

QUALITY BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNMENT
Remarks of Thomas J. Mosgaller, ASQ Past President
At the Fifth Global Forum on Reinventing Government
Mexico City
November 3, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Mazzella. On behalf of the American Society for Quality, I would like to express gratitude to President Fox for his vision in bringing us together and to the officials of the United Nations and the Mexican government for inviting ASQ to participate in this dialog on reinventing government.

I have had the good fortune in my 35 years of public life to have worked in all three sectors of society... the association sector, or what Peter Drucker the management guru calls the 3rd sector, for 12 years as a community organizer; then I was invited by my community, Madison, Wisconsin, to be the first quality director for our city, where I served in 3 mayoral administrations over 13 years introducing quality practices into government (during this time I also helped start the government division of the American Society for Quality); three years ago I moved to the private sector to serve as vice president of a company that designs and builds healthcare facilities across the U.S.A.

Having worked in all three sectors, always with an eye to how each sector can better relate to and serve the other sectors, has shaped my world view as you will notice in my remarks today. Dr. W. Edwards Deming, who served as my primary mentor in quality, often said that you can't have a system without aim. He said it is our role as leaders to provide that aim, and I would submit to you that the aim of the system we are here to talk about today is about more than any one sector but how all three sectors work together to improve our whole community as a society. It is not to just look at the private sector, or associational life, or government separate from the other sectors but rather to see the synergy that can develop among all three.

I have been asked to convey to you today the initial results and outputs of a study by the Quality in Government Subcommittee of the American Society for Quality's Research Committee. The study was undertaken in response to a challenge posed by this Global Forum on Reinventing Government.

The first phase of the study resulted in an operational definition of quality government. The ultimate aim of the study will be to operationalize this definition and discover public-sector best quality practices and national policies that drive quality improvement.

Here is the definition:

Quality government is the set of practices and processes defining the approach taken to improve the quality of life of a nation's citizens and the comprehensive deployment throughout all governmental agencies of this approach in order to deliver prosperous,

long-term, and equitable performance results to public and private stakeholders in an ethical manner.

Let me highlight some points that I think are critical.

The Malcom Baldrige national quality award in the US, along with Mexico's Intragob Model and most other national models for excellence around the world, talks about three components required for achieving excellence: Approach. Deployment. Results. These components are also major elements of the definition of quality government.

1. An **approach**. This part of the definition speaks to processes and practices taken to improve the quality of life of a nation's citizens.
2. Comprehensive **deployment** throughout all governmental agencies.
3. Why... **The results**. Or, as the definition says, "in order to deliver prosperous, long-term and equitable performance results."
4. And most important, " in an ethical manner." It all begins with trust.

Let's consider the first component required for achieving excellence: The approach.

As someone who has spent a majority of my life on the ground, at the grass roots of community, local government, and now day-to-day execution in a business setting, I like to bring these statements down to what it means to a practical level every day for the people who work with you and for you in government.

First I will share a brief story. In 1831 a young man from France came to the United States to better understand the kind of democracy we were developing. He and a colleague spent a year traveling to what was then the United States observing people in communities doing what people do at the local level: Laying down basic expectations of one another, hiring a school teacher for their school, figuring out how they would work together to put out a fire, building a community center, and so forth.

When he went back to France he wrote a book titled *Democracy in America* which to this day is still one of the best books ever written on the subject of democracy. His name was Alexis de Tocqueville. And if I were to distill the essence of what he observed it would be this:

1. Citizens came together voluntarily to address important opportunities or problems.
2. They not only identified the problem or opportunity but actually defined their own solutions. (They called in the experts when they needed them.)

3. They rolled up their sleeves and acted on those solutions.

These three observations are not owned by any one nation. They are principles that underlie the basic concept of democracy anywhere in the world where people are seeking to develop an open society in which the rule of citizens is primary.

How does this connect to quality? I think quality and the pursuit of democracy, whether in a community, a government, or the private sector, are inherently interconnected.

You can not be a quality organization without the truth, because the truth is what is required as a basis of continuous improvement. And you can't have truth without driving fear out of an organization. Dr. Deming made this one of his 14 points of excellence—a concept at the very core of striving to be great.

In our community, Madison, Wisconsin (220,000 people, and by most standards considered one of the U.S.'s great small cities) I had the good fortune of helping craft how we linked our commitment to quality with de Tocqueville's timeless understanding of basic democratic concepts into a set of principles that we shared with all of our employees. I would like to share those principles with you:

7 Basic Principles for Governance

1. Don't get in the way.
2. Don't get out ahead.
3. Every government agency has some core functions people expect us to do ... let's do it.
4. Know your neighbors.
5. Think partnership ... we are in this together.
6. If you can't address a problem, who do you know who can?
7. The measure of success of an effective governmental system is whether it helps create and re-create civic engagement and associational life. Our question was always.... if we intervene will we enhance or inhibit the natural tendency of people to establish association within their community?

