



**Baldrige and the Church
A Journey of Excellence
Part 1**



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I distinctly remember a day about three decades ago in a class in Seminary discussing personnel related issues in the church. The professor very proudly made the statement about a church he was working with taking the personnel policies from a local business and adapting them to use for the Personnel Policies of the church. I raised my hand and asked, *“Isn’t that backwards? Shouldn’t we, as the church, be setting the standards for the business community when it comes to personnel policies? After all, who better than the church to set the example on how to treat people?”* The professor replied, “Good point”...there was a long pause...and then we continued our discussion and never revisited my comment.

Thus began a slow and often painful journey of finding a way to instill excellence in the life of the local church in such a way that the business community can identify with and recognize it as not only appropriate but also “excellent.” It wasn’t until a few years ago when I was introduced to the Baldrige Criteria that I found a framework to use to truly build excellence into every process in the life of the church.



Any local church of any size will have a multitude of processes that need to be documented, practiced, revised, and a put into motion. (Plan, Do, Check, Act sound familiar to anyone?) The first thing to tackle in looking at the Criteria is the “OP.” Writing an Organizational Profile can be as difficult a task for a church as it is for any business, regardless of maturity level. Questions must be answered such as, *“What are your organization’s main product offerings? What are the delivery mechanisms used to provide your products to the customer? What are the key characteristics of your organizational culture? What are your stated purpose, vision, values, and mission?”* These questions are just the beginning of the Organizational Profile and on the surface seem easy for any church to answer. Try answering those simple questions about the church you attend. Once you sit down and begin to write it suddenly becomes more demanding and thought provoking. Just as these are basic questions that any business needs to answer as they journey toward growth and excellence so must any church. Gaps of all kinds can be revealed, many gaps that are not be realized until you try to document your church’s processes. Thinking through and putting together an OP for the church will bring a great deal of clarity to the ministry and direction of the congregation.

Once you get into the criteria it quickly becomes evident of how it applies to the processes of the church. The first category of criteria is Senior Leadership. I would encourage any church leader (member or paid staff) to answer the overall question of *“How do your senior leaders lead?”* Answering the questions in item “a) Vision, Values, and Mission” and item “b) Communication and Organizational Performance” would bring great clarity to how the Senior Pastor/Minister leads and

communicates. And as a side note, if every church would answer the question *“How do senior leaders personally promote an organizational environment that fosters, requires, and results in legal and ethical behavior?”* there would be far fewer financial scandals in the church. Because the church where I serve has answered that question we have policies and procedures in place that prevent one or two people from doing anything that would cause a financial problem that would greatly affect the church. I know a minister who is now serving time in prison because of embezzlement but his church had no policies in place that would have prevented him from taking advantage of the congregation. By proactively answering the question dealing with legal and ethical matters, much pain and suffering would have been avoided. It would be easy to go through every question in the criteria and make a direct application to the church and the benefit it would bring to any Christian organization. The Baldrige Criteria should never be seen as a threat to the church but rather an aid to help the local church ensure its sustainability into the future.

I have heard someone say that when you become an Examiner for Quality Texas that the Criteria Booklet becomes your “Bible.”

I understand the sentiment of that statement but I would strongly disagree! To use a phrase from an infamous political discussion,

“I know the Bible and the Baldrige Criteria isn’t it!” HOWEVER, I have never found anything in the Criteria that contradicts Scripture – and that is the beauty of Baldrige and applying the Criteria to the church!

Strategic Planning is a Category many churches totally ignore. There is nothing “spiritual” about a lack of planning! Do a word search in Scripture for “plan, plans, and purpose” and you will quickly see that God is a “planner” by nature. He is The Ultimate Strategic Planner. One example is found in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* Far too often the church marches ahead without direction and wonders why unclear goals are not achieved. The Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth about clarity when he writes in I Corinthians 14:8, *“Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?”* Too many churches are sounding an unclear trumpet when it comes to vision, direction and clarity of purpose.

The category of Customer Focus has huge implications to the church as well. For example, we consider a key group of “customers” are our “first time visitors.” Because they are important to us we have a number of processes that directly impact them as a group. We have a whole team of people who are involved at various levels called Our FIT Group. FIT stands for “First Impressions Team.” We have an ideal process for what happens when the first time visitor drives into our parking lot. There is then a process to hand them off to the next level of the FIT Group – our Welcome Center greeters – where there is also a process to get information about them, their family, etc. From there we have a process for introducing them to a greeter in a classroom or Worship Center, depending on where they are going first. Our goal is that each first time visitor comes into personal contact with at least three or four people before they ever sit down in a classroom or Worship Service. If we have their contact information then a whole other set of processes come into play in making personal contact with them including calls, cards, and even a delivery of fresh-baked homemade cookies from a church member who lives in their neighborhood.

I have just begun to scratch the surface on how Baldrige and the Church can truly be a journey of Excellence. We have not had time to mention work systems and emergency readiness (major implications for the church in today’s world). This list could go on and on!

I believe it is time for the local churches to set the standard for excellence in everything she does to the glory of God! Baldrige can be a great framework in helping the church in the journey of excellence.