

OYA *In the Loop*

November 21, 2008

We're halfway through the second month since Bob Jester left. I have spent much of my time talking with and listening to our employees.

From visiting facilities and field offices to reading every single comment on the culture/climate survey, I have listened, and I have heard, what you have to say. I'm proud of opening up communication and I want to not only maintain those channels, but enhance them as well. So keep your candid comments coming.

I could elaborate on what I've heard, but that wouldn't be a productive use of your time or mine. Rather, I want to use this space to affirm to you that I have assimilated the information you entrusted to me. Now I will share with you my take on the challenges and opportunities facing OYA from within, and the actions we're going to pursue to move forward.

Up front, I want you to know that communicating with you is a continuous commitment on my part. In the months ahead, I anticipate passing along conclusions that others and I have drawn about the agency. I'll let you know what we're going to do to enhance the things we're doing right. Conversely, if we need a course correction, I'll also share how we can make things better. Some topics for future discussion: understanding the role of the central office, how decisions are made, what transparency means, and more.

I also expect from all of us that the progress we make will be sustained.

When I led the Systems Improvement Project and now as your interim director, a common thread surfaced: There is a profound disconnect at OYA between many managers and represented staff. It is more prevalent in the field and facilities than in central office, but in all of our locations these relationships could be better.

So here are some of my conclusions:

OYA is a young agency that had to grow fast. People who were technically proficient got promoted, sometimes into management. We did not train new managers in the knowledge they needed to be a manager and a leader in a complex organization. We did not always give them good feedback and coaching about how to be more effective in their jobs. This neglect was not fair to our managers, and it wasn't fair to our employees.

Despite these things, some of our managers grew and prospered and became very good leaders and managers. Others haven't done as well.

I believe the most important thing we can do to improve agency performance and to increase morale and job satisfaction is to improve the management team's performance. As I have told you before, I want our managers to be consistent across the state so that employees and youth are treated approximately the same regardless of location.

How can we achieve that? We can achieve that by having consistent OYA values and goals everywhere. I believe OYA should be an open, transparent, trustworthy, and reliable agency, one that does what it says it's going to do and one that involves its employees and partners in its work. Consistency starts with our managers. To be consistent, our managers, regardless of how well they are performing now, must be trained in the values that we desire.

Then, after training, our managers need to be coached to be the best they can be. I know some of you are asking why a manager with 20 years of experience needs to be coached. To answer that question I would point to professional athletes. Tiger Woods, who is arguably the best golfer of our generation, has a coach. All of us need council from time to time no matter how experienced and sage we might be. That includes me and includes all of you.

To achieve these goals, I have instituted several activities.

First, all managers have begun to attend a required year-long training program that will deliver core competencies in strategic thinking and planning, decision making, collaboration, team building, relationships and communication, managing conflict, quality improvement and managing change. Throughout these training sessions our core values will be reinforced.

Second, I am establishing a management coaching function within the agency that will help build consistency and a new level of management accountability throughout OYA. This week, Priscilla Rose Cuddy joined OYA on rotation to help build our management coaching and development program. She will not only assist executives and managers in developing high performance competencies, but also will help enhance organizational performance.

A word about Priscilla: Priscilla came to Oregon government after 25 years leading a consulting company in Ohio that specialized in helping improve public sector organizations. With a focus on federal agencies, she led efforts in change management, continuous improvement and quality, management development, interpersonal communication, diversity, strategic planning and performance management. She also provided professional coaching to senior federal executives.

In Oregon for nearly nine years, she served in the Employment Department and Department of Human Services where she created and led programs to develop leaders and managers.

Initially, Priscilla will focus on Central Office to help it become more connected and responsive to the field and facilities. I am grateful and delighted to have her join us, and I anticipate tangible results.

Third, Fariborz and I will personally meet with every person hired into management, whether from outside OYA or through promotion. These are not interviews – they are an opportunity for us to build a working relationship and share our expectations with every individual who is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our workplace. We will discuss agency values and general management expectations, and we will listen to their ideas and suggestions around creating a more empowered work environment for all staff across OYA.

Fourth, we will continue to pursue the recommendations regarding management practices articulated in the SIP report and the issues that were identified in the employee survey that we just completed.

Fifth, I anticipate that the Transition Team will have recommendations that we will work on before a new director comes on board.

Sixth, we will continue to meet with and engage our labor leaders in meaningful discussions about our progress in developing a workplace environment that is empowering and fair.

Seventh, Fariborz and I will continue to listen to and advocate for managers, and build them up as a team. We will encourage and support their work, and be here as a resource for them.

While there is a lot to do here at OYA, especially now in this economic recession, I will never lose focus on the values that are important to me and, I think, to this organization. I want this to be a fair place to work where people are treated equally regardless of position. We get there by being open, transparent, trustworthy, and reliable.

~Bobby