

Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration
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Submission

I have been in the APS since 1979, and am currently an EL2 in Canberra.

I applauded the introduction of APS Values, and am thankful that they exist. I think they do embody that way we should all behave and proceed through our daily work. But when I reflect on the behavior I now see in my agency it is as though these values do not exist. The poorest behavior I have witnessed has come from the SES, Ministers and Secretaries.

It troubles me that I am still a witness to one-upmanship, turf protection and pointless power plays by senior public servants. I have seen behavior that would not be out of place in the school yard far more often than I have seen behavior that is genuinely targeted at rewarding and encouraging the effective performance of staff. Rarely does a junior employee tackle poor behavior from a senior employee, for fear of recrimination, and there are little real protections afforded to them for doing so.

Staff remain separated and segregated from their leaders, by virtue of the way leaders treat them. I have witnessed, and continue to hear stories from others, about senior managers actually yelling at staff, demeaning their staff and forcing staff to take on truly unreasonable work demands. Case in point- none of my staff will do my job, as they do not wish to have to deal with my SES manager and other SES in this organisation.

Despite discussions in all fora about 'living the values from the top down', and the 'importance of leadership' real improvements in this arena have failed to eventuate, as those who are responsible for making the change are the same people who are failing to do so. Address this in an effective way, and real change for the better may actually occur.

Until there are some mechanisms for assessing SES performance that include the input of junior staff, and are moderated from outside the agency, I can't see how this will change. The flow on effects to culture, performance and retention are worthy of more work being done to make Secretaries and SES more accountable for their behavior and for the morale of their staff.