please, if you think something is going wrong, say so, and say so early. Don't leave it for too long, because the longer we leave it the more we hesitate to do it, the cost of taking action to fix it mount.

That being said, today we're talking more about innovation rather than core public service skills, but my point is that core public service skills are ongoing. One of them, as I said before, is to be frank and fearless but increasingly in the future a core public service skill will be how do we keep innovating? How do we keep anticipating where the world is going? As part of the National Innovation and Science agenda a couple of years ago, the Prime Minister, Mr. Turnbull made it clear that government should lead by example, in terms of the innovation agenda. The work of the secretaries in coming together to say we're going to sponsor innovation [inaudible 00:06:00], we're going to sponsor bringing forward awards to others to recognise people in all the rest of it is all very important. We have to recognise and celebrate success.

We're having success already. If I look at things like the way the Digital Transformation Agency has been partnering with a number of departments, including my own to improve the digital experience of users. A digital marketplace which is simplifying the process of procurement and making it easier for small and medium size enterprises to win government contracts. The Business Research and Innovation Initiative is among other things looking for digital solutions to boost community engagement in policy and programme design. I think that's a real sleeper, that one. I think that's quite an important one, because one of the lessons you get out of contemporary politics is the importance of being in touch with your customer, your market, the consumer. To some extent your customer is your Secretary, or your minister, the government, whatever. Ultimately, they are merely, if you like, the middlemen and women. Your ultimate customer consumer is out there, and for some departments, particularly the big customer facing departments, I think they're very aware. They've got all these clients, all these consumers out there who expect service to be of a certain level.

They expect service to be what they expect of a bank, or some big private sector entity. There's always a benchmark somewhere out there. For me, being able to engage the community in policy and programme design is very important to get that feedback, and then how do we work it in to what we are doing. That's a very good one, I think, for us to look forward to in the future.

But today is to celebrate success. It's to put up in lights the various ways in which different parts of the public service are trying to meet the needs of today and the needs of the future. What struck me about the [inaudible 00:07:54] one, we were talking there, I

believe, was food revolution, I think it was called, or whatever. That reminded me of an important thing, and that is that people are most passionate when they have a purpose, when you're doing something with a purpose. I think it's important to always think the thing you're doing, you're working on ... When you leave aside the technical description of what you're doing, is why we're really doing this, what's this all about, who's it for. Always think back from that. I think that's going to be very important.

Ladies and gentlemen, not a long speech. There's a lot of celebrating to be done. I love the idea of the cake. With innovation, you can you have your cake and eat it too. Never forget that. Sorry, that's a dad joke. I've been listening to Randal for too long, I think. The important thing is let's celebrate these achievements, use them as examples of what can be done. The Australian Public Service can hold its head up high about the innovation that goes on. The obligation on us as ministers and as a government is to keep giving you permission to experiment. I know it's hard when ... We're all custodians of taxpayers' money. We've all go to make sure we're looking after value for money for the taxpayer, but within that it is important that people understand that they're expected to experiment, to try new things because if you don't try something, you don't risk something, you'll never know whether you can do it. Even when you find out, "Oh, I can't quite do this," you learn something even from that exercise.

Ladies and gentlemen, fantastic you're all here today. I hope you have a really great day. I'm looking forward to it, and thanks again for the invitation to be here

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