

2015 State of the Department Speech

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Los Angeles County

- General Welcome (Brenda)
- [Dean's Nightmare Video]
- Good morning/afternoon everyone.
- Welcome to our 2015 State of the Department address.
- I hope you all enjoyed the video. I know our managers really enjoyed making it – at least some of them did.
- The nightmare video was a lighthearted look at how our management team gets ready to “bring it”, which is our new theme for Fiscal Year 2015-16.
- The video is intended to poke a little fun at our work environment, but also to acknowledge that we have a lot on our plates.
- That, at times, our work life can be overwhelming -- that it can even feel like a nightmare. And, that getting through it requires focus, resolve and teamwork.
- The “Bring It” theme is a call to action for our collective RRCC team, which includes each and every one of you.
- “Bringing it” implies ownership, accountability and responsibility. It’s about recognizing that to be truly successful – as individuals and as a Department – we have to find the resolve to tap into what motivates us and identify with the true nature of our work and then we need to “bring it” every day and in every situation.
- And, I know we are all human and that there are days and circumstances where it is hard to find that resolve; when there are triggers that test our patience or fatigue that tempts us to let down our guard and lose track of why we’re here and what we are charged with doing.

- My message today is that it is actually in those times when our character, our reputation and our spirit of service are defined and remembered – yours, mine and ours collectively.
- And, that is why we have to equip ourselves to get through the nightmare; to crawl, to walk until we can run; to rise when we fall; to hold our ground and to focus on the end game of success, achievement and outcomes.
- “Bringing It” is about how we act and perform both when eyes are focused on us and when no one is looking.
- 2015 has and will continue to present us with a lot of unique challenges.
 - For our Recorder/Clerk operations, we are seeing fluctuations in volume. In some cases that means our document counts and revenue are down, while at the same time our in-person customer base is up;
 - In Birth, Death and Marriage and in Business Filings, there is increasing demand for quick service while we navigate the automation of systems and the limitations placed on us by the legal and regulatory framework we have to work within.
 - In Elections, we are preparing for the 2016 Presidential Election cycle as the State Legislature moves to fundamentally change the face of election administration in California and as we move closer to implementing modernized voting equipment. In both cases we are reminded regularly that all eyes are on Los Angeles County and that there is an expectation for us to lead.
 - In HR and Administration, we are adapting to new demands and system changes that are being implemented across the county as well as dealing with staff turnover and employee training needs.

- In Finance and Budget, we are retooling our election billing process and working with the CEO to better project our revenues based on new forecasting models linked to economic trends and patterns.
- Our Information Technology Bureau is racing the clock to keep up with a long list of internal projects and system change requests, while at the same time working to keep us all up to speed on the latest platforms and productivity tools.
- Across the entire Department we are pushing for greater accountability, improved service delivery and increased efficiency – to meet our own standards and the expectations of the Board of Supervisors and the public we serve.
- We all need to work together to meet those challenges head on. Over and over, we have shown the ability to rise to the challenges in this Department, but we cannot become complacent or indifferent to the importance of continuous improvement and sustained, quality service.
- One of the ways in which we have worked to strengthen our foundation and build capacity to meet demand and expectations is through our commitment to process improvement and adopting the Lean Six Sigma approach.
- We have trained more than 80% of our employees at the Yellow Belt level with more to come.
- Additionally, we have at least one trained Black Belt Lean Six Sigma coordinator in every bureau.
- Throughout the Department we are deploying Idea Boards and encouraging you, as our subject matter experts, to offer ideas for improving operations and streamlining procedures.
- We have seen it work, we know it brings results but there is great opportunity for expansion. And, there is an important need to ensure the sustainability of the process improvements we implement.

- We have also taken steps to build more bench strength in our workforce focusing on succession planning and employee development. The formation of an Emerging Leaders Program is the hallmark of this effort.
- The Emerging Leaders Program is available to all employees. Applicants are asked to share their definition of leadership, to identify ways in which they want to grow as leaders and to outline how they think they can contribute to the leadership of the Department. The application, along with a supervisory evaluation are considered during the selection process.
- For our first cohort, 15 employees from throughout the Department were selected when we launched the program earlier this year.
- The Emerging Leaders cohort meets on a monthly basis to complete a training curriculum and to participate on Lean Six Sigma process improvement initiatives. Additionally, each participant is paired with a management mentor who works with them to support their individual leadership development goals.
- This is truly an exciting program. Already, what I have seen through the program has exceeded my expectations, so I am especially proud and excited to introduce you to our emerging leaders and for you to hear first-hand what they have to say about the program.
- [Emerging Leaders Video – Part 1]
- Would our Emerging Leader participants in the room please stand to be recognized?
- As you heard, part of what has made the Emerging Leaders Program so successful is the focus on strengths.
- When we play to our strengths we're able to do incredible things.
- And this past year we, in fact, did some incredible things.

