



# Baldrige...And The Sharing Of Best Practices

By Monte Guitar, Director of Technical Programs · mguitar@mpa.org

Many of today's quality or business standards provide a framework that allows you the flexibility to define what is most effective for your organization. The ISO-based standards provide core system requirements that are now considered fundamental to having the ability to capture new business. The Malcolm Baldrige Quality Program is based on criteria (the standard) that focus on a much broader series of requirements not mandated by other standards and guidelines.

Most critical to the implementation of any standard is the importance of understanding what is required and educating those who need to be part of the process. With ISO, sometimes the completion of the audit process to maintain certification becomes an over-inflated focus.

With the Malcolm Baldrige process, winning the "award" is not the true goal of the program. With both ISO and Malcolm Baldrige programs, it is the educational process that is most important. It is taking your organization on a continual learning process and ensuring that people partake in this system progression. This learning process is the "best practice" on which we need to focus.

**Baldrige Overview.** The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program is a national education program based on the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. It emphasizes continuous improvement, innovation, integration of processes and results. The program was developed with the idea of increasing the competitiveness, quality and productivity of U.S. organizations for the benefit of all citizens.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is the highest level of national recognition for performance excellence that an American organization can receive. The United States Congress established the award program in 1987 to recognize U.S. companies for their achievements in quality and business performance. It was also established to raise awareness about the importance of quality and performance excellence as a competitive edge.

**Shifting Focus.** While the Baldrige process may have initially been

driven with the betterment of American manufacturing in mind, the applications now show a key shift in those who are willing to apply. Forty-five manufacturing companies chose to apply when the award process began in 1988. In 2007, two manufacturers saw this process to be of value. Where are all of the applicants coming from



now? They are coming from the health care sector. In 2007, there were 42 health care applicants for the award.

Typically, there are fewer than 100 applicants for the Baldrige Award within any given year. The real numbers to focus on are the thousands of companies that use the criteria as an additional input to their planning processes.

An organization does not have to go through the application process to find value with the criteria. A self-assessment and analysis of the

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requirements can be just as beneficial for an organization as a full audit. After all, many companies are in different stages of their organizational development. Using the criteria as a benchmark to what they are currently doing and maintaining compliance to what is mandated can be as effective an approach as any.

The key to looking at any standard, including the Baldrige criteria, is to think of it as an educational process, with less focus on the word "award." When awards are received, there tends to be a collective sigh of relief, and the supporting systems and personnel responsible for the achievement suffer.

Approach this educational process at your own pace. You have the opportunity to do a cost-effective (free) self-assessment. After your own gap analysis review, you can always make the choice to go deeper within the application process.



**Sharing Information.** Those who win the Baldrige Award are required to share their best practices with other businesses at the national "Quest for Excellence" Conference. In 2007, five winners shared their ideas and approaches with conference attendees.

PMPA members drive the improvement and the vision for their association. It is the members who push the vision in their districts with programming unique to the economic times, regulations and district locations. It is the members' participation in the variety of committees and a driving philosophy predicated on teamwork and participation that will trump anything that could be done by an individual that continues to push members toward excellence.

The "criteria" used by PMPA members to drive association best-practice sharing is based on a respect for the past, a drive to perform in the present and a passion for the future.

The type of sharing that is highlighted by the Baldrige process is what the Precision Machined Products Association has been doing since 1933. The association took an additional step in 1961 by delivering relevant technical content within a national technical conference.

The 2008 PMPA National Technical Conference was attended by 173 companies, with 30 of those companies sharing ideas in a formal manner (with technical sessions). Most of the balance of those companies shared their ideas and practices within informal networking sessions.

**Sharing Best Practices?** If the sharing of best practices by PMPA members at national meetings, local meetings and on the Listserves is any indication, the precision machining industry may find that it has already adopted some of the Baldrige criteria. How about your company? To learn more, visit: <http://www.baldrige.nist.gov/Criteria.htm>

Monte Guitar is an ASQ-Certified Quality Auditor and was recently appointed to the 2008 Board of Examiners for the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award.

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