

Chief Executive Officer Commitment to Performance Improvement

St. Joseph Health System

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Many important issues challenge today's Chief Executive Officer in any of today's corporations, including customer focus, regulatory compliance, revenue generation, ethics, expense management, workforce development, revenue stream management and performance improvement, to mention only a few.

Most importantly, the corporation's mission, vision and values structure must be clearly articulated explicitly and implicitly in every decision made throughout the corporation.

Each of these parameters requires the attention of the Chief Executive Officer and the staff directly responsible for the service. Attention can be focused for only so long on each parameter, or there will be an imbalance in the outcomes of the enterprise. One of the best practices to address these multiple parameters and maintain balance is through the use of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award management framework.

This management framework fosters a clear delineation of staff accountabilities for the various parameters. More importantly, however, is the clear focus on the customer and the delineation of the expectations of the customer, through workforce development initiatives; careful integration of the strategic plans of the enterprise; and the use of scorecards to define the success of the initiatives and their outcomes.

For the Chief Executive Officer, the Baldrige criteria provide tools to improve performance practices, and, most importantly, results. The use of the tools really drives a different way of thinking about the strategic initiatives of the organization: not just the elements making up the strategic statement, but the definition of what would be considered successfully to have met the targets at the end of the period.

In organizations today, we are not blessed with a luxury period where we can ponder the potential outcomes of various initiatives for any period of time; rather, results need to fit within narrower and narrower limits of performance. In healthcare, the outcomes of the academic medical centers, following much research and testing of new procedures, are expected to be readily available to the patient populations served throughout the entire delivery spectrum seemingly immediately.

The more informed patient is getting quality driven results and other clinical information through a variety of resources, driven in part by the wide-spread accessibility of the Inter-Net, the enhanced outcomes of performance improvements used throughout the field and the accessibility of results-driven data.

These changing customer expectations are causing healthcare organizations to “scramble” to focus on meeting or exceeding the customer’s expectations. To accomplish this task, any tool needs to be adaptable and help the CEO focus on the primary needs to accomplish the mission, vision and to live out the values of the organization.

The Baldrige criteria have helped the management team of St. Joseph Health System focus on the single source work guide for the entire management team; move beyond the silo management bunkers; focus on deployment of information and results communication to the entire team: Physicians, volunteers, team members, management and leadership.

The two things that I have found most rewarding about the utilization of the Baldrige criteria at St. Joseph Health System have been the following: The constant focus of the criteria from multiple angles fully illuminating the work to be done and guiding the compass/roadmap of performance improvement. Secondly, the increasing encouragement of the leaders, management and non-management when they have been engaged in this journey of improvement has been most gratifying. They are excited to have the opportunity to engage, and to be engaged, by their colleagues throughout the entire system to seek improved ways to fully meet our customer’s expectations.

Richard Chait, in his book, Governance as Leadership, speaks of three responsibilities of governance: stewardship, strategic and generative. I would agree that many governing bodies perform the first two responsibilities, stewardship and strategic, quite well. The third responsibility, generative, is receiving less time and attention generally. I would suggest that the Baldrige criteria deployment will serve to engage the Governing Bodies in new ways to cause a re-prioritization of time to this important leadership responsibility.

We are finding that the implementation of the Baldrige criteria, through a generative process at the staff leadership level, is assisting us in the full deployment of the strategies, processes, performance improvement initiatives and the results thereof throughout the entire System.