- As has become our tradition, we've compiled a Top 10 list of departmental achievements that I want to highlight. The list is not all inclusive, but is a representative sample of our achievements, so let's start with the first five.
- [Top 10, 10-6]
 - The first notable achievement I want to highlight is the promotion of 91 employees from within the Department. This speaks directly to our goal of workforce development and of the caliber of our employees.
 - Additionally, in the past year, working hand-in-hand with our front line staff we reduced the steps involved in processing document recordings received through the mail from 9 steps spread over three floors of the building to 2 steps in one location – a 77% reduction in document handling. That screams of Operational Improvement.
 - On that same theme, in the face of increased scrutiny and inquiries on the accuracy of our voter file, we embarked on a concentrated data hygiene effort resulting in the review, update or removal of more than 425,000 voter records.
 - Another example that illustrates what we are capable of accomplishing is implementation of the new NSF check verification; which allows for automated and real time clearance of payments made by check over the counter.
 - And, to complete the half-way point of this year's top ten, we reduced the timeframe for paying poll workers after the election from 8 weeks to 2 weeks – a huge customer service enhancement!
- In looking at each of these achievements, what is clear is that they were shared accomplishments. Underlying each one were elements of collaboration, cooperation and a focus on success. That's what happens when everyone is willing to help and to encourage each other.

- For us to succeed in the year ahead, we need to find new ways to encourage and motivate our co-workers to “bring it”.
- Here’s the reality – we do great work here and we achieve a lot, but there is vast room for improvement and an increasing need for consistency.
- Too often what we achieve requires effort and resources beyond what ought to be required. It involves overcoming obstacles, breaking down barriers and working through limitations that could have better been addressed ahead of time.
- We can change that dynamic by focusing on our responsibility to deliver on our core goals of customer service, fiscal responsibility, operational improvement and workforce development.
- There are two ways you can personally be a part of that improvement:
 - The first thing you can do is renew your own commitment to your job. In a recent speech, Supervisor Hilda Solis talked about how she wakes up each morning and asks herself “what can I do today to improve the lives of those in Los Angeles County?”
 - That is an example of a focused, personal commitment to work. I am asking each of you to tap into what motivates you, to identify what is rewarding about the work you do and then let that fuel you to “bring it” every day – even on the days and in the moments when it seems the hardest.
 - Did you know that one of the biggest challenges we face in the Department in staying aligned to our goals is attendance? It may sound simple, but we can achieve new heights of success and achieve it with less demand on our resources simply by cutting down on absenteeism. A big part of “bringing it” starts with showing up!
 - So, the second thing I am asking you to do as a part of our theme “bring it” – is to encourage each other.

- When you see a colleague struggling or frustrated, take a moment to listen or to lend a hand.
 - If you notice a co-worker has been out for a while, when they return let them know they were missed and that you appreciate it when they are here.
 - And, when you face a challenge that takes you away from work, don't lose track of the importance of your role here and how that contributes to a way of life and a level of stability that is important to us all.
 - Take steps to ensure your wellness and launch a plan to get back to work.
- And, don't overthink these things. This is not complicated. It is really simply about committing to do the right thing.
- Tapping into your personal commitment and encouraging others can happen through simple things, but they are simple things that have a huge impact.
- Let's hear again from our Emerging Leaders about how they help encourage others to "bring it".
- [Emerging Leaders Video – Part 2]
- Did you all hear the commitment and encouragement in those clips? The key point here is that we all have a part to play. And, a big element of the "bring it" theme is to invoke a sense of teamwork.
- So, now let's pick up on that top ten list of achievements. By working together, we have done some amazing things.
- [Top 10, 5-1]
 - For several years now, we have been working on a plan to modernize our voting systems and to improve the voting experience in Los Angeles County. This year marked a major milestone in the process with the development and testing of working prototypes to replace our Inka Vote and PBR Systems.

