

Why They Call It A Journey

Central Texas Workforce

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“Journey” – I remember hearing the phrase “journey” and thinking, “How hard can this be? You just set a destination, make a plan, gather your resources and go there.” Here it is 14 years later, and all I can do is laugh at my innocence. We set a destination, we’ve moved forward in spite of unexpected detours, and we’ve arrived. We’ve Won!!

Unfortunately, our “arrival” is somewhat anticlimactic. We’ve learned along the way and have gained the knowledge that we’ve only just begun our journey. Metaphorically, if we were traveling across the United States, we would still be in Texas. Of course we are comforted by the knowledge that no one ever leaves Texas by choice. Realistically, we can look back and see who we used to be; we can look at our feedback report and realize we’re not who we want to be yet; and we can look forward and see what we want to become. That is the value of the criteria. It helps you find your blind spots. It promotes continuous improvement. It encourages you to focus on the parts of your business that are the most important.

You may be curious to hear about what we did when we won. At Central Texas Workforce, we closed our offices early on a Friday afternoon (a rare treat in itself) and brought everyone together to make “the BIG announcement.” We reenacted the telephone call from Quality Texas with the assistance of CEO, Bill Denney. Everyone heard the news and celebrated together – although Bill is still complaining of temporary hearing loss. We had music, balloons, a PowerPoint with staff photos, Workforce of Winners prizes (this time they were Texas lottery scratch offs), and best of all LOTS and LOTS of ice cream. You may be thinking, “Well of course they celebrated – they won!” The truth is, we had a similar celebration last year when we went to site visit but weren’t selected. Another value of the criteria is that we’ve learned to value our staff and celebrate our milestones.

For Central Texas Workforce, the criteria have become the foundation for the way we do business. Even though we are government funded and regulated, we “Do Business, Like Business, for Business.” Our resources are aligned through our purpose statement, “Creating Futures by Bringing People and Jobs Together.” Our strategy map presents a “line of sight” that helps our staff, partners, and stakeholders see how our leadership foundation creates a culture that supports our core competencies, defines and measures our processes, focuses on our market segment requirements, and ultimately achieves stakeholder value. We are supported by our governance model which empowers staff to make decisions and to satisfy their customers within the parameters set by our values. Yes, everyone in our organization knows, “In all our actions and decisions Central Texas

Workforce values: customer-focus, accountability, quality, teamwork and integrity.”

Our Central Texas Quality Champions are in the process of designing and preparing for the four workshops we are responsible for at the Quality Texas conference on June 16-18. We were told that our topics were assigned based on the strengths the site visit team identified while on site. To be perfectly honest, we were not surprised to see “The Organization as a Team” – after all, we’ve been selected as one of the “Best Companies to Work for in Texas” for three consecutive years, and we far outpace our peers and other state agencies in Texas’ Survey of Organizational Excellence. On the other hand, we’ve just returned from Baldrige’s Quest for Excellence conference where we saw best practices from world-class organizations – imagine how humbled we were to see that our process strategies were identified as a best practice. Even today, I sit wondering if anyone is ever completely satisfied with their processes – Oh, that’s right, if processes were perfect, they wouldn’t need a continuous improvement cycle built into them.

Central Texas Workforce began its “journey” in 1994 when government began placing an emphasis on “results”, the U.S. Department of Labor began a Baldrige-based “Pioneers” program to help workforce programs and agencies begin their journey. They provided training, and within a few years they implemented an “Enterprise” awards program that recognized workforce agencies with Baldrige-based, customer-driven, role-model practices. When quality initiatives lost their priority emphasis in government, most workforce agencies shifted their attention to new initiatives. Central Texas Workforce chose to stay the course. We were “hooked” because we knew that the principles would make us a place that businesses and job seekers would seek out for services, a place with a positive reputation among our stakeholder and peers, a place that gives back to our communities.

Yes, we are on a journey . . . a never ending quest. We will never “arrive” and will continue to look for what is around the corner and look forward to finding where we want to go next. We used to think that applying the criteria was a “thing to do” rather than “a way to do things”. Now we know the journey isn’t extra work; it is a way to promote innovation, a method for engaging our workforce, a chance to manage change and stabilize our organization. Perhaps rare for government agencies, it is our chance to demonstrate positive results. Most of all, starting and continuing on the journey is a **way to turn work into an adventure.**

Central Texas Workforce is one of 28 regional organizations responsible for planning, oversight, and evaluation of all publicly funded workforce programs and services in Texas. Created by the Legislature in 1995, Central Texas Workforce is responsible for developing local Workforce Centers and service providers in Bell, Coryell, Hamilton, Lampasas, Milam, Mills, and San Saba counties in central Texas. Workforce training programs are provided through three large Workforce Centers and three smaller Centers serving rural businesses and job seekers. The Mission of the organization is to provide quality education, training and labor market services that give employers and job seekers of the region a competitive advantage in the global economy. Major strengths of Central Texas Workforce include communication and commitment to listening to staff and stakeholders; innovative approaches to allocation of resources; high performance; and development and retention of a highly motivated and tenured staff by providing quality benefits, an environment that rewards exceptional performance and a sense of empowerment that results in a high quality customer experience.