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—Alice Perry

## THE JOB TO BE DONE

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour created a new state employment services agency in July of 2004. This new organization of almost 800 employees was the conglomeration of several previously separate state agencies and boards. Charged with making the state workforce development system better and changing the overall culture for greater effectiveness and efficiency, the members of the new MDES leadership team had their work cut out for them.

The challenge for this team was clear—how to begin to meld the hundreds of employees from numerous departments and different agencies into a cohesive and effective organization. Though the importance of this task was apparent in the summer of 2004, no one could know just how important it would become until the MDES met its greatest challenge ever—the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

## SOLUTION

After a year of working to merge the various established agencies and groups into the newly-formed organization, the Executive Director of the MDES, Tommy Dale Favre chose to enlist the help of FranklinCovey and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People training as the “cultural change agent” and vehicle by which the governor’s objectives for the newly-formed MDES would be met. The senior management team kicked off the 7 Habits agency-wide rollout plan in July of 2005 by going through the course themselves.

Though the impact of the training was apparent immediately, the true test of what the team had learned and implemented came with Hurricane Katrina on August 29th, 2005 when many Mississippi residents faced the loss of their jobs, homes and lives as they knew them.

## RESULTS

Alice Perry, Director of Public Information and Policy Development, was amazed to see how so many people who had never utilized the 7 Habits before exhibited such commitment to leverage what they had learned in the midst of this tragedy.

“The 7 Habits training held us together and helped us to not only focus on the task at hand but also to focus on how we were going about our work. It was amazing to see people really using what they learned—reminding each other to keep the End in Mind, to focus on our Circle of Influence, to encourage each other to Sharpen the Saw, etc. in the middle of what felt like a war. Everyone on the executive team found ways to operate in Quadrant Two to make sure that the work we were doing would be great and lasting.”

Since the summer of 2005, there has been a tangible shift in the “cultural norm” among the leadership of the MDES—people are more focused, unified, and less distracted by the unimportant. This increased focus and unity is impacting those in need in Mississippi—the MDES has processed more than 190,000 unemployment claims and has helped more than 16,000 jobless Mississippi residents find work.

The MDES management teams are now working to finish the agency-wide rollout of the 7 Habits training. Twelve key managers are becoming certified facilitators and will take the training statewide to the 800 MDES team members who are serving those in need.