



“Corporate business leaders can focus first on what they are close to: board diversity, diversity in their C-suites, and making executives and others feel included in their organizations.”

To Improve the Health of Those We Serve

by Karen Morrison

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For over 30 years I have been a member of the OhioHealth community. Our mission, “To Improve the Health of Those We Serve,” is more than just an organizational statement of purpose. For many of us, myself included, it is a way of life.

I grew up in a family of health care professionals including my father who was a physician. I was attracted to health care because at its core, as I learned from them, it is a caring profession. My father embraced his relationships with his patients because it gave him the opportunity to help empower them to improve their health and minimize their risk of disease. I was likewise inspired to pursue both preventive medicine and law, the combination of which led me to health care advocacy.

Currently, I am leading the OhioHealth enterprise strategy for external relations including community relations, corporate reinvestment, community health and wellness, and government affairs. We work with multiple partners at all levels, public and private, federal, state, and local, to influence public policy and the provision of health care in a way that adds value and favorably impacts the health status of the entire community.

OhioHealth is the parent company for twelve hospitals, 200 ambulatory sites, a comprehensive home care provider, hospice, and rehabilitation services. We serve a 47-county region, representing millions of people, with a staff of over 30,000 employees and 3,500 physicians. I am particularly proud of our efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to bring testing and vaccination opportunities to poor and vaccine-hesitant communities.

I also serve on numerous advisory and corporate boards, as well as chairing the Columbus Board of Health, the Executive Leadership Council, and The Links, Incorporated, and I was recognized by Becker’s Hospital Review as one of the “68 African American Leaders in Healthcare, 2019.” Now I also serve on the Baldrige Foundation Board of Directors.

Baldrige and Organizational Culture

My experiences have demonstrated to me that there is little more important within organizational leadership than its leadership culture. I was drawn to Baldrige because it requires a focus on the systems level. Baldrige takes a holistic approach to leadership and management, stressing first a concentration on cultural issues which then leads to strategy and execution, establishing the processes, marshalling the resources, and taking care of the people that create the organization’s results.

A major part of the Baldrige ethic is the sharing of best practices, and many of the leaders of Baldrige organizations, certainly those organizations that have received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award over the last ten years, often talk about the critical role that organizational culture plays in developing performance excellence.

There are 11 Baldrige Core Values and Concepts at the heart of the Baldrige Criteria which are also found in many high-performing organizations. The Baldrige Program further developed a list of leadership behaviors aligned with the 11 core values and concepts. There has been a substantial amount empirical research tracking these leadership behaviors, concluding that these behaviors are critical to effective leadership in high-performing organizations.

Diversity and Inclusion

One of the core values is Visionary Leadership, and a key associated leadership behavior is creating and ensuring a supportive and collaborative environment. Another of the core values is Valuing People, with associated leadership behavior that:

- “Builds and fosters an organizational culture that focuses on engagement, development, and well-being of workforce members
- Creates an organizational environment that is safe, trusting, and cooperative
- Builds partnerships with internal and external people and organizations
- Capitalizes on the diversity of the workforce and partners.”

Diversity is strength within an organization, but true diversity can only be accomplished when the organizational culture is based on the concept of inclusion. These Baldrige leadership behaviors are very much based on inclusiveness. They are about creating a safe space in which all members of the organization can contribute, and in which leaders are encouraged to seek out and learn from the thoughts and experiences of all their members.

Corporate business leaders can focus first on what they are close to: board diversity, diversity in their C-suites, and making executives and others feel included in their organizations. They must also develop processes that encourage and facilitate listening across the organization in a way that shows employees that they and their opinions and experiences are valued. How organizations do that are some of the very important questions that a Baldrige self-assessment forces organizations to evaluate.

Baldrige asks organizations to look at themselves to understand how they are implementing these core values and concepts, and to understand where there are gaps in their implementation and execution. Only when we see ourselves for what we are can we begin to make the changes necessary to achieve inclusion, diversity, and performance excellence.



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