



Building Results with Baldrige Feedback

Contributed by
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Health care leaders face a “perfect storm” of challenges to improve their quality, safety, employee and patient engagement and reduce costs. To survive and thrive, leaders must build effective, efficient, collaborative organizations capable of rapid change and improvement. Critical challenges health care leaders report include:

- Aligning leaders and all staff in pursuit of the organization’s goals
- Building commitment and engagement at all levels, including the medical staff
- Rapid adoption of proven methods to build a strong culture and effective processes that generate measurable results in key areas of performance

We can learn from leaders who have succeeded. Many of them have used Baldrige as a transformational strategy. The “*Journey to Excellence*” engages leaders and the workforce alike in effective cycles of assessment, feedback, and improvement. Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Performance Excellence (MGH CPE) studies Baldrige recipients to extract lessons to accelerate progress. Since 2002, we have worked with organizations seeking transformational change, transferring best practices from all of the Baldrige recipients, helping health care delivery and related organizations build lasting improvement results.

Organizations that use Baldrige effectively to achieve and sustain high performance employ systematic methods at each step in the process to ensure that they leverage learning from their Baldrige assessments and make the most of their feedback reports. With our client organizations, we have seen significant gains in results through:

1. Effective design and execution of the application writing process as part of a broader learning and development experience
2. Self scoring workshops with internal leaders who identify their own organization’s strengths and gaps compared against the Criteria
3. Early action on preliminary self assessments to begin making immediate improvements
4. Creative use of the award program feedback to deliver “brutal truth” to foster needed changes in leadership and management processes

1 - Design and execute your application development to promote organizational learning

Baldrige users can gain valuable insights about their organizational “aha” moments throughout their application development cycle, even before a feedback report is received. They can turn these insights into rapid improvements in focus and alignment. However, most organizations fail to take full advantage of the opportunity for organizational learning through application development. We often hear about organizations that treat application writing as just a project, not as an opportunity in and of itself to learn and improve. They struggle through the writing and hope never to hear the “B” word again.

Several organizations we’ve coached have found that a well structured and managed application development process can serve to define early opportunities for improvement, increase critical dialogue within and between functional areas, and develop leaders. Participating in an effective Baldrige journey as a key contributor has more value in experience and on one’s resume in health care than an MBA as many careers have demonstrated.

Begin with “Just-in-Time” learning of the Criteria, rather than broad based Criteria instruction, as the latter typically proves a waste of resources. With our clients, we have seen highly interactive workshops build group knowledge of their own organization as a system. The workshops turn informal processes into formal processes that can function independent of individuals. Multidisciplinary, cross-functional teams

develop the outline of approaches critical to tell the organization's story fully and accurately in a Baldrige application. The emphasis is on creating an effective organization first and writing about it secondarily.

2 - Leverage your application to promote organizational learning

Once an organization has completed an application, we encourage conducting a self scoring workshop within 8 -12 weeks.

Every organization is unique. Each activity must be customized to be effective.

Baldrige users we study and our own clients repeatedly report insights about their organization--“aha” moments—throughout application development. However, most organizations fail to take full advantage of the opportunity for organizational learning presented by their application. We have helped organizations leverage their Baldrige application by using it as a case study to facilitate cross-organizational learning and action. This builds group knowledge of the organization as a system that achieves results, while deepening knowledge of the Baldrige framework and criteria.

A self scoring workshop engages participants, working in multidisciplinary cross-organizational groups, in analyzing their organization as presented in the application, determining strengths and opportunities for improvement, and identifying priorities for action. It enables applicant organizations to get an early start on improvement, ahead of the award process feedback report, and to better understand and “own” the feedback report when it arrives. Our clients particularly value the workshop's effectiveness at breaking down functional barriers among leaders and managers and building a common view of the organization as a system, including its goals, challenges, and key processes, and performance.

One ambulatory multi-specialty health system we worked with conducted two 3 day self scoring workshops with their 150 leaders. Selection for participation was based upon individuals' status as an identified emerging leader. Many critical improvements emerged from their self scoring analysis and this organization went on to improve their processes and results and receive their state's highest honor.

Early action on your “aha's” improves organizational performance and build momentum and engagement All too often we see organizations that wait until they receive their feedback report from the award program many months after it was written and submitted before they take action. This is a mistake. The application development process and self-scoring workshop provide ample actionable information to help focus on a critical few important areas for improvement. More important, by planning a short list of focused actions against internally identified gaps, participants are empowered and engaged. They see this is a process to help them work smarter, not harder. The journey gains credibility as the emphasis is on improvement not the pursuit of an award.

3 - Make the most of your feedback report

Our research shows that every Baldrige award recipient developed a systematic approach to analyze their feedback and use it to improve. One approach that has proven successful is a structured but highly interactive workshop to distill and group key messages and set priorities to focus improvement. Often in health care, early priorities include stopping initiatives or aligning initiatives that are currently operating at cross purposes. Good Baldrige feedback helps leaders focus and align their investments in improvement.

The key output from an effective feedback review process is a set of priorities for action that feed into strategic and operational planning (as well as a list of opportunities to improve the application in the next cycle). Typically, this work should take place soon after your organization receives the feedback report, and ideally should serve as an input to your next cycle of strategic planning.



Every Organization is Unique, but Common Lessons Emerge

Studying the Baldrige leading organizations who successfully transformed their cultures and their organizations, a key lesson emerged. While they are all so very different – in size, scope, geography, culture, market dynamics, challenges, and advantages – there are clear common lessons about leading a successful organizational transformation. Leading change that grows the organization’s culture and produces necessary results is accelerated by experiential learning and crucial conversations. The learning must be systematically and quickly translated into priorities for improvement. Early action and on true gaps build engagement and credibility. Use of feedback to focus improvement builds alignment. Together these approaches help leaders address their critical concerns: building alignment, commitment and engagement while rapidly adopting effective processes that generate measurable results.

The recipients clearly adopted a deep commitment to learning from the brutal truth about their strengths and weaknesses, and engaged broad groups internally in an active change process. We can learn from their journeys and from the accelerated progress we have seen with our own clients that have come from systematically maximizing opportunities for learning and improvement.