

It's Easy, It's Free, and It Works!

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"It's easy, it's free, and it works!" That's Dale Crownover's perspective on the criteria for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Dale's advice for any company that wants to improve is to become familiar with the "Criteria for Performance Excellence" and use the questions available there to enhance every aspect of your organization.

Dale should know! He's the President of the Texas Nameplate Company, a 75-employee Dallas company that won the National Quality Award in 1998 and in 2004. Dale anticipates that the company will apply again in 2010. Ah, but it has not been an easy journey.

Once plagued by error-prone production and dwindling profits, the turnaround began in 1991 in response to a rejection notice from one of its largest customers. Only a high school graduate at the time, Crownover borrowed money to purchase a computer to learn about and implement a system of statistical process control, demanded by General Dynamics (now Lockheed Martin).

How do I know all this? I met Dale Crownover last week at the annual Georgia Oglethorpe Awards conference in Atlanta. He was the keynote speaker at the Awards luncheon on the second day of the event. I was the featured speaker who opened the conference on the first day, with a follow-up breakout session for those interested in more detail the second day.

Also, I've started reading Dale Crownover's book *Take It to the Next Level: A Story of the Quest for Quality and the Malcolm Baldrige Award*. In the book, Dale recognizes his employees' "desire, determination, and commitment to make the company better, not bigger." Dale emphasized this strategy of improvement in his speech. The quest for quality is making his company better!

At the state level, the "Criteria for Performance Excellence" are the same as for the National Quality Award, but there are three incremental steps in the state awards. At this year's conference, two organizations received Step 1, the "Georgia Focus Recognition." Five organizations received the Step 2, "Georgia Progress Award." Sadly, none of the recipients are from middle-Georgia!

But middle-Georgia organizations could be leading the pack in future years! The value of applying is that you receive free feedback from highly qualified examiners who evaluate and offer suggestions on your application. The criteria cover seven main aspects of your organization; here are the categories.

Leadership. In organizations of excellence, leaders communicate organizational values, direction, and performance expectations, aimed at creating value for customers and other stakeholders.

Strategic Planning. Organizations of excellence develop long-range objectives and deploy these concepts in the organization, building action plans consistent with key performance indicators.

Customer and Market Focus. Organizations of excellence satisfy the requirements, expectations, and preferences of their customers and investigate ways to meet customers' future needs.

Workforce Utilization. Organizations of excellence have work systems and learning opportunities to support performance excellence and encourage personal and organizational growth.

Process Management. Organizations of excellence have operations for producing their products and services that are reliable and repeatable, and these systems are executed flawlessly.

Results. Organizations of excellence have superior and improving results in the areas of customer satisfaction, financial performance, human resource development, and social responsibility.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management. Organizations of excellence use the information gathered about all of these categories to continuously seek and implement improvement.

You may obtain a free copy of the "Criteria for Performance Excellence" by calling 301-975-2036 or by sending an e-mail request to nqp@nist.gov. Order a copy, look it over, capture your questions, and then give me a call so I can help you understand what you are reading.

As your leadership coach, Dennis Hooper will support your organization's move toward genuine excellence. Call Dennis at (478)-988-0237, or e-mail him at dhooper2@juno.com.