



PRIME MINISTER

12 November 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
SPEECH TO THE AUSTRALIAN QUALITY AWARDS
DARLING HARBOUR, SYDNEY**

E & OE.....

Thank you very much David. To Bob Carr, the Premier of New South Wales, Barry Murphy, ladies and gentlemen.

The last time that I made a speech in this convention centre was at the dinner to welcome home Australia's victorious Atlanta Olympic Games team and that was a very euphoric night and it was a night that was full of proper adulation for a group of men and women who had done remarkable things in the name of Australia. And it's very appropriate that the next address should also be in honour of a group of men and women who are also doing equally remarkable things for Australia. We are never reluctant, and properly so, and it's always part of our national character to do honour and pay homage to our sports men and women who achieve so much on the sporting and playing fields of the world. We're very proud of them and they give us a great deal of inspiration and a great deal of encouragement.

We ought to be equally proud and we should pay equal homage to those men and women who achieve excellence in business and the way in which the Australian Quality Awards have grown in status over the years, the way in which a gathering of over 4000 people, I understand, involved right across the nation tonight in this exercise is an indication of how much store all Australians are now placing on the need for our nation to succeed in the international competitive race.

Quality is all about lifting performance. It's all about lifting competitiveness, and lifting performance and lifting competitiveness is all about Australia's international future. You've all been told before but it has to be said again and again. We live in a fiercely competitive global economy. Nobody owes Australia a living. The fact that we live cheek by jowl to the fastest growing and most exciting economic region, the Asian Pacific region, means that we have a remarkable opportunity, that we can't take our future for granted, that we have to claw our future for ourselves, we have to

compete, we have to be efficient, we have to be smart and we have to produce high quality products. What I think the Australian Quality Awards do is to focus the minds of everybody, not just men and women in business but also men and women in governments, focus the minds of all of us on lifting our game and lifting our performance.

As I flick through the citations of the various recipients tonight, one of the common threads that came through very strongly to me was the importance of relations between the owner and the proprietor of the business and the employees of that business, and the great focus in so many of the awards, not only on customer satisfaction and good customer relations but also on good human relations inside the firm. And I still believe it may in the eyes of some be regarded as an old fashioned value but I think it's an enduring and important value, that the most important resource that any firm has is its employees, its people, and if the relations between those who run the business, and if you can get the relationship right, if you can involve every last person in your firm or your enterprise or your government agency or your business, in the future if you can forge a common vision, if you can have a common purpose at the workplace level, then I think you've got more than half of the battle won. And we've come a long way in that department over the last few years and everybody has played a part, and I acknowledge, quite frankly despite the differences I may occasionally have on policy issues, I acknowledge the contribution that has been made in that area by many leaders of the trade union movement in Australia because I think increasingly, we're all seeing that we have to work and fight together for a common purpose and if you can have that common purpose inculcated at the firm level, then I believe that more than half the battle has been won.

And that of course is the philosophy that lies very much behind the Government's recent changes to workplace relations. They are not about fighting long distant and best forgotten battles. They are about imbuing a sense of common endeavour and common enterprise at the workplace level because that really is the wave of the future. The next millennium is going to see dramatic changes in the Australian workplace. We are going to see proportionately more Australians employed by smaller firms. We are going to see the communications explosion absolutely change the face of the way in which work is conducted. We are going to see more people working from home. We are going to see more people working in decentralised locations. We are going to see people more and more sensitive to the shifts of economies in different parts of the world. We are going to have people more conscious that job availability will be a global thing rather than a national or a regional thing. And there's going to be an even greater pressure in the future on high quality and high performance and I want on behalf of the Government, I want to thank everybody that has been associated with the Australian Quality Awards. I want to thank the assessors, I want to thank the participants but collectively, I want to thank everybody who is committed to building a more competitive and a more enlightened business future for Australia.

I think more than at any other time in our history, we are conscious that we have to make our way on our own. We will win and we will succeed if we are the world's best, and if we're not the world's best in many areas then we are not going to have the future that all of us want for ourselves. But I am filled with optimism and confidence about the future. Just as I take a very positive view about the balance sheet of

Australia's history to date, I also take a very positive view about Australia's future prospects and sitting and listening tonight to the performance of big and small firms, public sector as well as private sector bodies and agencies all over Australia, you can't be other than filled with a great sense of optimism and hope.

So on behalf of the Government, I congratulate Barry Murphy and his committee. I congratulate those who devised the Australian Quality Awards. I thank them for the great contribution that they are making to Australia winning the international competitive race.

Thank you.