- You have already heard from our first cohort of Emerging Leaders – 15 employees who are nearing completion in the program.
 - In addition to that we have had 10 managers from our Department complete a countywide Executive Leadership Development Program (ELDP) – higher participation per capita than any other county department.
 - Equally significant, our microfilm conversion process for vital and property records completed film-to-image conversion of more than 65 million records in just 18 months.
 - And, the final example I want to share is a 20% reduction in the ballot transportation time from polling places to headquarters for tabulation on Election Night.
 - Again, this speaks directly to what can be accomplished when we work together in response to the expectations and demands of the public we serve.
- Each year, my goal for the State of the Department presentation is really to personalize it – to make it about you, and this year is no exception.
 - You have all worked hard and the Top 10 list is a reflection of that, but it is important for you to know that the public sees this as well.
 - If you look around the room today, you'll see some posters. These are a sample of actual Yelp reviews and social media posts that show just how important the public sees our work.
 - These posters show why customer service is one of our most important values – and, they are proof that how we provide service is noticed.
 - This is an area that I really want to highlight and to make it a primary point of focus for all of us.
 - The public expects and deserves the highest quality service available and we must strive to deliver that on a daily basis.
 - As great as these posters are, they are not the only feedback we receive. Sadly, we are more likely to see posts or to receive referrals from the Board of Supervisors when we fail to meet our

standard of service. And, that does happen. There was even a tweet last year that, out of frustration, referred to me as a “useless turd”!

- Credibility and consistency are important. Whether we like it or not, each time a negative review of our service is posted or reported, it has the effect of diminishing all of the quotes posted here on the walls and it reflects on every one of us.
- So, how do we make sure we stay on the right track in terms of our customer service goal?
- I think the most effective way of doing this is to put ourselves in the shoes of the customer. Think about those interactions in your day-to-day life where you are a customer. What are your expectations? How do you react when those expectations are not met? And, in contrast, how do you feel when your service expectations are exceeded?
- For me, that provides a real visual and powerful message about how I should be providing customer service. Let me share a recent example:
- This has to do with a recent experience where Jeremy and I had traveled to San Francisco for a day of meetings related to our Voting Systems Assessment Project.
- We took a very early flight in the morning, were in meetings all day long and then caught a return flight late the same evening. Upon arrival, the pilot announced that despite our early arrival, there would be a 20 minute delay in having a gate available, so we had to remain on the tarmac. 20 minutes grew to a 40 minute wait before we finally were able to depart the gateway from the airplane to the terminal. At this point, I was pretty exhausted and was eager to get to the parking lot and had home; anticipating a full day starting early the next morning.
 - LAX Parking – tired, anxiety, waiting in line, cone in front of my car, reducing the number of cashier booths available (sound familiar)?
 - Urge to roll down window and express myself to the guy putting the cone in front of my car; preparing to tell the cashier how they need to improve customer service, etc.

- And, then when it was finally my turn to pay, something very interesting occurred:
 - Cashier greeted me, thanked me for my patience, apologized for the delay, efficiently processed my payment and asked if I needed anything further – totally changing the dynamic of the situation.
- It's a pretty effective equation -- when we approach service from the perspective of the customer, we provide better service.
- Doing so allows us to acknowledge the unseen and the unspoken. For example:
 - Consider why the customer comes to our office seeking copies of a document. What are the circumstances and emotions associated with the transaction?
 - Maybe they are seeking:
 - Benefits enrollment to provide healthcare for their family, or
 - Taking the first steps to getting a passport to travel home, or
 - Settling an estate after the loss of a loved one,
 - Or maybe they are signing their child up for her/his very first season of soccer or T-Ball.
 - Those are transactions and emotions we can relate to on a human level and where, if we take the time to do so, we can relate to the customer's behavior and expectations.
 - We can also consider the stress or excitement around the transaction. Think about how it feels to be involved in
 - a first time home purchase,
 - or to be completing a refinance that may allow some debt relief after a period of unemployment,
 - imagine the nerves associated with being a first time candidate taking papers out to run for office, or

