



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

---

**Address on**  
**‘Leadership in the public sector’**

**Mr Andrew Metcalfe**  
**Secretary**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**Address to IPAA - Queensland Branch**

**Brisbane**  
**5 April 2011**

**Introduction**

It’s a pleasure to speak to you today. Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Yuggera people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today’s event.

It’s always great to travel back to Brisbane. I was born and raised in Toowoomba, and while my career has taken me away from my home, I am still a proud Queenslander! Indeed, speaking to you today reminds me of the great collegiate attitude of Queenslanders - this obviously extends to your membership base and is one characteristic that I would like see develop in the ACT Branch.

Today, I would like to discuss leadership in the Australian Public Service. I have held a number of senior leadership roles within the public service, and in these I have consistently made the development and enhancement of the leadership skills of my staff a key priority.

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the election to president of the ACT Branch of the IPAA, and leadership is a key issue I intend to focus on during my tenure.

Shortly I will outline my thoughts on leadership, and the importance of it in the public sector, but before I do I'd like to briefly discuss the role of my department to give some context to environment in which I operate, and why there is a need for strong leadership.

From the outside it could be easy to overly simplify my department's work, but equally easy to be awed by the volumes that we manage. For example last year over 28 million passengers crossed our border, over four million visas were issued, and there were around 120 thousand conferrals of Australian citizenship.

We are a diverse and far reaching department, and in some way, the work of the department has directly touched over half of the population as nearly one in two of our population was either born overseas, or had a parent who was born overseas. Further it could be argued that we have an impact on every Australian's life through our interest and work in Australia's future workforce needs, and our future population.

The importance of the immigration portfolio is evident in our statement of purpose - *building Australia's future through the well-managed entry and settlement of people*. We have a key nation-building role that requires us to collaborate and share leadership with other portfolios. We play a critical role in the government's sustainable population and productivity agendas.

We have responsibility for key aspects of border security policy and operations, visa compliance, law enforcement functions and immigration detention. We administer policy for migration and temporary visas, refugee and humanitarian entry, for settlement, Australian Citizenship and policies to enrich our multicultural society.

Many of the decisions we make are very sensitive. They relate to refugee applications, identity and character considerations for visa and citizenship applications, as well as matters of national security.

Our decisions and operations can be the subject of great public interest and also generate discussion in the Parliament, the media and in the community. For example, last year we took over 5000 media enquiries, this year we have already taken over 1500! You will no doubt be aware that on a daily basis you can read articles commenting on our business in some form or another - sometimes positively!

My role, as Secretary, is to ensure this all occurs efficiently, seamlessly, legally, and within government guidelines.

## **The importance of leadership**

When I became secretary of immigration and citizenship in 2005, it was at time when the department's three most senior officials had been removed, it had been delivered with a damning report on its culture and operations, and another report was on the way. Needless to say a major focus of mine was on developing strong leadership capacity within the department to help bring about lasting and meaningful change, but at the same time deliver the programs we are required to deliver.

One of the first things I did was to commission a staff survey process whereby all staff could comment, in an anonymous way, about various issues of their work including management and leadership practices. An interesting finding of this staff survey was that that staff are more influenced by their immediate supervisors than with those further up the line. They look to those people to interpret messages that come from me and the senior leaders.

What this meant to me as a secretary is that firstly I need to ensure that my vision and direction is clear - and secondly that the leadership skills of those in the department in senior positions need to be of a high standard.

Without clear leadership and direction a department such as ours cannot be successful, and cannot achieve the objectives that are set. However, leadership is not something that just happens! As senior leaders in the public sector it is essential to have a clear understanding of expectations for the department, and ensure that we build the capability of our leaders in their roles.

To achieve this, an organisation must support its staff. My department continues to do this through support tools, coaching, and mentoring. In addition to this I have, as secretary, consistently reinforced key aspects of leadership that I expect my senior officers to focus on. These include a series of capabilities that I expect all leaders to demonstrate:

- Providing vision and meaningful direction.
- Operating consistently with the things that we value.
- Communicating constantly and meaningfully.
- Creating the environment for success.
- Functioning as team players.
- Persisting to achieve good outcomes.

These are not overly complicated, nor ambiguous in nature. They are simple themes that are transferable to a range of different areas or organisations, and this is why I believe they have worked in my department. To add more context to these capabilities I'd like to briefly work through each one with you:

### *Vision and meaningful direction*

The behaviours under this capability are about providing clarity, opportunities for participation and inspiration. Whatever the situation without clear direction, even with the best will in the world, we are all capable of going in different directions. Unless staff efforts are coordinated, there is no chance of achieving objectives.

