



## Tips from Mystery Consultants, Not Inc.

An applicant writes.

Dear Mystery Consultants,  
Some of the responses in our application don't score very high. What is the problem?  
Signed  
Flummoxed in Pflugerville

Dear Flummoxed.

Pflugerville is a wonderful place to be whether you are flummoxed or living phat, friend.

It could be that you are not responding to the most basic requirement for any response to a Criteria requirement - describe an effective, systematic approach. This is the key requirement to move above the 30% Scoring Band for all 12 Process Items in the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. What is an “effective, systematic approach”? The Criteria booklet Glossary provides this information.

### An Approach

The term “**approach**” refers to how an organization addresses the Baldrige Criteria requirements, i.e., the methods and processes used by the organization. Approaches are evaluated on the basis of the appropriateness of the methods and processes to the Item requirements, the effectiveness of their use, and their alignment with organizational needs.

A response must demonstrate that it has the potential to achieve the intended purpose. In many cases, this is where a more careful reading of the Criteria helps. Pick any Process Item. Read it carefully. You will see at the end of many specific requirements the word “to” followed by a phrase.

For example: “*1.1b(1) How do senior leaders take an active role in reward and recognition programs **to reinforce HIGH PERFORMANCE** and **a focus on the organization**, as well as on PATIENTS and other CUSTOMERS?*”

If you merely report how senior leaders participate in various reward and recognition programs without demonstrating how these programs or their participation accomplishes the two specific purposes listed in the Criteria, the process you describe does not demonstrate effectiveness. It did not accomplish the purpose expected. It may be effective in accomplishing other valid purposes, but that does not address the Criteria requirement as stated here. You should provide that response in 5.1a(3), which asks, “HOW does your WORKFORCE PERFORMANCE management system consider WORKFORCE compensation, reward, recognition, and incentive practices?” This is open ended to capture the many other logical purposes that reward and recognition programs might be deployed to accomplish.

### An Effective Approach

The term “**effective**” refers to how well an approach, a process, or a measure addresses its intended purpose. Determining effectiveness requires the evaluation of how well a need is met by the approach taken, its deployment, or the measure used.

First, the process you describe may not be a process at all. It may just be a series of “activities.” A pile of activities is not a process. Not ever. Not even with Divine

intervention or electrical current. This is the most common gap. The response is merely a pile of activities, linked by good intentions, not purpose.

Second, you can determine effectiveness through measures and demonstrate effectiveness by reporting results for these measures in the appropriate Results Item. So what you see as effective, may not be seen as effective by a team of Examiners when they see no results for that process.

### **An Effective, Systematic, Approach**

The term “**systematic**” refers to approaches that are repeatable and use data and information so that improvement and learning are possible. In other words, approaches are systematic if they build in the opportunity for evaluation and learning and thereby permit a gain in maturity.

First, the most frequent omission is not to provide any evidence that the process is measured or that the measures are used for improvement. Most Examiners will give you “the benefit of the doubt” if you merely say you use the improvement process described in P.2c or 6.2b to improve this process. If you chose this route, be prepared to be asked to provide evidence that this process was actually improved at least one time using the improvement process described during the site visit. Many teams make a list of processes applicants say they have improved, and use it to verify deployment of the improvement process. (I hear heavy sighs of all the folks who are using this method to get around actually improving processes, but have not had a site visit yet. Be forewarned, since Baldrige is a systems approach, there is no place to hide “loose ends.”

Second, the “process” you describe does not demonstrate repeatability. The vast majority of business “processes” are not processes at all. That’s why there is an ASQ, a Baldrige, a Six Sigma, a Lean, and an ISO. The widespread deficiency in all organizations is calling a “pile of activities” a process when it is not. This is especially prevalent in service “processes” which are found in all organizations. A series of steps performed differently each time or differently by different people or differently in different locations are not systematic processes. Actually, these are all indicators that there is no process, systematic or not.

### **One type of response that is NOT systematic is one that is merely anecdotal.**

The term “**anecdotal**” refers to process information that lacks specific methods, measures, deployment mechanisms, and evaluation/improvement/learning factors. Anecdotal information frequently uses examples and describes individual activities rather than systematic processes.

An anecdotal response to how senior leaders deploy performance expectations might describe a specific occasion when a senior leader visited all company facilities. On the other hand, a systematic approach might describe the communication methods used by all senior leaders to deliver performance expectations on a regular basis, the measures used to assess effectiveness of the methods, and tools and techniques used to evaluate and improve the communication methods.

Mystery Consultants is a group of experienced Baldrige Examiners that want to share some of their “secrets.” Not every consultant does the things the way we do. Our motto is “*We may or may not be the best, but are most mysterious.*” Read again next time when MC demystifies yet another Baldrige

enigma.

Until then, happy improving.