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## General Management Expectations

From Bobby Mink

Oregon Youth Authority Interim Director



*Earlier this month at our managers' meeting, I talked about my general, overarching expectations of the OYA management team. I did not describe specific expectations for our facilities, field, or central office units. Rather, I focused on three general goals and thirteen principles or values that are very important at*

*this particular time in OYA's history. An overview of my comments follows.*

Benjamin Disraeli, British prime minister in the late 1800s said, "The rarest and most admirable quality of public service is moral courage." At OYA, we will strive to make moral courage much more common-place than rare, doing our jobs of managing and leading in a manner that is honest, ethical, and reliable.

In practical terms, our managers must have integrity and be above reproach. When people speak of OYA, I want them to say that OYA does what it says it will do: that we keep our promises and that we are trustworthy as an organization.

Sometimes that takes courage — the courage to do the right thing even if it hurts, the courage to admit mistakes, and the courage to be honest about everything we do. These are qualities that I expect to be commonplace, not rare, at OYA.

### Three Goals

During my tenure as your interim director, there are three overarching goals that I have for each of our managers.

- 1. Serve Oregonians to the best of our ability.** You already do this well, but there is always room for improvement. We need to constantly look for ways to increase the safety and security of the youth in our care, for ways to enhance our treatment modalities, and for ways to streamline our business systems. We need to continue to involve families and listen to our stakeholders. We should engage our stakeholders in major decisions.
- 2. Our leadership and management of this agency will be principle-based, values-based, and ethics-based.** There is a lot to say about this later in my discussion of principles. We are beginning our leadership and management training in September and the topics for the first training are "mission, values, and ethics."
- 3. Complete the Systems Improvement Project (SIP) priorities prior to September 15.** Our managers must enthusiastically embrace these changes for us to be successful. Every manager's performance will be judged in part on how well they implement the changes required by the SIP.

In the near future, I will speak to the Director's Group members about more specific goals for their areas of responsibility, but for now these three overarching goals are good markers for us to accomplish.

### Some important management and leadership principles

Values, principles, and work place ethics define the context in which we do our jobs. I want OYA to be an organization with character beyond reproach. I want people to say that OYA keeps its promises, that it is a values-driven organization, and that it is the best place to work in Oregon state government. *Cont. on page 2*

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The following principles are largely common sense, and they reflect what most of us do most of the time. Nevertheless, it is important to state them, think about them, understand them, and make them central to our daily work. These principles are not in any priority order; consider them all equally important.

**1. Customer service is number one.** The only reason we exist is to help Oregonians. We must never lose sight of that. We are not here to advance the organization or ourselves. We are here to serve our clients efficiently and effectively.

**2. We are part of a larger team.** The governor, the Legislature, other state departments, local government, not-for-profit providers, and others are part of the larger team. Within OYA the field, the facilities, and the central office are part of the OYA team and the larger team. We need to be constantly aware of this, and we must involve others in our policy deliberations.

**3. Establish local values to fit the statewide context.** The personalities of our worksites reflect the values of the manager and the employees who work there. As you work to establish positive values such as those discussed today (and we will discover in our leadership and management training), remember you are part of something much larger. What you do or don't do can impact the entire agency and beyond. You will not be successful unless we all are successful.

**4. You must walk it before you talk it.** You must communicate the values, communicate the values, and communicate the values some more. Communicate with actions, then with words. If you don't take the values to heart, your talk will be transparent to your staff and your partners. Your actions are what count in establishing a principle-based work place. Everything you do should be explained terms of our values. We cannot and will not have a half-hearted management team.

**5. Involve our clients, communities, and other stakeholders.** We will not be successful without the involvement of our stakeholders in policy development and service delivery. The involvement has to be quality

involvement that makes a difference.

**6. Seek out your critics.** There is no better way to gain credibility and respect than to seek out your critics and then listen to them respectfully. At the same time, when our critics go public with negative comments that we know are erroneous, we make a huge mistake if we let those comments go unchallenged.

**7. Urgency is needed.** The governor, the Legislature, and others want action now on our deficiencies. We all need to feel the urgency to act quickly, but thoughtfully. It is unacceptable for things needing action to smolder. It pains me to hear that employees have been on administrative leave for months without any information about what to expect. It is unacceptable for managers to look the other way when a subordinate manager or employee is clearly deficient in job performance. Letters should receive prompt responses, phone messages should get prompt callbacks, requests for information should be completed promptly, and e-mail inquiries should be acknowledged right away.

**8. Expect excellence in every thing we do.** Oregonians demand and deserve excellent services. Demand creative risk-taking and enthusiastic energy from your employees. This also includes an expectation of excellence for local governments and our contracted providers.

**9. Develop a diverse workforce.** Oregon is an increasingly diverse state, and our workforce and our contractors ought to reflect our diverse communities. I expect us to work harder at locating, recruiting, and hiring qualified people of color and people with disabilities. We need to work at retaining our employees. Too often, qualified people leave state government because they felt unwelcome or believed they were expected to meet a higher standard.

**10. Expect and demand accountability.** For each of your subordinate managers and employees, develop clearly stated goals and expectations. Every employee at OYA ought to know how his or her job is connected to the mission. Reward excellent performance. Coach

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# General Management Expectations *cont...*

average and poor employees to do their jobs better. Poor performers, every one of them, must be on a work plan to help them to understand your legitimate expectations and how they can meet them. I expect extra effort in dealing with poor performing managers. They need to improve quickly or be coached out of the organization. Employee morale will improve greatly when you either coach a poor performing manager into better performance or you coach them out of the workplace.

**11. Your jobs are management and leadership jobs.** Your community of interest, or your allegiance, is with the governor and the OYA director, not with your employees. This doesn't mean you cannot be friends and colleagues with your employees. You can. But you are a manager and leader first and foremost. Do not have a relationship, business or personal, with a subordinate that undermines your objectivity or detracts from our values and principles. Learn your profession and be competent in your profession. Your profession is manager and leader.

**12. There will be no surprises.** Let me know about sensitive issues. I can handle bad news. I don't like surprises. There is nothing more embarrassing for me than to answer a phone call from the governor, the governor's staff, or the DAS director and hear first from them about awkward news about our agency.

**13. Always be honest.** It is easy to be honest when delivering good news. But we absolutely must be honest when delivering bad news. Always admit your mistakes. Others respect people and organizations that accept responsibility for their actions.

Earlier, I said we want to build an organization with character. In many respects, we already have that; we have employees who do good work, care about the mission, have good values, and who have earned the trust of their co-workers and partners. But, unfortunately, recent events have caused people to question our organizational character.

Together, we are going to work hard to prove our mettle. I want people to say that OYA is:

- **Trustworthy.** When we are trusted, we are given more flexibility by decision-makers because they know they can count on us.

- **Honest.** We should communicate and act in good faith, telling the truth even when it hurts. And sometimes it does.
- **Reliable.** This is the old-fashioned keeping of promises and doing what we said we would do. This is avoiding commitments that are unclear or unwise. It is not promising what we cannot deliver.
- **Loyal.** We have allegiance to the Oregon taxpayers and the governor for whom we work.

OYA will be an organization with **integrity**. What you see is what you get. Integrity is the antithesis of self-interest, self-deception, and self-righteousness.

This agency is not in the midst of crisis; it is in the midst of opportunity. Let the light of opportunity shine on you, embrace it enthusiastically, and let the world see what we, together, are capable of achieving.

John D. Rockefeller was a 19th century entrepreneur who made millions of dollars. When asked how he was able to amass great wealth, his sister commented, "If it is raining porridge, John will have his bowl right side up."

Let's get the OYA bowl right side up.

