

Closing Keynote Address
Suzanne Vinet, Champion
National Managers' Community
Delivered at the Alberta Regional Managers' Fall Forum
October 13, 2011, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Good morning.

I am pleased to be here in Edmonton at the Alberta Regional Managers' Fall Forum.

This is my first visit to the region as the Champion of the NMC. When the Clerk asked me to take on the role of Champion for the National Managers' Community, I was thrilled and honoured. I saw it as an opportunity to meet and connect with managers across the country.

You have chosen a great theme for your forum: Community of Leadership—Impacting Canadians in Challenging Times. This is a very timely theme.

I would like to note that NMC Alberta has made great strides in recent years by:

- expanding the membership base;
- offering learning and networking opportunities to more than 800 managers; and
- forging solid partnerships with Alberta Federal Council and the Youth Network.

I would really like to commend the excellent work done by members of the NMC Governing Council, staff and volunteers and every person that has contributed greatly to this success.

Today, I'd like to talk to you about:

- 1) Your role and importance as managers;
- 2) Leadership in a changing environment and;
- 3) How the National Managers' Community can support you.

You have heard this before but I will say it again. As managers, you are vital to the success of the Public Service and Public Service Renewal.

Your role as managers in shaping public service is key:

- You translate strategic direction into front line results;
- You act as a lever in change management and innovation;
- You influence the effectiveness of your teams;
- You have a direct impact on recruitment and retention; and
- You form a major talent pool of potential future executives.

Through programs like the PS Leadership Awards, the Clerk, as well as senior officials and the whole public service, celebrate excellence by managers all across the country.

In May, Charlie Pacas of Parks Canada received an Innovation Award for setting a new standard for conserving and restoring natural ecosystems. For the past 18 years, Mr. Pacas has worked passionately to protect and restore the natural environment within Banff National Park. A perfect example of his innovation is the groundbreaking project to restore the Devon Lakes aquatic ecosystem to its original state.

The NMC also recognizes leadership excellence of managers through its Leadership Awards Program and in May presented the NMC Regional Honours Award to Brad Sass, Assistant Warden of Interventions at the Correctional Service of Canada's maximum security penitentiary in Edmonton. He is directly responsible for the provision of offender programming, case management activities, offender transfers, aboriginal programs and social development to maximum security offenders sentenced to two years or more. Brad supervises a large cadre of staff across many disciplines. Brad's managers, who nominated him for this award, describe him as a magnanimous leader who widely spreads the credit for success, a thoughtful problem solver, innovative, fair and transparent.

Programs like these are important. They offer an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the best among managers. But, for all those who are recognized there are many, many more who also are doing excellent work.

What you do in the regions is very important. As a recent example, many of you or your staff worked alongside colleagues from local and provincial governments to ensure the safe evacuation and eventual return of people from Slave Lake. Working in the region gives you the opportunity to contribute directly to your communities and brings you in contact with citizens on a daily basis. This in turn makes you the experts in understanding the realities of our country in its many regions and gives you the ability to influence headquarter in its understanding of the issues across the country.

In his 18th report to the Prime Minister the Clerk speaks a lot about excellence.

Renewal is an evolving, on-going way to improve for all of us and deliver the work we do on behalf of Canadians with excellence.

The many challenges we face, including fiscal restraint, offer an opportunity to make real and widespread change for a more modern, dynamic and effective Public Service.

We have made good progress under the Renewal banner and there is more to do. The Clerk gives clear directions for renewal going forward. First, he asks managers to engage employees in the excellence agenda. For this he has requested that each DM set out specific plans. He also tasks us to keep “renewing the workforce”. The Clerk wants to know what is being done in each department to motivate, support and develop employees, while setting high standards for performance.

The third direction is “renewing the workplace”. Here he is looking for administrative systems and business processes that will support modern, healthy and productive workplaces. In other words: change how we work.

Managers are the key to the success in delivering on these three key directions.

In order to do that, you need a good understanding of the big picture and constant dialogue with senior levels.

