

*The Political Officer  
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

Turbulent weather requires strong crews. In well-managed organizations, a common strategy in times of rapid change is to return to fundamentals, in particular to ensure respect for the principles and practices which best define the organization. The strategy can take many forms, but a focus on people is invariably a central element. Organizations don't produce results; people do.

Best practices in personnel management can be categorized under a variety of headings: valuing the person, developing the individual, enhancing professionalism.

*Valuing the person*

- Within the federal government, many departments and agencies including Industry Canada, Health and HRDC are running programs to assist employees to strike a better balance between work and private life.
- In Australia, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has launched a *Working Smarter* program to establish "a new paradigm for the successful DFAT officer who ... organises his/her own time and that of subordinates cleverly and strategically, demonstrates good judgement and discrimination in setting work priorities, and maintains a sense of balance between work and private life". Because of the bad example they can set, senior officers are "actively discouraged from working late except in genuine emergencies ... working in the office at weekends should be kept to an absolute minimum". Full utilization of annual leave is considered "a key indicator of good management".
- In many Canadian public sector institutions, "upward feedback" is no longer an occasional training tool for managers but a permanent feature of employee engagement in managing the workplace. Both the Australian and New Zealand foreign ministries have instituted upward appraisal systems whereby subordinates annually provide their supervisor's supervisor with a confidential collective appraisal of the individual's performance. Staff appraisals are an integral element of managers' annual performance assessments.
- Industry Canada utilizes the provisions of a Treasury Board directive to provide financial bonuses to employees for especially meritorious performance.
- In the UK, the Foreign Office publishes an annual "Diplomatic Service List" which not only includes a listing of all officers in the organization but also biographical sketches on each member. Canada used to do something similar until the early 1970s.