

**ADDRESS BY HON D. GOKHOOL,
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE
AND RESEARCH**

**LAUNCHING OF TRAINING COURSE
ON
CUSTOMER CARE
FOR
FRONT LINE OFFICERS
OF THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY,
SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

**Thursday, 12 February 2009
at 09 30 hrs**

Ebene

Mr Ragen, Permanent Secretary

Mr Dubois, Director of the IVTB

Mr Chellen, Director of the Ecole Hoteliere Sir Gaetan Duval

Mr Imrit, Director of Industry,

Mr Somanah, Director, Assay Office,

Mr Gopee, Ag. Director, MAURITAS,

Mr Utchanah, Mr. Moolye, Principal Assistants Secretaries,

Staff of my Ministry

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning and welcome to to-day's Training Programme on Customer care being organized by my Ministry. Staff of my Ministry as well as Parastatal Bodies falling under my Ministry are participating in this programme.

Before proceeding further, may I take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to our new PS Mr Ragen.

Repositioning Strategy...New Vision

To-day's Training Programme forms part of the repositioning strategy of my Ministry in a context characterised by numerous challenges ,both local and international.

When faced with daunting challenges, it is the hallmark of all progressive people, organizations and nations to transform adversity into creative opportunities .

In such times, it is the duty of Government, Corporate sector and the Civil Society to reckon with the new realities and take bold and innovative measures.

As you are aware, Government has introduced the Additional Stimulus Package to modernize our public infrastructures and support the Corporate Sector.

We at the Ministry of Industry, Science and Research are inspired by the philosophy of transforming adversities into opportunities

That is why we are crafting a new vision for a globally competitive, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible Industrial sector, propelled by Science, Technology and Innovation(STI).

Our Mission is to nurture Excellence and Innovation to achieve higher levels of prosperity for the nation

Our strategy is to promote a culture of Superior Performance, Excellence, Innovation ,Social Responsibility and Sustainability.

Human Resource capabilities

This transformation and higher productivity will depend on our Human Resource capabilities. As at the Ministry of Education and HR, I am determined to bring positive changes needed to increase our overall effectiveness of the delivery of our services.

Continuous Staff development, I must say, has always been at the fore of my agenda. I believe that it is essential that employees be provided with the right tools, the appropriate skills and the conducive environment to allow them to perform at the level we expect them to.

This Training Workshop must therefore be placed in the context of our overall efforts to enhance our Human Resource capabilities to better respond to the needs and expectations of our customers and stakeholders.

Allow me to remind you that PRB 2008 has made it very clear that all Ministries should set up a Training Action Plan and a Training Committee to support HRD. We believe in the philosophy that our human resources constitute our most valuable resources provided that we invest in their continuous development .We are implementing these recommendations.

Philosophy

Today, the demands on governments – whether central or local government - to provide quality service to citizens and businesses have never been greater. Together with quality, Transparency, Accountability issues also need to be addressed.

We need to realize that the country is now operating in an interconnected, interdependent, complex and highly globalised environment

and it needs to re-engineer so as to compete effectively and prosper. Our benchmarks should be global.

Public officers must be continuously provided with those skills and competencies that would ensure that they deliver a level of service that would satisfy and even exceed customers' expectations.

We must constantly remind ourselves of the central philosophy of Government as spelt out in Para 5 of Government Programme 2005-2010:

...Government believes in PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST.

This government has as one of its main policy "Putting the People First". The citizen is and will remain the focal point of any development we are aiming at. The customer should be perceived as a vital link in the reform process in order to crystallize the vision of the Government in creating a modern and a world class Public Service with a customer oriented approach.

We must always bear in mind that we are paid by taxpayers to provide an irreproachable service. We should never feel that the public who is getting in our way is an inconvenience. It is not a favour that we do. It is part of a legal and moral contract that we have to honour everyday

Hence, the relevance of today's training programme.

Stakeholders

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been at the Ministry of Industry, Science and Research for nearly 5 months now. During those five months, it has been a wonderful learning experience for me. I have had several meetings with the corporate sector, with officers of public sector agencies, with officers of the Ministry, with members of the public – all of them “customers” that the Ministry serves.

I must acknowledge that the feedback I have gained during those interactions have provided me an interesting insights into the functioning of the Ministry.

There are indeed a number of encouraging and positive developments that I have noted. Greater focus ,greater involvement and greater concern for time-bound implementation of decisions and projects ,and a greater emphasis on performance and outcomes are clearly visible at all levels of the Ministry. But all this is not enough.

