

International Women's Day

Name: Florah Mele
Position: Senior Human Resource Officer
Organization: Office of the Public Service Commission



Background and Career Journey:

My journey as a Senior Human Resource Officer is built on values of commitment, honesty, accountability, trust, giving, being the example, empathy, and service—principles that align with my Christian faith. Growing up with a single mother in a challenging environment taught me the importance of hard work and relying on God.

My childhood was deeply connected to church activities, and faith has always guided me.

For me, leadership is not about a title—it's about making a difference in someone else's life. I believe God equips us to do that. What I enjoy most in this field is seeing how my support helps employees grow and succeed. My passion lies in giving—giving without expecting anything in return.

What inspired you to pursue this career path?

When I chose this career, I didn't realize it would align with my passion for giving. But after graduating and starting out, I feel this path may be what God intended for me.

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

I was first appointed to Public Service as a Senior Human Resource Officer in Tafea after completing a two-month internship at the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Honestly, I had no prior experience managing an office, but I do have confidence in me that I can handle the role. I had never visited Tafea province before, with no knowledge of its culture or environment. Working alone for a full year forced me to discover my own potential and resilience.

Later, I was transferred back to OPSC Vila. My manager then asked me to consider moving to Penama province, but having just welcomed my first child, I declined the offer and began exploring opportunities in other ministries.

This period became a turning point in my career. I pushed myself to believe it might be linked to my performance. That motivated me to work harder, take on extra duties, stay committed, earn trust, and prove that people shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

Leadership and Management:

How would you describe your leadership style?

I find it hard to define my leadership style myself, but last year one of my superiors once described me as an adaptive employee. He said that if I were thrown into deep water, I would find my way out. I may not always push to my full potential, but *I am committed to giving my best, building trust, and staying dedicated.*

I remind myself often that nothing comes free in life, so effort and commitment are essential.

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

I believe the key qualities that are essential for effective leadership/teamwork are;

- Strategic Thinking – A leader must have a clear vision of where the team is now, where it's headed, and the ultimate goal.
- Communication – Sharing ideas and instructions clearly prevents confusion and keeps everyone aligned.
- Trust – Strong teams are built on trust. Without it, performance and collaboration suffer.
- Commitment – Leaders must be dedicated and lead with service. If you're not committed, you can't expect your team to be.
- Leading by Example – Actions speak louder than words. Leaders must model the behavior they expect from their team.
- Honesty – Integrity starts with the leader. Being accountable yourself allows you to hold your team accountable too.



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

I've faced many challenges, but one experience that stands out is organizing the 2024 Public Service Day along with Luganville Day in Sanma. As the PSC Officer on the ground, I was automatically appointed chairperson of the event. The biggest challenge was the budget—we were given a limited amount of money to make it happen.

To start, I formed a committee through a PTAC meeting and made sure everyone understood their roles from the beginning. I kept communication open, followed up on tasks, and emphasized that teamwork was essential. I shared responsibilities, and whenever someone couldn't complete their part, I stepped in without complaint because we were all committed to the same goal.

We also sought additional financial support through networking and negotiations. For example, we presented our plan to the Luganville Municipality Day committee so we could merge the event and share costs, which worked well. We secured other sponsors too, and together we successfully ran the event. It wasn't just me—it was the whole team's effort that made it possible.

How do you foster a positive and productive work environment?

I communicate openly and honestly, but I acknowledge that I'm human and not without flaws. I'm a trustworthy person who enjoys sharing ideas and working as part of a team. Building trust is always my priority, even when outcomes don't go as planned, because trust is essential for creating a positive and productive work environment. Without it, teams struggle to deliver and eventually begin to fall apart.

Overcoming Barriers:

Three of many challenges that still stuck in my mind are;

- **Culture:** On my first day at the Tafea Office, an officer questioned me, saying, "Olsem wanem i nmo gat wan man Tafea i save mekem wok ya" In a male-dominated society, women are often discouraged from leading or speaking up.
- **Gender Bias:** A superior once told me, "Florah yu no mkm olsem yu no skul" simply because I tried to clarify a situation and defend myself. I believe if I were a man, those words would never have been said.
- **Work–Life Balance:** At home, I was expected to fulfill my role as a mother and prioritize family responsibilities, while also managing work. Balancing both is a bit difficult at times.

Achievements and Impact:

What are some of your proudest accomplishments in your career?

I am adaptable and able to multitask in different contexts. I am a senior officer transferred to the OPSC main office in Vila to cover for a Principal Officer who is on study leave—a challenging but necessary decision.

I am committed to supporting the office despite short staffing, even if it means leaving my province to serve in Vila. I believe in giving and serving others, even when it requires sacrifice and trusting others to take over my responsibilities.

I'm not sure how to measure the impact of my work, but I believe my absence will reveal it. If no one notices when I'm gone, then my work likely hasn't made a difference in their journey.

Future Vision and Goals:

What are your future goals and aspirations for your career?

I plan to advance my career by pursuing a Master in Public Policy, which I believe will equip me to become a more strategic and innovative public servant. This training will enable me to strengthen institutions like the Public Service Commission, fostering inclusive development, building public trust, and ensuring provincial governance is effective and future ready.

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

One change I'd like to see is for the Women in Leadership program, run by the Ministry of Health and the Vanuatu Australian Health Program, to be extended to all Senior Executive Officers across the public service. This would ensure both male and female leaders are well prepared to build diverse teams.



Ms. Mele facilitated meetings as Senior HRO Sanma.