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## Creating value and results

### Troubled times foster innovation

By *Triche Guenin*



The theme for the recent 8th annual Colorado Performance Excellence (CPEX) conference centered on sharing lessons learned and best-in-class practices, especially in understanding how high performance organizations create value during a downturn in the economy.

Keynote presentations were made by three Baldrige National Quality Award (BNQA) recipients: City of Coral Springs Florida, Cargill Corn Milling headquartered in Minneapolis, and Colorado's Poudre Valley Healthcare System. Each shared their journey on earning the country's highest recognition of performance excellence.

In addition, a panel discussion was moderated to answer questions specific to working in turbulent times. Representatives from a second Colorado BNQA recipient, UNC's Montfort College of Business, joined the other Baldrige winners on the panel. A snapshot of the Q&A to the group follows, with a summary of their answers:

Q: When cutting back, how do you foster a culture that retains open communication, high performance work, and an engaged workforce?

A: Transparency in knowing all the facts and understanding what is happening is essential: being well informed breeds trust, unknown angst. Even with tough choices, the workforce will understand - it's the surprise that creates distrust.

Q: During these troubled times, how do you innovate product/service offerings to attract new customers and retain relationships with current ones?

A: Sometimes having business NOT occur as usual can provide an environment to foster innovation. People are no longer able to "do" things by themselves and are reliant on bringing in others, with different ideas, into the fold to do so - that fosters innovation.

A: Continue to build customer relationships. Find out what it takes for THEM to be successful and align with those needs. However, don't be shortsighted and stray from your core competencies just to keep/get them - you'll be setting yourself up for your own failure

Q: What has your leadership done to create an economically sustainable organization?

A: Focus on the sustainability and success of the customer. Become more aggressive on sales

A: Keep on the cutting edge so get more innovative approaches for customers. Build on core quality and reputation, especially when bringing on new products/services when trust is needed

A: Work with suppliers to determine how to expand/distribute and essentially spread the risk

A: Be financially responsible, don't overextend, be fiscally creative, invest back into the business when times are good so that have a solid base

A: Cut non-essentials. Be proactive in determining what to cut - tactically vs. strategically.

A: Invest in your people upfront - if they're satisfied, they'll do a better job and customer satisfaction will increase, they'll be more creative so bring more innovative ideas to the table, and they'll be happier and turnover with its associated costs and poor quality will decrease.

Q: What best practices have allowed you to sustain momentum during these tough economic times?

A: Focus on innovation - all employees are encouraged to participate not only for customer related products/services and processes, but also internally

A: Engagement of our workforce - empowering them and placing the tools in their hands to make decisions, encouraging them to work in teams and learn from each other

A: Formalizing our processes, especially the strategic development process. It's now hard wired, replicable, helps keep us on track, and builds momentum into the framework

A: Listening/responding - ask for input, take feedback and develop solutions, and share results

A: Transparency with internal personnel and customers/partners - we're all working towards each other's success

A: Tracking/trending data at front end in order to benchmark against the competition as well as better understand our customer's changing needs

A: Look to other industries for best practices. Examples include Union Pacific for their innovative processes, Wainright Industries and FedEx for their employee satisfaction, Disney for their movement of people throughout their facility, MedRad for their topbox methodology on metrics, and the cruise lines and Ritz Carlton for their service perspective, to name a few.

Many Colorado based organizations are looking to CPEX, the state's Quality program, mirrored after the Baldrige National Quality Award program, to help jumpstart them on their journey towards excellence. Some are looking at the downturn in the economy as an opportunity to work ON their businesses rather than running around IN their businesses. Regardless of the reason for their commitment to making a change, the Colorado Performance for Excellence program provides a foundation from which organizations can springboard to new opportunities: building in agility to better weather future economic downturns, continued growth, entering new markets, innovation in new products/services, etc.

**To learn more about the Colorado Performance Excellence program, look at <http://www.coloradoexcellence.org/>.**

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