*Operate consistently with the things an organisation values*

As professional public servants we do, as a matter of course, adhere to the APS Values and Code of Conduct. In my department, as leader, we make it clear that we value teamwork, service excellence, respect, openness and commitment. This includes leading by example, helping others understand the values and acting quickly to address behaviour that is inconsistent with those values.

*Communicate constantly and meaningfully*

Communication is one thing that leaders must do very well, particularly during times of change. One of the single most important drivers to achieve high performance is to give regular, informal feedback in a timely way. Engaging with staff on a regular basis and ensuring that the dialogue is two-way and not just information sharing are key aspects of the leadership model. This means allowing time for effective communication, regular team meetings and face to face discussion, even during times of heavy work load. And it means sharing decision making wherever possible.

*Create the environment for success*

The behaviours under this capability are about providing understanding and support for your staff so that they are able to succeed in their roles. Feedback, recognition of good outcomes and developing staff skills are all fundamental to creating an environment of success. As I just mentioned, immediate, constructive and informal feedback is vital. Creating an environment for success is also about supporting an ideas culture, where staff feel supported in expressing their opinions and where supervisors listen.

*Function as team players*

This brings me to the next important leadership capability. In a large and diverse organisation like immigration teamwork is a key strength we continually look to nurture. We have thousands of teams who work together every day. Many leaders manage their teams and are also members of other teams in other parts of the department. To make this work these individuals and teams need to be on the same page-on the same team.

Good, effective teamwork relies on trust and confidence and placing value on the skills and capabilities of others. This is away in which we work to ensure we don't work insolation from each other - or in silos. That way we can all contribute to the fact that we are one department, working together to achieve success.

*Persist to achieve good outcomes*

Finally, as leaders we sometimes we need to be persistent. Our objectives may be clear, but there can be impediments. These can be overcome by keeping perspective, being resilient and optimistic. Giving up is not an option when good policy, program or service outcomes are at stake.

**Leadership behaviours**

Over the last six years I think we have done well to integrate these leadership values into the department - my challenge now is to ensure that we continue to ensure that they become the norm-our culture. I'd like to turn to how, as Secretary, I do this.

Our department's motto is *People our Business*. It is designed to encapsulate the very essence of what we do - working with people. Indeed, as the leader of such a diverse and challenging department it is essential that I ensure that my senior leaders *work with people*. This is a very simple concept, but can be applied within every facet of my department's work. For example:

- As a leader I must *work with people* to ensure that they are the right people for the jobs and empower to do what they need to do.
- As leaders, my SES must *work with their people* to provide clear vision and meaningful direction.
- Across our departmental groups, we must *work with people* to ensure that we do not fall in the silo trap I spoke of earlier.
- As a senior leadership group, we must *work with people* to ensure that they are trained and well supported.
- Importantly, as departmental officers administering a very large and complex visa program, we must *work with people* including clients, stakeholders and the community to ensure that we administer this program in a lawful and proper way.

I believe that my department has made outstanding progress in leadership behaviours over recent years. The values and behaviours I have discussed have been embedded in our culture, and in our planning processes such as 2010-11 Strategic Plan.

## **IPAA**

My views on leadership are not complicated. They focus on a leadership style that promotes communication, and people working together to achieve objectives. IPAA is a forum in which such ideas can be discussed, shared, and even debated.

As members, I encourage you to do this both within the group, and also within your workplaces. I'm sure that this will lead to your ongoing development, and also improvements across your work area.

As I've noted the issues I have discussed today are topics that I would like to pursue in my time as president of the ACT branch, to improve the skills of young or emerging leaders, and also to address the need for strong communication within the public sector.

## **Conclusion**

In closing I'd like to reiterate those six key leadership capabilities that I continue to focus on with my staff:

- Providing vision and meaningful direction.
- Operating consistently with the things that we value.
- Communicating constantly and meaningfully.
- Creating the environment for success.
- Functioning as team players.
- Persisting to achieve good outcomes.

I think that these are transferable to many, if not all, public sector organisations and I hope that they will be of use in your various workplaces. I hope that my talk has given you an insight into the role of senior leadership within the Australian Public Service. It is a role that is challenging, but very rewarding.

END