- a campaign treasurer struggling to meet deadlines and to navigate confusing regulations.
- And now, image what it's like to walk through the doors of our building and figure out what you need to do.
- We can do a better job of making sure our environment is responsive to these dynamics, to reduce the stress and intimidation of interacting with the Department and with the County.
- And, don't forget our internal customers. Put yourself in the shoes of
 - A cashier waiting for the system to come back up after it's crashed while trying to calm the customers standing at their window, or
 - The secretary waiting anxiously for an email attachment to open while the little blue circle swirls on their desk top and their manager paces anxiously waiting for the copy (sound familiar?), or
 - EOC staff waiting for a purchase order to be approved so they can begin taking delivery of supplies and prepping the election materials, or
 - A Section Head waiting for an eligibility list to fill a vacant position they desperately need to provide relief and distribution of their workload.
- These are all things we can relate to in some form or manner. And, excellent customer service is accomplished by paying attention to the small things.
- It starts with 1) **recognition** – knowing what the dynamics of the interaction involve; 2) **acknowledgement** – a simple smile and “thank you for your patience” or “I am sorry you had to wait” can go a long way; and 3) **asking** whether there is anything else you can help with.

- This brings us back full circle to the “bring it” theme. The question then is how will you “bring it” in the year ahead?
- That was the last question we asked our Emerging Leaders as we prepared for today’s presentation. Here is what they had to say.
- [Emerging Leaders Video – Part 3]
- Once again, I want to thank the Emerging Leaders for being a part of the program today. The Emerging Leaders Program has proven so successful that we will soon begin accepting applications for a second cohort so we can continue building our leadership bench strength.
- When we wrap up today, you will all receive a draw-string bag with our “bring it” theme.
- In your bag is an updated copy of our Departmental Strategic Plan. I ask that you familiarize yourself with the plan. Keep it handy in your work area so you can review and refer to it regularly. Our success depends on each of you and we want you to be able to tell others about what we are doing.
- You’ll also find a postcard in the bag with quotes from one of the six posters on it. Use the card as a reminder of just how important your work is and the impact you have on the public.
- On the reverse side of the cards is a place for you to write down and commit to how you are going to “bring it” in the year ahead. I encourage you to fill it out and post it somewhere where you can see it every day as a reminder of our theme.
- Over the next few weeks our media team will be combing the building to get pictures of you and these cards, and we will use them in a display in the employee entrance for further visibility, encouragement and support of our theme.
- We’ve heard how our Emerging Leaders are going to “bring it”. And, here are a couple of examples of how I am challenging myself to “bring it” this year. I am making a commitment to:

- Launch a “walk in their shoes” program – internally and externally taking the time to walk through our work flow and to experience our services through the lens of a customer and as a front line employee.
- I’m also committing to:
 - Increase my awareness and focus on employee wellness. I want you to know that I care about the health of our work environment and I am concerned when our employees are out sick.
- And, I intend to:
 - Re-vamp the “Donuts with Dean” program to increase opportunities for candid feedback and discussion with employees throughout the Department.
- Now, before I wrap things up, would anyone like to share how they plan to “bring it” this year?

Thanks.

- Anyone else? Thanks.
 - Anyone else? Thanks.
 - Maybe one more? Thanks.
- Great stuff.
- Clearly, we did some really great things last year and already there are many initiatives and projects underway for the current year, but let’s not get complacent or lose track of our mission to serve Los Angeles County by providing essential records management and election services in a fair, accessible and transparent manner.
- Let’s continue to look for new and innovative ways to serve the public.
- Here is what I believe –
 - I believe that we perform best when our limits and abilities are stretched and tested;

- I believe when we are knocked down, we have the resilience to get up and stand even stronger;
- I believe every one of you has the capacity to be a champion of customer service; and
- I believe we already have all that we need to manage through the nightmares and to continue on a path of success.
- We just need to recognize it and commit to “bringing it”.
- But, to quote one of my favorite authors, Marcus Buckingham, it really doesn’t matter so much what I believe, what is important is what you believe.
- So as you leave today and head back into the work environment, I hope you give some thought to how you plan to make your mark this year.
- What is the state of your relationship to the Department?
- How will you “Bring It”?
- How you will encourage others to “bring it” too?
- There are big things ahead for the RRCC and I am excited to continue on this journey with you.
- Thanks for joining us today.
- Thank you for your partnership and for the contributions you make to this Department and to the people we serve.
- I look forward to another great year and continued success.