

LEADERSHIP Excellence



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End of Dragonian Leadership

Imagine this creature is the last surviving leader, telling his tales to a wizard, the keeper of all knowledge. The leader spins out his stories, a millennium of adventures, triumphs and sorrows as the wizard dutifully and diligently records them.

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Peer Learning

Bring improvements home.



by Harry Hertz

ALL LEADERS HAVE A gap or challenge to address—an area where they could benefit from gathering different insights and perspectives from other senior leaders. What if to fill the gap or attack the challenge, they could learn from and share best practices with a cohort group and with CEOs from award-winning national role models—and have a senior executive as a coach?

Graduates of the *Baldrige Executive Fellows Program* apply learning from networking, benchmarking, and sharing with other executives on a project of strategic significance in *their* firms. With *capstone projects* approved by their leaders, Fellows expand their markets, engage employees, and introduce new products—all based on learning received in the program.

As part of a collaborative year-long *learning experience*, Fellows share strategies and engage in dialogue with *senior executives* of Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award winners. The Fellows meet at Baldrige Award recipient sites, participating in tours and discussions

focusing on the Baldrige systems perspective and key aspects of leadership. Fellows discuss topics that align with the *Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence* (leadership; strategic planning; customer focus; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; workforce focus; operations focus; and results) but through the lens of leadership. And they gain insight into *best leadership practices* related to: setting directions, values, and expectations to balance stakeholder requirements, stimulate innovation, and ensure sustainability; managing for innovation and operational excellence; developing and executing strategy; ensuring *customer-driven excellence*; and valuing team members/partners.

Fellows follow a process that enables them to pose questions to each other and other senior executives and gain input on a project of strategic significance to their organizations. This

process, repeated at each meeting, results in benchmarking visits among Fellows' companies, comments on potential blind spots to explore, advice on approaches to pursue, and the hows and whys of leadership and planning.

Some of the take-aways include:

- **Culture trumps strategy;** you need to set culture first or strategy accomplishment will be severely hindered.

- **Visionary leaders are passionate and authentic;** they walk the talk and they have very different styles, but their sincerity and clarity of purpose are visible.

- **Visionary leaders set aggressive goals**—and it's amazing how often committed employees will achieve them.

- **Engage employees;** committed people are the lifeblood of organizations.

- **Focus and discipline are essential.**

Leaders need to be relentless in making their *aims clear* and *messages consistent*.

- **Consumers/customers are wired, tired, and focused.** Delight them in a way that recognizes their situations and needs.

They want honest relationships and supplier agility.

- **Your employees are constantly listening to you** for clues.

- **New employee orientation should**

touch the emotions in authentic ways. Gaining emotional commitment of people early speeds up learning by six months.

- **Communication between supervisors and employees and among employees needs to be worth-based and not hurt-based.** Too often words not chosen carefully lead to hurt rather than help when

the goal is open communication to help a colleague achieve high performance.

- **A framework for organizing thoughts and processes is critical.** Baldrige provides that framework.

From exposure to Baldrige Award winners and their executives, Fellows bring home added learning for their staffs, including how to: leverage core competencies; build on strategic advantages; address strategic challenges; make strategic use of the voice of the customer; segment data and use the analysis; focus on appropriate metrics—selection, use, alignment; improve communication; and see with a systems perspective in their culture.

The program puts leaders together and uses *peer learning* to work through the *Baldrige Criteria*, enabling organizations to become more effective/profitable. **LE**

Harry Hertz is Director of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. Visit www.nist.gov/baldrige/fellows/index.cfm.

ACTION: *Design your learning experience.*

