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Riding the wave

These organizations used innovation as their surfboard

By *Triche Guenin*



While many organizations are cutting costs, delaying investments or hustling customers, others are using the downturn in the economy as an opportunity to work on their internal operations.

Last month's 8th annual Colorado Performance Excellence (CPEX) conference recognized those organizations which are investing in themselves. The Quest for Excellence Forum centered on sharing lessons learned and best-in-class practices from those that made the investment earlier and are weathering the storm successfully.

CPEX is Colorado's version of the Baldrige National Quality Award (BNQA) program. It is dedicated to serving the people of Colorado by cultivating performance excellence that generates outstanding results. The program follows the criteria, format and process similar to the BNQA program. To accommodate the smaller and younger organizations in the state, the program is comprised of different levels, each building on the last:

- o High Plains - identifies the competitive factors that influence the organization's environment, defines key strategic challenges they face, and the systems for improvement utilized by the organization
- o Foothills - uses six basic criteria to identify the approaches an organization follows to achieve performance excellence
- o Timberline - assesses the organization's approaches, feedback methodologies, consistency in integration and deployment throughout the organization
- o Peak - recognizes an organization's sustained systemic approaches, deployment and associated results. This essentially mirrors the national Baldrige program.

Susan Kirkpatrick, Executive Director of Colorado Department of Local Affairs, recognized the state's 2009 CPEX recipients. As a board member for the 2008 Healthcare Baldrige recipient, Poudre Valley Healthcare Systems, she has first hand knowledge and appreciation for the journey the recipients have gone and are going through. She presented the High Plains award to the following organizations:

- o Allosource - a non-profit provider of bone and tissues allografts
- o Elevations Credit Union - banking solutions for Boulder and Broomfield counties
- o S.M. Stoller Corporation - environmental consulting focusing on high- hazard site and groundwater remediations
- o Thompson School District - Colorado's 16th largest school district (preK-12) in the Loveland/Berthoud area
- o Colorado Department of Labor & Employment - Jefferson County Workforce Center

The Foothills Award was presented to the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment - Workforce Boulder County and Mesa County Valley School District #51.

Ten members of the Denver Health leadership team, comprised of executives and physicians, accepted the Timberline Award. They are Colorado's primary "safety net" healthcare institution: more than 25 percent of Denver residents are treated and one in three children cared for by Denver Health physicians.

The award program performs on an annual cycle and welcomes any/all types of organizations - large/small, public/private, profit/non-profit, and manufacturing/service/education/healthcare /government. Organizations do not compete against each other; rather, they are individually evaluated on how they perform against the criteria. Therefore, there is sometimes more than one recipient in an award level and in some cases none, in a given cycle.

The criteria are the same as those used in the Baldrige National Quality Award program, which are reviewed, evaluated and updated every two years. The current criteria are for the 2009/2010 periods. They are very thorough and encompass the following areas: leadership (e.g. vision/mission/values, governance, stewardship), strategic planning, knowledge about the customer and markets, measurement/analysis & knowledge management, focus on the workforce and an understanding and robustness of all processes (both internal as well as those outsourced). All of these six criteria, then, also need to be measured, tracked, trended, benchmarked and improvements demonstrated.

It is a robust initiative that requires time and resources. It takes a leader with vision and a commitment to steer their organizations toward a sustainable future. Many times it requires a culture change.

However, even if an award is not attained, the journey itself is rewarding and major improvements and associated benefits will be achieved. Ask any of the recipients along the journey....

The CPEX program enables an organization to do this in realistic and attainable chunks via the different award levels. Is now the time to invest in your organization's future and long term path of excellence?

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

Triche Guenin is President of Partners Through Change, Inc., a process improvement firm that helps organizations become more efficient/effective in their day-to-day operations. She can be reached at 303-777-9680 or www.partnersthroughchange.com.
