

Q & A With David Spong, Two-Time Winner, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award



David Spong is the only two-time winner of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for two different organizations in two different sectors. Dr. Spong recently retired from a 40-year career with Boeing as president of Aerospace Support for Boeing Integrated Defense Systems, which won the Baldrige Award in the service category in 2003. Previously, he headed Airlift and Tanker Programs for Boeing Military Aircraft and Missile Systems, which won the 1998 Baldrige Award in the manufacturing category.

Q: How does Baldrige differ from ISO 9000? What is the role of lean in Baldrige?

A: There is the perception that there must be one superior methodology for improvement. Proponents of each will argue that Six Sigma, ISO, Lean, Kaizen, or the methodology they are skilled in is the only viable choice for organizations to embrace, at the exclusion of all others. While many of these tool-sets work very effectively together, they are much more powerful when put into the context of an overall management system.

The three quality measurement systems, the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, ISO 9001:2000 Registration, and Six Sigma each offer a different emphasis in helping organizations improve performance and increase customer satisfaction. Six Sigma concentrates on measuring product quality and improving process engineering. It drives process improvement and cost savings. ISO 9001:2000 Registration is a product/service conformity model for guaranteeing equity in the marketplace. It concentrates on fixing quality system defects and product/service nonconformities.

In contrast, the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence focuses on performance excellence for the entire organization in an overall management framework. Identifying and tracking all-important organizational results: customer, product/service, financial, human resource, and organizational effectiveness. Or, as explained by April Lusk, Director of Quality for Trident Precision Manufacturing, Inc. (1996 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient in Small Business), in describing her organization's use of the Baldrige Criteria, "You need an overall organizational approach if you are looking for guidance in how to link the product approach with such organization functions as strategic planning, customer satisfaction, and staff and supplier satisfaction."

Spokespersons from other MBNQA recipient organizations agree that Baldrige, Six Sigma, and ISO are different, but can be compatible. Each may have a place in the management system of a successful organization. It shouldn't be "either/or." It can be "one, two, and/or three." So say many Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipients when asked if it is best to choose only one of the available performance improvement tools. To ensure the overall future development and success of an organization, you need a systems approach and Baldrige provides that. Where you begin often depends on what your organization needs now.

Q: *What kind of value can applicants gain simply from the application process itself?*

A: One of the criticisms leveled at the Baldrige Program is that it is all about an award and thus there is a belief that what one does is only useful to win the award. Unfortunately, this perception is widely held in spite of many attempts to explain that the real benefit of using the criteria is to focus improvement methodology on the whole organization. It is like getting a complete "Physical" for the whole organization. Many organizations never apply for the award they just use the criteria as an internal improvement system.

It has been said that a leader has the loneliest job. Today's businesses are beset by a multitude of problems and issues, many without easy or obvious solutions and you, as the leader, must solve them. Most of us "lonely" leaders draw on our experience and the capabilities of our staff to solve the problems. We fight our day-to-day fires. We hope our strategic planning will help us steer our organizations toward a healthy, sustainable future. But we never are quite sure if our plans are up to our challenges or how to convert plans to integrated organizational action.