Now let's consider the second required component for achieving excellence:
Deployment.

For accomplishing innovation and improvement in the public sector, we might consider following one of two divergent approaches for deployment: managing by results or managing by means. I believe that management by means is especially suited to the peculiar character of our government organizations.

Management by results represents the conventional thinking that predominates in so many business organizations. Based on conventional cost-management thinking, it has become a mechanistic mindset that drives people to meet preconceived accounting targets. By contrast, managing by means—which characterizes the deployment approach of a very small number of highly successful firms—takes a living-system approach to management that requires a fundamental change in how one thinks about work and how one organizes work. The basic difference between these two approaches might be summarized as managing by intervention versus managing by inspiration centered on a clear aim. Having aim is critical, and the role of a leader is to set goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations and focus them on work worthy of their effort.

Baldrige looks at deployment as what happens between leadership on the front end and results on the back end. In between, excellence models like the Baldrige criteria and the Intragob Quality Model spend a tremendous amount of effort helping us look at our systems for planning, people, focusing on our customers, gathering information, and continuously improving processes. Only by improving execution in innovative ways--between leadership setting the aim and getting the results--do we optimize any system in any sector, much less a society as a whole. The same premises are true of ISO and Six Sigma tools.....

Let me tell you a story. An elderly gentleman in my community was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's disease. Restless and abusive at home, he was sent to a locally funded senior citizen daycare center to give his frail wife a few hours of respite every day. But when he became too much to handle at the daycare center, the first option considered was to institutionalize him in a nursing home, where he would have been medicated into tranquility. Instead, an Alzheimer's support worker used her creativity and autonomy granted her by a caring social service system to come up with a better solution. Noting that the man had spent 30 years working as a woodworker in a furniture factory, she re-created a similar woodworking shop environment at the man's home. Now, he gets up in the morning, his wife packs his lunch, and he heads to his woodworking shop where he spends his time plying the craft he loves. He feels valued, his wife has peace of mind, and the system saves \$25,000 per year compared to the cost of keeping him in an institution. The benefits of having a public system that values experimentation, innovation and risk-taking are obvious. This story is just one of many examples of innovative responses to difficult situations faced every day by our public health nurses, police officers, and park employees. These are the kinds of successful experiences of civil servants in a culture of total quality that you can document and pass on to others as best practices.

Finally, let's consider the third component required for achieving excellence: Results...or the ability to produce the outcome that you and your constituents desire.

If you have clarity of aim you know what that outcome is to be. If you have discipline of execution you have a method for achieving the aim. The results are like the scoreboard in

soccer or baseball: Important because it helps you keep track of what you agree to accomplish but only as good as the process that preceded it.

Government bureaucracies traditionally have emphasized conformance and compliance results. But your real customers—the taxpayers—expect their service provider to care enough to exceed their expectations.

When I was visiting a nursing home where my mother-in-law was recovering from an illness, I passed the room of an elderly woman who was crying. I glanced in, but felt it was not my business to interfere and proceeded to visit Grandma Lil. I my way out I walked by the room again, only to see the lady was even more distraught. I looked in the door and observed her pushing an orange across her food tray, only to have it fall on the floor and disappear under her bed. When she looked at me, big tears were rolling down her cheeks. Only then did I realize the full implications of the situation. The woman had severe arthritis in her hands, which made it impossible for her to grasp, much less peel, the orange. That moment, like many moments of truth in our public sector institutions, was a prime example of what happens when rules and regulations are met, but the customers are left less empowered after receiving service than before the transaction. I'm sure if the nursing home certification inspector had come through for a quality assurance review, all the boxes on the compliance forms could be checked positively. The meal was delivered on time, it met nutritional requirements, the utensils and serving trays looked clean; but the ultimate act of satisfying the customer was terribly flawed. Compliance without a system that cares results in bus drivers closing doors on passengers trying to board because driver performance is measured by being at the next bus stop on time. Or city tree trimming crews holding off angry neighborhood residents with their chainsaws in order to give streetside trees a pruning according to city specifications. Bureaucratic systems that reinforce compliance and control are counterproductive to today's emphasis on quality and customer care that the public demands.

In summary, considering all three elements--Approach, Deploy, and Results--I believe the definition of government quality speaks to the importance of looking at any organization as a system: self organizing... interdependent... and diverse. You don't control quality any more than you can control democracy. If you have clear aim, an agreed upon approach to execution, and a system to see if you are achieving the desired results--and if you build a culture of trust that supports truth-telling—you exceed expectations and you achieve excellence.

In closing, let me share with you a theme that has guided me for the past 25 years as a public servant and a proponent of quality. It goes back to Pericles, the mayor of Athens 2500 years ago, who administered an oath to citizens who were selected by their peers to take positions of public responsibility. I look at this oath every day and try to model the behavior it demands. It says, "thus in all ways I will transmit my community greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."

That can only be done when we strive for both democracy and quality.

Thank you very much.