
***Minnesota Council for Quality Stakeholder Update
February, 2002***

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1. Preface

Some of you are long-time supporters of the Minnesota Council for Quality -- thank you! Others of you are not as familiar with our organization, but have been placed on our newsletter distribution because I feel that you might eventually get value from our services.

In either case, I would like to set some context. The Minnesota Council for Quality is a 13-year old non-profit with a mission of helping organizations improve their performance and/or competitiveness. Our core product is a comprehensive assessment (based on Baldrige) that helps organizations identify strengths and improvement opportunities. While this assessment is the foundation of the prestigious Minnesota Quality Award, many organizations are using the process for general improvement and learning.

Over the last few months, we have begun asking our current, past, and potential customers how to improve our assessment product and what other improvement-related services might be of value to their organizations. Beginning in this newsletter -- and as a result of these conversations -- we will begin to outline some of the exciting changes we are making at the Council. This will be a gradual process, and I welcome your ideas, feedback, and comments.

Sincerely, Brian Lassiter, President

2. 2002 MQA Assessment Process Changes

Over the last few months, we have spent time talking to past, current, and potential assessment customers to identify potential improvements to our process. Though we are not finished gathering improvement data, we have identified some key changes to our 2002 process. In short, we're listening!

* We are moving to a more "continuous" or "rolling" cycle. In the past, the Council had a rigid timeline for the Award assessment. If it did not conform to your organization's planning timeline or other needs, you just had to make do. Beginning this year, we will offer assessments on the organization's timetable: when you are ready for an assessment, we'll have trained Evaluators ready for you. For those organizations that prefer the discipline of deadlines, we will still offer a defined schedule (look for that announcement soon). We hope that this rolling process will be much more customer focused. However, it requires changes in our process, namely...

* We will be offering two Evaluator training sessions this year instead of the usual one. The first training will be for the Class of 2002 Board of Evaluators and is scheduled for March 1 (for new Evaluators) and April 2-4 (for all Evaluators). The Class of 2003 Evaluators will be trained in September 6 (new) and October 4-6 (all). Having two sessions a year will allow us to have a trained pool of Evaluators from which to field teams when participating companies signal they are ready. Obviously, it requires a bit of flexibility on behalf of the Evaluators: in the past, you could count on individual reviews in late summer, consensus in early fall, and site in late fall. With the new process, you may get an assignment anytime in 2002; however, we promise to give you enough lead time to make a decision as to your availability to complete the assignment.

* We are also changing the pricing schedule for Evaluator training. As you all know, the Council has had a challenging financial situation for the last few years. But we feel that charging our Evaluators for their volunteer time and expertise is asking quite a lot! As a result, we are now offering a tiered pricing schedule: full price for new Evaluators (with the theory that they will receive the most developmental value from the training and assessment experience), half-price for second-year Evaluators (with the theory that they are more valuable and do not have quite the learning curve as rookies), and free for Evaluators with three or more years' experience. This new system covers our costs, rewards Evaluator loyalty and retention, and hopefully will improve the experience level -- and therefore quality -- of our Board of Evaluators. There will still be discounts for member organizations as well.

* We will also be making other changes in 2002, such as: having on-site Award celebrations in addition to our annual public recognition, researching and offering additional assessment tools (even simpler than Baldrige Express) for organizations desiring an entry point into the process, offering a "user group" for new participating organizations, improving the quality of our training, improving our communications, and so forth. Look for more announcements on these changes in the near future.

And, as always, we welcome your feedback!

3. Seeking 2002 Board of Evaluators

As mentioned above, the first of two 2002 Evaluator training sessions is fast approaching. With nearly 20 organizations that have expressed interest in a 2002 assessment, we are looking to increase the size and quality of our Board of Evaluators. One-day training for new Evaluators is March 1 and training for all Evaluators is April 2-4.

Pricing has been reduced (and in some cases eliminated), and we hope that will encourage some of the more senior/experienced Evaluators to reapply. We are also exempting current Baldrige Examiners from the training requirement, as you obviously receive training in Washington.

If you are interested in applying and did not receive an application by email earlier this week, please contact Kathryn Mackin at mc4quality@aol.com. If you have any questions about being an Evaluator, please contact Kathryn, Brian Lassiter, or any of the Council Board of Directors. We hope you will consider applying!

