



Baldrige Excellence Framework

by Frank W. Fusco

Treasurer, Baldrige Foundation Board of Directors

“The Baldrige Framework is also used to recognize excellent performance at the state and national levels through the award process, but it is in the journey, and in the shared knowledge that is a part of the Baldrige process, that organizations find the greatest return on their investment. This truly is the path to keeping our nation competitive and our businesses sustainable.”

I spent nearly 40 years in public service in the government sector. As I look back on that career, it seems I spent the first 20 years searching for accountability and the last 20 years understanding much more clearly what it takes, how to define it and how to achieve levels of excellence. The turning point was when I was introduced to the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

In the early years of my career, I served as a grant financial compliance auditor, a performance auditor (GAO methods) and as committee staffer for state legislative budget committees. I was involved with efforts such as Planning-Programming and Budgeting (PPB), Management by Objectives (MBO), Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB), and Total Quality Management (TQM).

When I became the staff director for the House Ways and Means Committee, I was searching for how to make government more accountable. I met with the head of an agency that I thought had the best performance in our state and asked him for advice on how to improve the accountability of all agencies of government. He handed me the Baldrige Criteria and said read this and let me know what you think.

Initially, I was underwhelmed. I had asked for answers, and he gave me instead a list of questions.

Those questions kept haunting me, though, and eventually I realized that my mentor had given me the guidance that would change my career. Within the year my top staffer and I went to a 3-day Baldrige examiner training session in Nashville, Tennessee. We never saw Nashville or the outside of the training center. We had drunk from the firehose of Baldrige-ese. We had been to the top of the mountain and could see the possibilities.

We returned to South Carolina and began a program to provide training for our staff and specialized training for legislators. We visited such places as the Milliken Company, one of the first Baldrige Award recipients, to learn first-hand how that list of questions, when properly understood and embraced, can fundamentally change an organization.

I became an agency head in the executive branch and for nine years encouraged and taught other leaders about the benefits of the Baldrige system. I continued my learning as a multi-year state examiner and through other training opportunities.

While things we learn from GAO, PPB, MBO, ZBB, TQM and other methods can be useful, the Baldrige system provides what leaders need to know: What drives overall organizational success. It does not hinge on a few processes,

initiatives, or methods, but on an understanding of the interrelatedness of the components and categories of the Baldrige Framework and the changing environment that all organizations experience. The questions are a guide to understanding the depth and quality of an organization's current level of performance, and, more importantly, it provides a roadmap to performance excellence. Simply put, it is an assessment tool that points you toward the highest levels of performance.

The Baldrige Framework is also used to recognize excellent performance at the state and national levels through the award process, but it is in the journey, and in the shared knowledge that is a part of the Baldrige process, that organizations find the greatest return on their investment. This truly is the path to keeping our nation competitive and our businesses sustainable.

I retired from the state of South Carolina public sector in 2011 and continue to be involved in assisting organizations that desire to be on the path of performance excellence and quality service. I encourage you, in whatever role you serve, to begin or continue learning the Baldrige way, and to support it for the benefit of all of us and for future generations. We are all someone's customer, and we should all appreciate and expect excellent service, in every sector of the economy.



Foundation Board Member Frank Fusco (right) with Julie Eddy from South Carolina Greenville Technical College, Gold-level recipient of the South Carolina Governor's Quality Award.

