



Organizational Change Starts With You



Elisabeth Parker
Texas Nameplate Company, Inc.

When I read something about Baldrige it is always about organizational change. Everything starts with the sage advice, “If your CEO isn’t on board, Baldrige won’t work.” I would like to take this opportunity to say, in my humble opinion; Baldrige is missing the trees for the forest. Turning the leaves on just one tree can start changing the color of the forest. Texas Nameplate Company, Inc. recently submitted an application to become a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient this past May. If we receive the award, it will be our third. We know we are a role model business; we have been one for 15 years. Continuously applying for the award gives us the feedback we need to sustain ourselves as a role model business. Writing our application gave me insight about what Baldrige could offer individual employees to increase job satisfaction and engagement, and in turn create organizational change. Using Baldrige I can now better help others develop and grow as employees. I learned about the big picture of our business and how individual contribution fits in to make a difference. And I learned to be patient and the little things do not matter if all the systems are in place and working – everything else will eventually fall in to place. Happiness at work starts with the individual and if you turn those criteria questions around and ask yourself the same questions, there is a lot one person can do to create organizational change whether they are the CEO or the housekeeper.

I started at Texas Nameplate Company, Inc (TNC) in January 2008 as a Human Resources Manager. My basic duties included administrative tasks, facilitating the Employee Survey, creating and maintaining training and Employee Benefits programs and in general, mediating any issues between employees and supervisors. In April 2008, Dale’s father, our founder and Chairman of the Board passed away. In May 2008 our Vice President left with her family to the east coast. Now the funny thing is, with all these events happening in a short period -everything still ran smoothly; production goals were met, spending was within budget, and there were no major disturbances within the plant. Everything ran by itself and everyone just knew what to do and did it well. I’ll be honest; I didn’t know that at the time. Hindsight showed me that. Pesky thing that hindsight.

Dale Crown over, CEO/President, spent time over that summer at home grieving the passing of his father with the rest of his family. When Dale would come into the office, I would sit to talk with him about different incidents I thought needed attention. In turn, what Dale taught me was not to worry. “As long as you’ve got good people, good systems in place, a little money in the bank and you’re good to your customers . . . everything else will be okay. It does not matter what it is. It’s fine.” I thought he was nuts. Being from the school of “*doing*” I thought if something went wrong, you did something about it. Baldrige teaches about the big picture. Most employees focus on what is right in front of them, what we need to teach them is how what is in front of them affects the whole. Most problems just need a little patience.

In the fall of 2008, we began the process to apply for Baldrige again. This is when my business education really began. My formal education began in psychology and human development. Around the same time, I started to study Buddhism and Yoga. Taking my education a step further, I became a Marriage and Family Therapist. After graduate school, I specialized in child therapy using Family Systems and Play Therapy as my guiding theories. I worked with families who, for one reason or another, had to be separated by the state and then needed to work with Child Protective Services to be reunited. After five years, I moved to the business world as a Human Resources Manager. All of the work I had done previously was clinical in nature, meaning I focused on patients and clients. When I began writing the application, I was as far away from Baldrige as a person could be. I have never had a business class. I did

not know what P&L meant. I did not know how to measure productivity or supplier performance. Moreover, I certainly did not understand what made an organization successful and what did not. Baldrige teaches how organizations can succeed or fail. Most employees know what their boss expects out of them, but employees need to know what the organization needs from them.

When I volunteered to write the application, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Dale reassured me, "It's not that hard, just answer some questions, make up a couple charts now and then – they really like those charts so make them pretty, and throw in some results. No big deal." And who was I to question him? TNC had already been down this road a few times and not much had really changed since the first two awards. Answer some questions, make some pretty charts, throw in some results – I could do that. How hard could it be? Boy, hindsight can really make you cringe sometimes, can't it?

In Buddhism there is a story about the 84th problem. The story goes, the farmer had many complaints. He told the Buddha how difficult his life was. It seemed the weather never cooperated and it was either too wet or too dry, so his crops often failed. Also, while his wife was a good woman, she was much too critical of him, and lately his children were showing no gratitude for anything he did for them. Furthermore, his neighbors were much too nosy and seemed to always be interfering in his affairs by spreading gossip about him.

The farmer, finishing his list of complaints, looked expectantly to the Buddha for a solution and was surprised when the Buddha said he could not help him. Instead, he explained all human beings have 83 problems and that is just the way life is. While you can work hard and solve a few problems, once you do, others will soon take their place. Upon hearing this, the farmer, in exasperation, asked, "Then what is the good of all your teaching?" The Buddha replied, "My teaching can't help you with the 83 problems, but perhaps it can help with the 84th." "What's that?" the farmer asked. "The 84th problem," the Buddha said, "is you don't want to have any problems."

Here is what I really learned from writing our Baldrige application. Every company has 83 problems (Baldrige calls them gaps). Employees believe their job satisfaction rests with the resolution of these 83 problems. What the organization already knows, and employees need to embrace is the 84th problem – there will always be problems or gaps. Many times employees believe leaving the company is the answer. Changing organizations will change the types of problems, but all organizations have them. If employees can understand these problems and see how their own individual contribution can make a difference, employees will worry less about the little things, have more patience with the big things, and find a sense of purpose within their own position, therefore becoming more satisfied and more engaged.

Baldrige can do this. I'll prove it to you. Think of yourself as a business. Organizational Profile – Who are you? What is your personal vision and mission? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are you responsible for, and even more importantly, what are you not responsible for? Who is your competition – i.e. how many and who would apply for your job? Leadership - You are the leader. How do you make key decisions within your job? How do you hold yourself accountable to those decisions? How do you inform others about the decisions? How do you incorporate feedback? Strategic Planning – What are your career goals? What are your short and long-term plans? How are you going to ensure the financial resources to attain them? Customer Focus – Your co-workers, employer and anyone you meet while on the job is your customer. How do you know your customers are satisfied with you? How do you gather their feedback? What is your method or system to communicate with them? How do you know it is effective? Measurement and Data Analysis - How do you know what you know? What are the facts to which you make decisions? How do you know they are accurate? Human Focus – You are your own employee. What are the key factors to your job satisfaction and engagement? What is your capacity and capability? Process Management – What is the process to do your job on a daily basis? How do you know it is effective? How much rework do you do? How do you identify areas to improve? How do you ensure you have met the requirements of the task?

Makes your head hurt, doesn't it? If you are a CEO, then by all means take the criteria and make a better company. However, if you are like me, just a regular employee, you can take the criteria and become a better, stronger employee. Baldrige will increase your job satisfaction and show the leaders at your company you are a key person adding value to the organization. Something else I learned from Baldrige – you can talk about a process, but a result to show effectiveness will get someone to listen. So don't tell people about Baldrige, show it through your performance and get them to ask you. They listen better that way.