



The Baldrige Commitment

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Some of you reading this will be familiar with that mix of excitement, fear, anxiety, and eagerness I was feeling one particular November day. It was a day that I had been anticipating for weeks; it was marked in my calendar in double bold letters. I woke up early in the morning and kept my phone within reach and every time it let out a ring, a ding, or buzz (and many false buzzes), I felt my adrenaline spike.

After years of approaching our weaknesses from different angles, deploying improved processes, learning from those processes to make further improvements, and integrating those newly developed best practices organization-wide, we were hoping we had reached the culmination of a long journey. Our Key Performance Indicators were moving in the right direction, we were among the top in the nation on several measures, and during our site visit, our examiners had been moved to tears on several occasions—one of them even said, “I wish I could work here.” So, our expectations were high. Finally, my caller ID showed a 202 area code. This was what I had been waiting for. This is what so many of the Adventist Health Castle team had been waiting for. I answered nervously. The voice on the other end of the line informed me that we had not won the 2015 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.



Kathy Raethel, President of Adventist Health Castle, shares the sense of pride felt throughout the organization as she accepts the 2017 Baldrige National Quality Award.

I sat in my office for a while that afternoon, alone. Disappointed. But then I thought back to the state of our organization before we first embarked on our Baldrige journey. And what I found was that rather than allow me to wallow, those memories gave me a renewed sense of purpose. I remembered the days when I'd come into the office and see pieces of mail with handwritten addresses on them—usually foretelling that the contents were from an unhappy patient or the family member of one. Just a few years prior, in 2010, about half of our Physician Satisfaction survey results were in the top quartile, according to the Professional Research Corporation (PRC), but healthcare providers' ratings of our hospitalist services were in the 48th percentile. We were doing well, but there were opportunities for improvement. And the Baldrige process was helping us move from good to great.

Over the years, our incorporation of the Baldrige Framework and our partnerships with Navigant Consulting and Studer Group guided us to develop a systematic approach to process improvement across the board, helping ameliorate our outliers and maintain and learn from top performers.

One of our foci had been on raising our hospitalists PRC score. After several cycles of ADLI (Approach, Deployment, Learning, Integration), we were able to improve the culture among and towards hospitalists. Where specialists and consultants may once have viewed them more as residents or house officers, they are now recognized as full-fledged peers. Our hospitalists are more engaged with those specialists, with nurses, and with committees. There is more transparency and accountability for patient satisfaction, infection control, and mortality rates. They worked with the Emergency Department to decrease wait times for transfers to inpatient rooms. These practices not only increased trust and collaboration. They also increased the hospitalist services PRC rating to the 96th percentile in 2015. Our most recent PRC survey put them in the 98th. They moved from below the median to the top ventile in five years! As one of

our hospitalists put it, “I remember how it used to be and I like it better now.”

There is a warmth in the Baldrige program. Some may look at words like “process,” “systematic,” and “framework” and interpret the Baldrige journey as being rather cool and mechanical. But at Adventist Health Castle, it helped us put an intangible purpose into words; through that journey we were able to increase the tactility of our highest ideal. Love Matters. That motto was directly birthed from the core competencies criterion. It was something we had always felt, but the required succinctness of the Baldrige application forced us to come up with a phrase that has reverberated beyond our hospital. It strikes a deep chord because “Love Matters” is not just something we say. It’s what associates feel. It’s what patients feel. And they tell us so.

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Nowadays, I look forward to receiving those handwritten letters. As we have progressed in our Baldrige journey, they have become increasingly positive. A recent patient wrote about her care team at Castle, “They were lovely, making me feel comforted and comfortable rather than fearful and uncertain. Past experiences in an emergency room were cool, mechanical, and uninformative.” She went on to say, “Today might have been a terrible experience, but was a pleasant adventure; so, I thank Adventist Health Castle.” Another patient writes that upon entering our hospital, he found “a devoted team that immediately jumped to work as if I was their mother or father in stress. From triage to sign out, I was treated with love and respect—and felt a very real part of their decision-making process.” He closed with, “Lucky me! On vacation with a potentially serious medical problem and I just happened to walk into one of the finest Emergency Rooms in the United States!”



Some of the dozens of Adventist Health Castle team members that made the trek from Hawaii to Baltimore to celebrate the receipt of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

One would hesitate to consider that phrases like “a pleasant adventure” and “Lucky me!” could apply to hospitals. Yet much through the growth fostered by our Baldrige journey, our team of 1100 associates, 300 physicians, and 250 volunteers have made it commonplace at Adventist Health Castle. That’s why on that November afternoon in 2015, my depressed state dissolved into deeper dedication to our cycles of improvement. Since then, our organization remains committed to performance excellence. We continue to refine our initiatives. We continue to look for ways to seize our opportunities for improvement. We continue these things because this journey has been more than fruitful. It’s been life-saving. Though a vast majority of our patients will never realize it, the care they receive is more effective, more efficient, more empathic because of the Baldrige Framework. For that, unknowing multitudes of our Windward `Oahu community are grateful.

In November 2017, after our second national application and second site visit, the United States Secretary of Commerce phoned to inform us that we had won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. I fondly recall seeing one of our housekeepers in the hall shortly after that. She eagerly put down her mop, gave me a big hug, and said, “Mrs. President, I have chicken skin!” That’s Hawaii’s version of goose bumps. “WE won the Baldrige Award!” she exclaimed. Reaching this milestone on our continual quest for quality has been actualized only by the buy-in of all of our stakeholders, and they have been inspired by it. The profundity of this entire experience, accentuated by the Commerce Secretary’s call, has made the decision to embark on this journey and the commitment to stay on it, a cornerstone for Adventist Health Castle.