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MEMORANDUM

To: Deputy Ministers/CEOs

From: Richard (Rick) C.J. Nurse, M.H.Sc.
Commissioner

Howard Windsor
Deputy Minister, Office of the Premier

Date: August 4, 2004

Subject: Response to 2004 Employee Survey

As you know, in February of this year, government sent an employee survey to more than 8,000 employees - to ask employees for their opinions and to find ways to make the workplace better. The survey asked for opinions about how well the work environment supported staff and in turn, encouraged a culture of service excellence.

The survey measured ten dimensions of the work environment:

- leadership
- communication
- compensation & benefits
- personal growth
- recruitment & retention
- quality of work life
- employee involvement
- diversity
- teamwork
- safety & security

At the time of the survey, we committed to reporting the results to you objectively this summer - we are doing that today. We believe that asking employees their opinions of the workplace is an essential first step towards improving the workplace experience. It is also an essential step towards building a strong and responsive public service. The survey results provide government with a good indication of the perceptions and beliefs of public servants. They also provide a benchmark which will be used to measure progress when comparing these results with those of future surveys.

We are very encouraged by the level of employee participation in responding to the survey. It was the first time that government had surveyed its employees in this way and more than half of you took the time to respond. Thank you.

Some Strengths and Some Areas of Concern

We are also encouraged by the many favourable perceptions expressed by staff and will be taking action to better understand and to improve perceptions where areas of concern are identified in the survey report.

The survey report provides government with a number of recommendations and we intend to act on these recommendations in the weeks and months ahead.

FOCUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:

Recommendation - Celebrate and Continue to Build on Identified Strengths

There were 20 questions which had a favourable response from employees. Many of employees believe that their supervisors listen and that they can speak openly to their supervisors, that training and development opportunities are available to them and that their workplace is safe.

➤ Response - Build on Our Strengths

Government will sustain its commitment to making training and development opportunities available to all employees and to ensuring a safe and supportive workplace - by meeting and, where possible, going “beyond compliance” with OH&S legislative regulations, policies and best practices.

Recommendation - Commit to Action and Follow up

➤ Response

Government is committed to consistent and coordinated action in response to this employee survey. Government is also committed to providing regular reports to employees and to communicate on progress.

Recommendation - Create an Advisory Committee

➤ Response

An Employee Survey Advisory Committee will be established to monitor government’s actions in response to the 2004 employee survey.

Recommendation - Use Results to Guide Corporate Human Resources Strategy Plan

➤ Response

We are committed to completing and implementing, a corporate human resources plan - as proposed in government’s 2004 - 2005 business plan. This plan will contain specific references to the employee survey findings and responses in such areas as recruitment, hiring practices, valuing diversity, succession and career planning, wellness, and recognition for employees.

❑ **Recommendation - Survey Regularly**

➤ **Response**

Employee survey, (focused and organization-wide), will be conducted regularly in future years.

❑ **Recommendation - Examine Reasons for Concerns about Hiring Practices (Merit) and Career Advancement**

Some employees (40%) expressed the opinion that government does not hire on the basis of merit (or candidate qualifications) and 44% report that career opportunities in the public service may be limited. (38% of employees feel that hiring is based on merit, and that career advancement opportunities are available).

➤ **Response**

Career and succession management strategy - Government's human resources plan will include a comprehensive career and succession management strategy aimed at attracting new talent and preparing current staff for career opportunities that will arise in the next 5-10 years.

Merit/staffing audits - The Public Service Commission has included merit/staffing audits in its 2004 - 2005 business plan and this review will take into consideration employee perceptions of hiring practices that were outlined in the employee survey results.

Diversity - Hiring practices will also be reviewed with a stronger emphasis on valuing diversity in our environment and in the public service.

❑ **Recommendation - Examine Ways to Encourage Employees to Remain in Public Service**

Almost 50% of government employees anticipate leaving the public service in the next 5-10 years. (While almost 50% would stay in public service even if offered a similar job with slightly higher pay elsewhere in their community).

