

TOP TIPS FOR PUBLIC SECTOR CEOS

As the public sector undergoes cuts, Criticaleye asked executives from the membership for their top tips for public sector leaders entering a time of austerity. The 'public sector recession' is not a short-term problem, and the structural changes needed are creating a new normal for the sector.

LEADERSHIP

What should public sector leaders be doing as they enter this 'new normal'?

- It goes without saying that staff take their cues from their leaders. Leaders therefore need to **be calm, confident and clear**. They must be honest about the situation. It is imperative that they do not show signs of concern.
- **Communicate 'ambiguity'** – it is a sign of strength to be transparent and say "I don't know".
- **Don't be a victim** – leaders (at any level) who show confidence tend to have high performing teams, whereas leaders who come across as 'victims' transmit this culture to their teams, resulting in poor performance.
- **Don't take lower level management by surprise** – this is a bad tactic as they will not be committed.
- **Do not ignore the unions**, even though only a low percentage of employees may be unionised. Also ...Do not rely on unions to communicate with your staff.
- **Be very visible** – the key to leadership in times of uncertainty is visibility and clear communication. To paraphrase Tom Peters, you need to lead by walking about.
- **Clarity of focus** – get everyone focused on a clear simple target.
- **Ensure that you are seen to be fair** both with those that are staying and those that have been made redundant. This will engender loyalty and will help prevent an exodus once the worst is over from people who felt that the organisation did not treat people well in the bad times.
- Symbols of savings (e.g. management not travelling first class) are as important as actual savings. Remember that **your actions will be scrutinised**.
- **Engage your team in the solution**, they have valuable frontline insights.
- Go to the Treasury with solutions not problems – **manage upwards as much as downwards**.

MANAGING THE MEDIA

The public sector is often exposed in the media. The group gave suggestions on how best to deal with the media:

- Remember that **all leaders are ambassadors of their brand**.
- **Be clear who has credibility with the press** within the organisation – this may not be the CEO.
- Remember that the **organisation itself should not be in the media**, but rather 'what it does'.
- Don't forget to **use new media** to influence perception.
- **Be willing to speak to the press**.

Ultimately, keep things simple and don't lose sight of your customer.