4. The Rest of the Council's Vision

Over the next few months, you will begin to see changes in the Council. As has been communicated already, we are trying to identify customer and stakeholder needs and then adapt our products, services, and operations to meet those needs. To identify stakeholder requirements, we have completed a three focus groups and have at least two more getting scheduled. In addition, we have talked to more than 50 other stakeholders one-one-one; in essence, we are on a constant quest for feedback.

As a result of our exploration, we have tentatively identified four strategies for the Council's future:

A) Improve the quality of the Award and assessment processes. As mentioned above, there are many actions we are taking to improve the quality of the experience and the value of the service to both participating organizations as well as Evaluators and other stakeholders.

B) Build a clearinghouse of improvement-related services. Once an organization understands its strengths and improvement opportunities, the tough work begins: changing processes and operations to improve performance and competitiveness. Instead of actually delivering services to help organizations improve, the Council will focus on brokering those services. We will be working to build a website (which will help improve our overall communications and awareness issues as well) that offers a database of

consultancies, training houses, and other improvement-related resources such as benchmarking sources, whitepapers, links, and so forth. We have heard from the marketplace that there is a need for organizations to quickly identify options to help them on their improvement journey; the Council's goal is to bring those options to you.

C) Build performance excellence in the education sector. This initiative has two primary objectives: 1) bring improvement principles, tools, and techniques to the future of Minnesota business -- our students, and 2) bring improvement principles, tools, and techniques to a sector of the market that otherwise does not have equal access or resources to acquire them -- small, out-state business. This collaborative effort will bring together several stakeholders: vendors who have improvement-related expertise will train out-state college professors and high school teachers on techniques such as Baldrige, Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard, ISO, and so forth. Those educators will then build this knowledge into their curriculum -- exposing students to these concepts much earlier than they are now -- as well as use this expertise to consult with and assist small businesses in their communities. While the details are not yet final, we believe this strategy will benefit Minnesota in many ways.

D) Build an internal infrastructure to support the first three strategies. The Council needs to improve its communication, its internal processes, and its resources in order to help Minnesota organizations achieve performance excellence. One of the primary initiatives in this strategy is to increase the number and size of our memberships; essentially, we need funds to make the necessary changes above. However, in the past, the Council asked for memberships under the guise of corporate citizenship -- a donation of sorts.

While investing in the Council certainly is a responsible, noteworthy thing to do, we believe that asking for corporate "hand-outs" -- particularly in this tough market -- is unacceptable. As such, we are working to identify elements of value that organizations will receive from its membership: things like training discounts, admission or discounts to OTHER organizations' services who are partnering with the Council, scholarships to Evaluator training (for either your organization or an organization that could use assistance, such as education or public sector), sponsorship of non-profit or education organizations who cannot afford an assessment, and so forth.

Look for additional communication on our strategic vision in the coming months. If you have questions, concerns, or feedback please contact the Council at mc4quality@aol.com or the president directly at lassiter_brian@hotmail.com.

5. Quest for Excellence -- April 7-10

As most of you know, the Quest for Excellence Conference (QE) is a great

event for learning from -- and networking with -- recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. In 2002, QE will feature the 2001 Baldrige Award recipients: Clarke American Checks, Inc. (manufacturing); Pal's Sudden Service (small business); Chugach School District (education); Pearl River School District (education); and the University of Wisconsin-Stout (education). This year is particularly exciting, since our very first Award recipients in education will be participating.

QE XIV will be held April 7-10, 2002, at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. The Minnesota Council for Quality will be partnering with NIST on the State/Local stuff....For complete information on Quest for Excellence please visit our web site at:

http://www.quality.nist.gov/Quest_for_Excellence.htm

If you have further questions, please contact NIST directly at the website above or contact us at mc4quality@aol.com.

6. New Zealand Performance Excellence Tour

Interested in heading down under this spring? Business Excellence NZ, the administrator of the New Zealand Performance Excellence Study Awards (PESA), is sponsoring its 10th anniversary. The NZ program, modeled after the Baldrige, is offering US organizations the opportunity to meet with NZ PESA winners as well as see sites and attractions of New Zealand.

The Tour is scheduled for April 13-25 and is offered at the subsidized rate of \$3200 per person (\$2730 per person on a share-twin accommodation). Cost includes roundtrip airfare from LA-Auckland, return transfers from airports to hotels, domestic air/coach travel, 10 nights' hotel at five-star hotels, and several activities. Registration is due March 15.

If you are interested in more information, please email Errol Slyfield, the director Business Excellence NZ at: errol@businessexcellence.co.nz. Please reference you are involved with the Minnesota Council for Quality.