➤ **Response**

Government's human resources plan will include programs and initiatives aimed at encouraging employees to remain with the public service as an "employer of choice". These programs and initiatives also address the need to encourage both young and mature workers to join or remain with the public service.

❑ **Recommendation - Examine Ways to Support Employees Who Wish to Discuss/Disclose Ethical Concerns**

Of those who completed the survey, 46%, believe that they can report concerns related to workplace ethics or conflicts without fear of reprisal.

➤ **Response**

Government has announced its intentions to approve new regulations, which will give guidance and support to employees who wish to bring issues of wrongdoing to the attention of senior group officials.

❑ **Recommendation - Strengthen Leadership & Re-affirm Diversity Commitment**

Many employees (36%) express the perception that department leaders do not set a good example for staff, and 21% feel their department does not place sufficient value on workplace diversity.

➤ **Response**

Leadership Development Program will continue to focus on government's commitment to:

- ▶ leadership competencies
- ▶ consistent human resource practices
- ▶ succession management and HR Development
- ▶ valuing diversification
- ▶ corporate code of conduct
- ▶ valuing driven decision making and leadership

As noted earlier, a valuing diversity initiative aimed at achieving a more diverse workplace, including full implementation of the Affirmative Action policy will be implemented by government, through the Public Service Commission.

Leadership Development Programs will strengthen leaders' focus on conflict resolution, relationship building and communication in response to these employee perceptions.

❑ **Recommendation - Organizational Effectiveness and Communications**

A number of employees (27%) don't believe that department goals and objectives are regularly achieved and others (35%) report not receiving communication about department business plans.

➤ **Response:**

Processes for development and for reporting progress on department (and corporate) business plans will be reviewed to encourage more staff involvement, and to ensure more effective tracking and reporting of progress and success.

❑ **Recommendation - Compensation and Recognition**

Many staff (46%) do not feel that they are fairly compensated for the work they do.

➤ **Response**

Government will continue to monitor the relationship between salaries in the public and private sectors, examining comparable rates.

Government will continue to work with all staff to show that the public is getting good value for its investment in public services and public servants.

Government will continue to bargain in good faith and representation of its unionized employees.

Government will research an organization-wide recognition program which will seek to properly recognize staff performance, service excellence and best practices throughout the Nova Scotia Public Service.

Where to from Here?

The survey has provided valuable insight into what we do well and what we need to improve upon. We now have the information, we need to make meaningful and lasting improvements to our workplace. Change will take time and a lot of work, but we are committed to acting on the opinions provided by public servants.

As noted above, one of the key recommendations is to establish an Advisory Committee to monitor our progress in responding to the 2004 employee survey. We will move to create this advisory group in the early fall and it will be chaired by Howard Windsor, Deputy Minister, Office of the Premier. If you have any advice on the mandate, or members of the Advisory Committee, please contact Rick Nurse at the Public Service Commission, where coordination of the committee's role will occur.

Information from the survey will be used in many ways – it will inform the proposed corporate human resources plan and future corporate and department-level business plans. Each government department will review its department-specific results and will also establish department-level action plans to guide their follow up and their survey results. To the extent possible, departments will action to gain a full understanding of the perceptions and beliefs expressed by staff, and then take whatever action this additional analysis suggests will be helpful. Where, in their opinion, a more organization-wide policy or program response is needed, advice and recommendations will be sent to the Public Service Commission for consideration and follow up.

We commit to providing you with regular updates of our progress. We'll measure our progress by touching base with some of you over the next two years through mini-surveys. In year three, government will undertake a full employee survey as was done this year, to see what progress has been made.

Again, thank you for your contributions to the survey and follow up processes.

Original signed by

Howard Windsor
Deputy Minister
Office of the Premier

Original signed by

Richard (Rick) C.J. Nurse, M.H.Sc.
Commissioner
Public Service Commission

cc: HR Directors
PSC Executive Team