Baldrige and the Church
A Journey of Excellence Part 2
"Customer" Focus?

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Customer Focus and the Church…the whole thing sounds like one big oxymoron doesn't it? But is it? In Part 1 in the last edition of the Quality Texas Foundation Newsletter, I stated, *"The category of Customer Focus has huge implications to the church as well."* I went on to talk about our overall greeter ministry and how important it was have a great "first impression" - if you didn't read Part 1 you might want to go back and read that article before continuing with this one.

When you really begin to think about it, so much of what the church does really relates to 3.1 – *Customer Engagement*. First and foremost, all that we do should bring honor and glory to God. He is NOT our "customer" but we care for people (our "customers") because He has called us to ministry – ministry to all people. So let's think about the implications of being called to reach out to and minister to people.

The Baldrige Criteria in category 3 states: *"The Customer Focus category examines how your organization engages its customers for long-term marketplace success. This engagement strategy includes how your organization builds a customer-focused culture. Also examined is how your organization listens to the voice of its customers and uses this information to improve and identify opportunities for innovation."* (This is found on page 13 of the 2009-2010 Criteria for Performance Excellence.)

Unlike a company trying to market a particular product, our "prospective customer" does not fit into a certain demographic segment. Some churches "target" a certain age group, for example, but we do not. We have ministries for people in all stages of life. We live in Williamson County, Texas, which has people of all ages. A couple of years ago Georgetown was named the number one place to retire in the country. The same year it was also named the number 2 place in the country to live and launch a new business. So we have made a conscious decision to try and reach all age groups. We have three worship services – all with a different "style" or approach to music and worship. We did not come to that conclusion because we wanted something else to do! This was all about customer engagement. Having three styles presents a strain on human resources, facilities, and finances. Having ministries for all age groups means our facilities are open 7 days a week – including most evenings until 9:00 p.m.

It would take much longer than this one article to explore the whole category criteria and how it applies to the church.   For now, let's be satisfied with looking at just 3.1a(2).   I will comment on it a question or two at a time.

The category begins by asking: *"How do you determine your key mechanisms to support use of your products and enable customers to seek information and conduct their business with you? What are your key means of customer support, including your key communication mechanisms?"* Again, the full answer would be lengthy so I will simply give some quick statements about how this works in the church where I serve. We communicate through our website. We continue to try to make our website user friendly and geared to the person who has not already attended the church. Church members do not go the website often to get information about an activity, etc. so the website is designed for a particular "customer" – the potential prospect. We also have screens in the worship center with announcements running on them before and after every service and on TV screens throughout the campus. The announcements have a segment similar to a news anchor. She tells details about events you cannot put on a slide as the basic details are behind her.   It is looped and the whole

series of announcements only takes a few minutes to go through. This is all about customer engagement.

The next criteria item question is, *"How do they vary for different customers, customer groups, or market segments?"* There are also a number of internal newsletters that are made in-house and distributed to the age-group (certain Bible study classes for example) it is intended to reach. Every age-group segment communicates uniquely to their intended audience. We send out a weekly church-wide email and every-other week there is a video by our Senior Pastor embedded in the email. It is usually about 3 minutes in length. This video also directs people to our website. These are just a few of the kinds of communications we do every week. You could say that all of these mechanisms (and many more) are used to fulfill the first part of 3.1a(2). I haven't even begun to mention various ministries for certain segments in our society such as "Celebrate Recovery" which is for those who face addictions of various kinds. We also have "Grief Share" for those who have recently faced the death of a loved one. "Divorce Care" is also offered for those who have experienced the pain of divorce. All of these classes or workshops are open to the public and advertised on the website, the local newspaper and banners posted in view of the passing public (over 17,000 cars a day!). There is a whole list of other things we do both on our campus and in the community that all relate to being "customer focused" but hopefully you get the idea.

The last questions in the category item are: *"How do you determine your customers' key support requirements? How do you ensure that customer support requirements are deployed to all people and processes involved in customer support?"* This is where it can become very difficult. With some customer segments, such as church members, we interact with on a constant basis and have hundreds of touch points

with them. We are constantly getting feedback (wanted or not!) from people about what they need for training or what they would like to see offered, etc. Many times this information is very helpful in planning what kind of courses to offer and appropriate action can be taken. For some reason we have found that church members are not fond of taking surveys very often so we have not done a "needs" survey in quite a while. With other key customers, such as the first time visitor, it is difficult to get feedback that is helpful to know if their expectations were met when they attended a certain worship service, course or event. If we have their personal information we do call them and often times are successful in getting some feedback from them and a few events we have an evaluation form to fill out and hand in immediately.

Another form of support in the church is making contact with the person or family who has experienced a crisis – illness, death in the family, loss of a job, etc. We are constantly trying to keep from allowing any of these needs to go unmet. We have deacon care teams that will respond appropriately to a crisis. Our ministerial staff is made aware of the situation and one or more respond. Their small-group leader is alerted to the need and emails or calls go out to the group. The person who has experienced the crisis will often have a number of people make contact and meet their need. All of this is part of ensuring that "customer support requirements are deployed to all people and processes involved in customer support."

There have been a number examples over the years of people who attended our church and they came to me at some point to describe their frustration with a need that was not met. Often times in talking with them they become part of the solution. Because they experienced the gap firsthand they are more passionate about making sure no one else experiences the same issue and they get involved- of course all those conversations did not turn out as well!

I sit here now after writing this realizing it is time to end and get back to work on improving some of our processes of customer engagement. It is a *never ending* need!

Taking time to examine how we engage our customers in the church is worth the time and effort. In my opinion its mission critical – take a look at Matthew 28:19-20!