

## The Baldrige Criteria: It's Easy, Free and It Works



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Every time I hear someone complain about how the Baldrige or Texas process is complicated, the Criteria are difficult to use, or they represent more work, I cringe at the misinformation they must have received. I've used the Criteria for more than ten years and I can assure you that none of that is true. It's lack of will, perseverance and determination that makes the difference between failure and success. The Criteria merely provide a framework for us to use. What's so hard about expecting an organization to have some idea of what its employees are doing, how they are doing it and why they are doing it?

Before you make up your mind about the Criteria, think about it for seven days.

### Monday—Strategic Planning

Planning is a simple idea too often made complicated. The Criteria don't have strategic answers; they have strategic questions. These are more significant because they're the commonsense ones you want to answer because they impact your organization. You'll quickly see the Criteria lines up the important questions that help you continuously improve.

**Today:** Review the questions. Do they improve your insights into the way you conduct your own business?

### Tuesday—Customer Focus

When choosing what quality method to use, remember *you* are the customer. If the Criteria are right for you, you'll come around to it eventually. You may "date" other methods and tools for a while, but over time the strengths of the Criteria will be undeniable to those who understand how they apply to their particular organization and business sector. Consider this:

There are similar criteria for business (non-profit/government), healthcare, and education.

Organizations in countries all over the world have adopted the *Baldrige Criteria*.

You can start at the state level and work your way up to the national level.

The Criteria are continually being updated.

The Criteria are free.

**Today:** Compare the other quality methods with what the Criteria offer in depth, breadth and opportunities. As a customer, which one will help you most over the long term.

### Wednesday—Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management

Most organizations already do what the Criteria ask for but they likely don't have a systems perspective for their approaches or deployment. You are already measuring things. Why not use

the Criteria to bring alignment to the things you already do and the measurements you already have, to help you change your focus for the better.

**Today:** Compare all the different management tools to see if they require you to change the way you operate instead of simply reviewing and improving it. Measuring and organizational analysis must drive operational change, or you will not improve.

#### **Thursday—Workforce Focus**

Winning an award isn't the objective. Winning employee loyalty is. If you have a lot of money, maybe you can afford flavor-of-the-month training. Maybe you can afford to hire somebody else to implement a new method and train all your employees. Maybe that person will understand your operations better than any of your own people do. But if you don't have a lot of money, why not make things simple. The Criteria allow you to engage your workforce at all levels. The concepts are easy to understand. For minimal time and money, you can become an examiner and learn from experts.

**Today:** Compare the common sense Baldrige Criteria approach to staff engagement with other programs.

#### **Friday—Process Management**

The Criteria don't process people. Instead, people process their work better by using the Criteria. While many organizations may already have some quality method (ISO 9000 and Six Sigma, for example), these methods used alone seem to me like having other people telling me how to run my business. The Criteria don't do that. They don't process you. You do your processes, and then link them from a Criteria and systems perspective. It's all about approach, deployment, learning and integration — are you doing the right things. Other methods, while important and useful, tend to focus on efficiency more than effectiveness.

**Today:** Compare what it takes to succeed with each quality management method. All quality methods and tools can be used with the Criteria, if the Criteria itself is your systems approach.

#### **Saturday—Results**

When I was a kid working at my dad's company, I noticed businesses raised their prices to make more money or to provide raises for employees. But many companies quickly learned they could not raise the prices of their products or services unless they raised their quality and performance - customers required better results. Unfortunately, some businesses still haven't figured that out. The Criteria provide organizations the opportunity to understand little things we think we know but don't do. Texas and Baldrige recipients (or anyone fully implementing the Criteria) - whether business is good or bad - always know where they stand and why. They would disagree with the "it's the economy, stupid" outlook. We become the masters of our own fate.

**Today:** Compare the feedback you'll get from the different quality management tools with the in-depth feedback Texas and Baldrige examiners will give you about how to improve your organization for better results. The Baldrige process, through the national and state programs is the only approach that provides extensive analysis and feedback of an entire organization.

#### **Sunday—Leadership**

I've listed the first category last to leave you with emphasis on how critical this is. It's more important to figure out what you *want* to use rather than what you think you *need* to use. That's a leadership decision. If the improvement system you use doesn't instill passion in your gut, how do you expect to continue working with it over the long haul, year after year? The Baldrige Criteria will inspire you and help you lead people. That's why Texas Nameplate's core values are so important to our company.

**Strategic planning** that looks at the future from an agile, systems perspective.

**Performance excellence** driven by our customers, markets and love of family

**Wise practices** that use measurements, analysis and knowledge to help take courses of action based on facts, judgments and decision making processes.

**Resources** that value our people first and offer both personal and organizational learning.

**Process management** that welcomes and nurtures innovation.

**Charted results** that track, project and compare results valuable to stakeholders.

**Visionary leadership** that encourages purposeful work, public responsibility and good citizenship.

Leadership is responsible for ensuring that the business is run based on its values. I suggest you determine the values of your own organization and ask yourself how you communicate and implement them.

**Today:** Compare all the various improvement methods and ask yourself whether you are really willing to commit to an improvement program. In no improvement approach, other than the Baldrige and state Baldrige Criteria-based programs, will you have a community of peers on whom you can rely for good counsel.

There will always be people who try to make simple ideas complicated. But, if you just read through the Criteria and think about it for a week, I know you will conclude that despite what the misinformed may say, this isn't expensive, complicated or difficult. It's just common sense and it works.