

International Women's Day

Name: Aileen Wilbur

Position: Senior Human Resource Officer, Penama

Organization: Office of the Public Service Commission



Leadership and Management:

How would you describe your leadership style?

I would describe my leadership style as participative, structured, and service-oriented. I believe in leading by example and maintaining professionalism in the workplace. I practice inclusive leadership, where I listen to my team, encourage consultation, and promote open communication before making decisions.

My office operates with an open-door policy, where staff feel comfortable coming to discuss work-related matters or even personal concerns. I believe that effective leadership includes being approachable and supportive.

I balance empathy with firmness to ensure staff feel valued while still meeting organizational standards and performance expectations.

What are the key qualities that you believe are essential for effective leadership/teamwork?

- Clear Communication is a very important quality for effective leadership. At the provincial level, it is essential to clearly communicate issues, solutions, and regulations. We work in a diverse cultural environment with communities and people who have different personalities and perspectives.
- Community Engagement – Effective provincial leadership requires active engagement with communities. Building trust and maintaining good stakeholder relationships improves service delivery and strengthens decentralization efforts.
- Problem Solving is also a significant quality that I believe is essential especially at the provincial level, working in geographically dispersed islands means leaders must be flexible and responsive to challenges, including logistical, staffing, and community-related issues.

Background and Career Journey:

I come from humble beginnings, raised by hardworking parents who believed deeply in the power of education. My father was a carpenter and my mother a housewife, and though we didn't have much, they sacrificed greatly to ensure I could succeed academically. Their unwavering support, along with the encouragement of my community, laid the foundation for the leader I am today.

I graduated with a double major in Economics and Public Administration. I gained early experience at the Tourism Office before joining the Vanuatu National Provident Fund in 2019. Within months, I transitioned into Human Resources, where I served for two years. In 2020, I was appointed as Senior Human Resource Officer for the Office of the Public Service in Penama Province—a role I have proudly held for nearly six years

What inspired you to pursue this career path?

I have a passion to serve in the community. There is a saying that my father would always remind me is "Once you succeed in your education journey never forget where you come from" For me, where I come from is my community, and my province, those words became the guiding force behind the path I chose.

Were there any pivotal moments or experiences that significantly shaped your career?

Being appointed to Human Resource Officer in Penama province is also a significant and transformative milestone in my career.

This Milestone has shaped my career and has allowed me to follow my passion to work with the communities at the provincial level through:

- navigating a new work environment,
- handling work place challenges and celebrating the success ,
- Managing staff issues,
- Embracing opportunities for capacity building ,
- working closely with communities and
- supporting decentralization efforts.

This role has deepened my understanding of HR in a provincial context and strengthened my commitment to improving service delivery at the community level.

Community Engagement has also play significant part in shaping my career. Working at the provincial government level means community interaction is an essential part of everyday responsibilities. Engaging with communities continuously reinforces my purpose in public service and reminds me why effective human resource management is vital for strengthening local governance.



Ms. Wilbur assisting communities on Ambae as Senior HRO Penama.

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Can you share a challenging situation you faced as a leader/ team member and how you navigated it?

One of the most challenging situations I faced was during the Tropical Cyclone Lola and Kevin response, where I was assigned as the controller for the North Pentecost area for distribution of goods. I worked alongside the Area Administrator, who was also a woman.

The operation faced several challenges: no funds, vehicles were used on credit, and transport owners and male supervisors became frustrated, even instructing volunteers to stop working or demanding higher rates. I faced harsh words, threats, and a tense environment, while the urgency to deliver aid remained.

To navigate the situation, I focused on effective communication and problem-solving.

This experience strengthened my crisis management, communication, and leadership skills, especially in high-demand and resource-limited environment.

How do you foster a positive and productive work environment?

I believe in leadership that combines clear communication, guidance, and empathy.

I make sure staff feel supported through accurate advice, constructive feedback, and encouragement, while focusing on solutions rather than just mistakes.

At the provincial level, I emphasize community engagement to give work more purpose and motivation, and I actively promote professional development through opportunities like apprenticeships and internships to build future capacity.

Most importantly, I treat staff as family away from home, offering care and support during personal milestones and life events, because strong teams are built not only on skills but also on trust, compassion, and shared growth.

Overcoming Barriers:

A challenge I have faced as a woman in leadership is navigating an aging workforce while being younger than many of my colleagues.

Collaboration with senior staff who are more experienced can be difficult, as I sometimes encounter resistance when introducing updated processes, offering corrective feedback, or addressing issues. Having worked in the field for a long time, some individuals prefer to rely solely on their established methods rather than embrace change.

This experience has taught me that while some colleagues are open and adaptable, others value tradition and consistency, and effective leadership requires balancing respect for their experience with the need to drive progress.

Communication is a very significant component when overcoming challenges faced at work.

Achievements and Impact:

What are some of your proudest accomplishments in your career?

Some of my proudest accomplishments include:

Sustained Leadership at the Provincial Level- Taking on the role of Senior Human Resource Officer and remaining committed to serving at the provincial level for almost six years. It reflects not only my professional growth but also my dedication to decentralization and community service.

Managing a Diverse Workforce- Supporting and overseeing staffs across line agencies within Penama Province—including Pentecost, Maewo, and Ambae—is a significant responsibility. Successfully coordinating HR functions across geographically dispersed islands is a key achievement.

Capacity Building and Acting Senior Roles- Serving in acting Secretary General (SG) positions when required has enhanced my strategic understanding of administration and leadership at a higher level. These opportunities have broadened my management and decision-making skills.



Future Vision and Goals:

What are your future goals and aspirations for your career?

My future aspiration is to continue growing as a leader in public service while staying rooted in my commitment to serving communities in Penama Province.

I aim to take on higher strategic leadership positions within government and contribute to advancing the Decentralization Policy at the provincial level.

My vision is to be a transformational leader who creates meaningful impact at the provincial level.

What initiatives or changes would you like to see to further support women in leadership roles or in your field of work?

I want to see stronger succession planning within organizations and line agencies at the provincial level that prepares women for senior leadership roles focusing on mentoring capable females into higher responsibilities.