Many of you have become managers because you excelled as a specialist. That’s how I became a manager, too. But, as you move up and, over time, you realize that the learning you need to do is different. It takes time and effort. It requires re-tooling as you go, adapting, thinking in new ways, and listening to your employees so that you can be a better manager.

Even though we are in a period of restraint, it is important for you to develop and continue to hone your management competencies.

As a manager, you need to have a broader view and interests. You need to pay attention to what is going on around you – understand the environment you are in, the priorities of government and how the work that is carried out by your department, your branch and your unit fits in.

The Public Service has changed a great deal in the last 30 years. Today we have:

- greater gender balance in senior management;
- a more diverse workforce;
- more rigorous performance management;
- greater transparency and public accountability;
- changing demographics - with hundreds of public servants eligible to retire over the next very few years;
- a complex global environment :
- a global economic recovery that remains uncertain;
- and now, the deficit reduction action plan.

You are being challenged to do more individually and collectively to help your senior leadership to not only get through this next period, but to emerge better and stronger.

As we progress in this exercise we call DRAP, I am reminded of when I first joined the public service. This for me is the third significant wave of change since I joined. My first experience of downsizing was in 1978, in the region, in an agency. I observed and learned the importance of having good managers exercising their leadership in times of change.

Many of you who were around in the 90s will remember Program Review. Again, these were very challenging and changing times.

We recognize the importance of supporting managers through this current period. That's why events such as this are so important. They offer an opportunity to be together, hear some important messages, discuss some best practices, learn new skills and often, simply to be reminded of the importance of your role as a manager.

It's important that you keep reminding yourself of the "big picture". That's what provides the context and helps making decisions with a long-term view rather than just in response to immediate pressures. As you staff positions, build as diverse a team as you can with a full range of complementary backgrounds and skill sets. In this ever changing environment, you will need people with all kinds of backgrounds and experiences.

Nurture your team – take care of your people. As managers, this is one of your most important functions. Be a role model. Especially during times of uncertainty visible leadership is key. Your actions and behaviours have a great deal of impact.

Some managers have been asking me, how can we be more involved in DRAP? You are. Some of you might have been part of the process of developing options but, that's not the only way you have your say. You have a great deal of influence through all sorts of ways. Managers are always being asked to contribute ideas and it is often ideas you provide throughout the year that your senior managers will remember and incorporate into options when the opportunity comes along.

Your contribution will also come in the next phase...in the implementation of decisions that are made in the next budget. You will need to lead your staff through whatever changes are determined. You should be ready to do so.

The National Managers' Community is working hard to ensure managers will be ready for this next phase. As your Champion I will do everything I can to make sure your voice is heard by senior officials.

NMC has been working on your behalf at the table with several DM Committees, the Canada School of Public Service, the Public Service Commission of Canada, the Human Resources Council and the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, to unify efforts to develop and share tools and information that managers will need in this period of fiscal restraint.

The NMC continues to offer Coaching sessions for managers. These sessions which focus on having difficult conversations will help you be better managers and give you some of the tools you need in your work.

New Tools sessions will be rolled out this year. This is a day-long workshop similar to the Coaching session but it focuses on learning a range of tools to engage the individual, the team and the organization.

In addition to this, there continues to be opportunities for managers to get together either in person or virtually to learn from each other and share best practices.

I encourage you to get involved in your manager network and where possible, to take a leadership role.

In this increasingly complex world Public Service matters.

As a network of managers, you have the power to influence and you make a difference.

Again, I encourage you to reach out, to learn and contribute. Don't wait to be invited in a formal process, do it as a part of your everyday work.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not pass along a message from your former Champion, François Guimont. As Chair of the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign, he has issued a challenge to managers to get involved in this year's campaign. He knows this community well and is counting on you to help him realize this year's goal. At different times in our lives, we or someone close to us has needed help or benefitted from the services of agencies we support through the campaign. I join François in asking you to participate and to encourage your staff to do the same.

Congratulations to the organizers of this forum and to all those who have been working hard to make the NMC strong in the region and in their departments. Thank you for all your work, passion and dedication.

Enjoy the rest of the forum.

Thank you. Now, I welcome your questions.