But I must also admit that I have identified a number of shortcomings and gaps that need to be addressed urgently. Some of them are:

- Communication gaps.....Regular flow of information is the oxygen of healthy organizations. There must be greater efforts to empower all employees with the latest information of what the Ministry is doing .
- Problems of co-ordination arising because there is a lack of networking and sharing
- Tracking and monitoring of decisions and projects
- Working against deadlines and timelines.
- Combining Reactiveness/Responsiveness to Proactiveness Reduce crisis management and fire-fighting
- Taking initiatives and Innovating
- Learning and Leading

Alvin Toffler: The illiterates of the 21st century will be those who refuse to Learn, Unlearn and Relearn.

- Going the extra mile towards our stakeholders /economic operators.
- Improving Quality of Service at all levels.

Driving change

With a change in the appellation of the Ministry to include Science and Research, it was important to nurture a new approach so as to leave a positive leave a image in the minds of callers at the Ministry.

It is my vision to make of the Ministry becomes a “reference” in the quality of service, the professionalism of our officers, our pro-activeness in the light of challenges and situations and the customer experience that we provide. We are ISO certified but we now have to go beyond processes and procedures; we must deliver at the practical, verifiable level.

You must have noticed that I have changed a number of things when I joined the Ministry last year – both the hard and the soft parts of managing the Ministry.

To take one example. The upgrading of the Reception Desk

The Reception Desk is the window to an organization. It is a front-line service; it is the first point of contact with the organization; it leaves the first and an everlasting impression about the culture of the organization to the

customer. Both the physical set up and the service delivery are being revisited. The staff will be provided regular training.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Those who directly interact with members of the public are being invited to provide that extra care, that extra service or that act of assistance to a customer in need.

I have been saying it repeatedly, at several meetings with officers of the Ministry, there must be follow-up to meetings. Each officer must master his or her file. We must not forget that it is through the government machinery that several government initiatives are delivered – be it the implementation of the projects approved and financed by the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund; or the Stimulus package put in place by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment. The forthcoming state of our economy may well depend on the way we successfully manage these initiatives. Our responsibility cannot be lesser than that of those employees on whom the bottom line figure of a company's balance sheet depends.

True it is that the public service does not operate under the same profitability conditions as a private business enterprise, customer service is no less

important. The social dimension of the service that we provide, our contribution in the success or downfall of an enterprise in need of assistance at the appropriate time, the time taken in processing clearances, the foresight in dealing with challenges, the proximity we maintain with our customers, our ability to keep updated with local and international situations, our ethical conduct are all determinant factors, pointing to the essence of the customer service in the public sector.

Basics

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The government has traditionally operated in a structured environment with clear rules and guidelines to inform the decision-making process. Going forward, this approach will not be enough. Many emerging challenges and issues cannot be resolved by existing policies and rules. Public officers must have the capacity to learn and adapt constantly, making use of tools such as scenario planning, risk assessment, horizon scanning so as to anticipate at strategic level, the looming difficulties. We must also be quick to take action. In navigating the unpredictable and the unknown, we need mastery over the basics.

I would like to add here that challenges today do not respect agency boundaries. Many problems do not fall neatly under the purview of any one agency. We must network if we want to tackle the problems effectively and optimally in the interest of the country. We must adopt systems perspective and thinking.

Innovations

We will sustain Quality initiatives at the Ministry. We will introduce a scheme for recognizing and rewarding our staff. We will institute a Best Employee Award Scheme. We will re-activate the Employee Suggestion Scheme and introduce regular Employee Suggestion Scheme Achieving Excellence in quality service is our ultimate aim.

Through similar training programmes, we intend to transform our customer service and customer relationship management; to develop among members of staff practical customer a caring attitude and philosophy; heighten and focus awareness and sensitivity to our clients' needs and enhance customer experience.

I am taking the opportunity to invite different Divisions/Sections and Units of my Ministry to participate in the forthcoming Public Service Excellence Award for 2009 being organized by the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms

This course is meant for those people with direct contact with customers, whether face to face or through the telephone, such as receptionists/telephone operators, office care attendants and secretaries. At the end of the programme, participants will know how to understand the customer's point of view, how to build rapport with customers, customer care on the telephone, setting customer service standards and the importance of the lifetime value of a customer.

It is of the utmost importance that the brand image of this Ministry be reflected in the image that its officers project through the quality of their interactions with customers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It takes only a negative attitude or a passing –the- buck attitude to alienate the public and we cannot afford that. Let me here quote the Great Mahatma Gandhi who had this to say on the customer:

(Quote)

"A Customer is the most important visitor on our premises.

He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him.

He is not an interruption to our work. He is the purpose of it.

He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it.

We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so."

(Unquote)

I invite you to make the most of this training programme and come out of it transformed in our outlook to our customers and the quality of service we provide to them

With these words, I have now the pleasure, to declare open, this in-house training course in quality customer care and wish the organizers and the participants all the success they deserve.

I thank you for your kind attention.