



Thoughts on Baldrige

by Debbie Collard

Immediate Past President, Baldrige Foundation Board of Directors

“Baldrige is simply the best tool to understand and improve an organization, regardless of the type, size, or focus of the organization. The return on investment is significantly positive for all stakeholders. Baldrige has had a profound effect on the way I approach quality and my expectations of quality in every aspect of my life. I use Baldrige in every organization I am a part of and to anyone who has not yet been exposed to Baldrige and its benefits I say, ‘Go out there and get started!’”

The name Baldrige was first mentioned to me mid-1991, when I returned to work from what was then called “maternity leave.” My department needed someone to be a representative for the McDonnell Douglas Corporation’s total quality initiative and directed I go to the training. John McDonnell, son of the founder, had mandated that the entire company use the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria as an internal assessment tool for our businesses. My response at the time was, “What is Baldrige?”

I am very thankful that I wasn’t given an option. I went to the training and have been involved with Baldrige ever since, at the state and national levels, as an examiner, practitioner, award recipient, Baldrige Foundation board member, and zealot. Being exposed to and learning about Baldrige has benefited both the organizations I worked for and me personally.

It seems that there are still many, many people who don’t know what Baldrige is, or what it can do for them or their organization. Without the impetus that I was lucky enough to have, and unless they have had a similarly compelling reason to learn about Baldrige, they are probably missing out on an incredible tool for organizational improvement without even knowing it!

Baldrige has been around for 30 years. It started in the late 1980s as a movement to increase manufacturing quality in the United States. Baldrige has changed and grown over the years, staying current and relevant. It is now used globally and is applicable in every conceivable type of organization. Having experienced the benefits of using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence in different organizations, including both manufacturing and service, I can attest that Baldrige can have transformational effects on an organization. There is every reason to use it and no reason not to.

Use of Baldrige is compatible with and complementary to multiple other improvement approaches, providing a framework with which to align the organization and understand where to focus resources and apply improvement approaches. Some organizations get stuck in only using one improvement approach (the old adage that if you only have a hammer everything looks like a nail) which limits the capability of the organization to improve holistically. Other organizations use multiple unaligned or unintegrated improvement approaches, which disperses the focus and reduces effectiveness. Baldrige provides a framework to integrate and align organizational activities.

Two organizations I worked for received the Baldrige Award; Boeing Airlift and Tanker (A&T) Programs for manufacturing in 1998, and Boeing Aerospace Support (AS) for service in 2003. Each of these organizations benefited from using Baldrige as a business model and outperformed similar organizations





Foundation Board Member Debbie Collard with Jane Benson (right) at the 29th Quest for Excellence conference.

who were not using Baldrige. Boeing A&T was an organizational turnaround success story, from the brink of cancellation and the loss of 10,000 jobs to a national role model! Boeing AS was an organization performing at average levels that in a three-year time period ended up tripling revenues with double-digit margins and exceeding performance challenges. Both organizations significantly improved the culture through using Baldrige as a business model, to the benefit of the customers, the employees, and all other stakeholder groups.

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