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Behind the Scenes at the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award

by Sheila Carmine

When I set out to establish the nation's first state-wide Quality award, I was challenged by the opportunity I had to define excellence, explore the magic of empowerment, and establish the highest ethical standards for a Quality excellence award and the process to select its winners.

When I established the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award in 1987, I asked the first group of examiners to decide whether they could create a better application than the one being developed for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Over lunch with the examiners one day, I distributed copies of a draft of the 1988 Baldrige Criteria that Curt

Awards, from cover

Reimann, director of the Baldrige Award, had sent me. The room was silent for what seemed like an hour as our examiners reviewed the criteria. Finally, one of them made what we all now think of as one of the great understatements of all times: "We can't do better than this."

Because excellence is our goal, CQIA examiners, at that meeting, decided to use the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria to judge excellence in Connecticut companies. We have used the entire current Baldrige Criteria for the six years we have been in existence. Our examiners, however, did not stop there. They feel responsible for helping to improve the Baldrige Criteria and, over the years, many of their suggestions have been incorporated into the National Award.

With our criteria selected, we next had to make certain our examiners were absolutely the best. We had to arrange training. Curt Reimann's office sent us a copy of the first Baldrige examiner training material as a start. Because Connecticut is fortunate to have a corps of Baldrige examiners, senior examiners and even judges, CQIA has been able to have its annual training led by different, recently trained and experienced Baldrige examiners from our own home state.

CQIA differs from the Baldrige Award in a number of areas, but not in the Award criteria. Among the differences are applicant size categories, examiner status and calendar. In our first year, we established six categories to better reach the smaller companies—those with fewer than 100 employees. Our categories are small service and manufacturing companies with less than 100 employees; medium size companies with

company they want to review and what processes and data they want to see.

The day of the site visit, the same group meets over breakfast for a final review of the site visit activities and to receive their CQIA examiner lapel pins. They typically arrive together at the applicant's facility 10 minutes prior to the official 8:00 a.m. start of the site visit. After the site visit is completed, the same team—and only those examiners—caucus to review site visit data and to decide whether the applicant company will win the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award. CQIA has no limit on the number of applicant companies that can win each year.

As director of CQIA, my role is to help the examiners. I provide them with training material, including the current Baldrige case study and examiner's scorebook so they have at least three weeks to prepare for their annual required training session in April. A month later, after they have received their CQIA applications and completed their individual grading, I compile each team's comments on strengths, areas of improvement and site visit issues relating to each item of the Baldrige criteria. I present the team members with a 50 to 100 page "book" before their scheduled con-

the Award. This year's winner, Hamilton Standard, will hold its Connecticut Quality Improvement Award Winners Workshop on Monday, October 25 in Windsor Locks, CT. The workshop will feature plant tours and presentations by Hamilton Standard associates on topics crucial to the company's success in difficult economic times. HS has improved on our three previous winners

Hamilton Standard was selected in July as the sole winner of the 1993 Connecticut Quality Improvement Award. According to one of the six CQIA examiners who assessed the company's operations during a site visit, Hamilton Standard "has done a remarkable job of giving broad-based attention to the 28 Baldrige criteria items, while keeping a sharp focus on business results achieved through their commitment to continuous improvement."

Hamilton Standard, a division of United Technologies Corporation based in Windsor Locks, is segmented into four core product lines that it designs, manufactures and sells as either components, subsystems or systems. They include propeller systems, engine controls and accessories, flight control systems and environmental control systems for the global aerospace industry.

Continuous improvements that helped Hamilton Standard win the CQIA include: developing a unique way to

integrate the company's vision and business goals throughout the company, from the president to the front-line managers; winning a head-to-head competition to design and manufacture major systems on the new Boeing 777 jet liner, after Boeing concluded that they could learn from Hamilton's approach to total quality and performance management; and recasting the company to create small, customer-focused business teams whose specific products go to specific customers so that each team feels a personal commitment for customer satisfaction.

"Hamilton Standard is honored to be the 1993 recipient of the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award," said Bob Kuhn, Hamilton Standard president. This award is a result of major changes we've made in the way we conduct our business, and it shows. Winning the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award says we're headed in the right direction."

workshops. It has announced that a select group of presidents and CEOs from Connecticut companies will have an opportunity to meet with the president of HS to

101 to 500 employees; and large companies with more than 500 companies.

We are always talking with company leaders to encourage them to use the Baldrige Criteria as a road map for improving their competitiveness. Many small companies have responded by telling us they would welcome changes to the application process that would enable them to apply more easily. To help them, we have begun to develop an effective Baldrige data-based award application that requires data presented in graphic form, but with little written narrative. This small business application will be developed with the help of small business leaders and state and federal small business organizations. Of course, everything we develop will be shared with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the government agency responsible for managing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Our process for selecting Award winners is compact, but very formal and efficient. CQIA has only one category of examiners; no senior examiners or judges, just examiners. During face-to-face, sometimes long (up to 15 hours) and argumentative but always respectful consensus meetings, the examiners are empowered to make the final decision on whether their team's applicant company will receive a site visit. If they agree on a site visit, the team holds a special planning session to determine, from the written application, what areas of the com-

ensus meeting. During consensus, I record their selected comments for feedback to the applicant. If the examiners decide on a site visit, I prepare another "book" with agreed-upon site visit issues. After the site visit, the examiners choose one examiner to compile their findings from the visit and to set the tone of the feedback in narrative form. The chosen examiner also reviews the accepted feedback from the written application to be certain there are no inconsistencies with the site visit information.

All 1993 examiners were very aware that CQIA did not have a winning company for the last two years. The team judging this year's winner—Hamilton Standard—called upon Baldrige examiners for advice before planning their site visit. They set and achieved the highest professional goals while enjoying the camaraderie, trust and respect, and humor of their team members. Following announcement of the winner, the entire feedback package was returned to Hamilton Standard in two-and-a-half weeks after the site visit.

With the winner selected and the feedback complete, our next job is to conduct a workshop so the winner can share information on the techniques and changes they made that helped them win

discuss how he led the company and its employees in changing their culture to one of continuous improvement at a time of significant downsizing, flat markets and increased global competition. Please call me at (203) 322-9534 if you would like more information about CQIA or if you would like to attend our fourth winners workshop in six years. ■

Sheila Carmine is Director of the Connecticut Quality Improvement Award.

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