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*Minnesota Council for Quality Stakeholder Update*  
*June 2003*  
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1. A Message from the President

Summer finally arrived, which means two things in Minnesota: three months of increased traffic on Friday afternoons as people head somewhere for their weekend, and the onset of many organizations' 2004 planning processes. On the latter point, I recently was engaged in an interesting conversation with a member about strategic planning. This individual asked if I thought the traditional method of SWOT analysis still made sense for planning today. (SWOT stands for "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats" and has been used by organizations for decades.)

My immediate reaction was "yes, sure it does." But then I got to thinking: how does an organization accurately define its strengths? In what areas should it consider its weaknesses and vulnerabilities? And what opportunities and threats should it consider? While SWOT analysis is simple and may be useful in facilitating thought, it really doesn't provide much guidance on what specific factors to consider during planning.

So I went to my trusty 2003 Criteria for Performance Excellence of the Baldrige and Minnesota Quality Awards, as I so often do for these riddles. I read what the Criteria had to say regarding strategic planning, and the answer became much clearer. In considering its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, an organization should address some very specific factors including:

- \* its customer (or stakeholder) and market needs, expectations, and opportunities,
- \* its competitive environment and its capabilities relative to competitors,
- \* its technological and other key innovations in products, services, and/or operations,
- \* its human and other resources' strengths and weaknesses,
- \* its opportunity and ability to redirect resources to higher priority products, services, or areas,
- \* the financial, societal, ethical, regulatory, and other potential risks facing it,
- \* changes in the national or global economy, and
- \* factors unique to the organization, including partner and supply chain needs.

So basically, organizations should use data to better understand their environment – both internal and external – such that they can set strategic objectives and develop long- and short-term action plans. SWOT may indeed be a way to think about the issues facing your business in a broad sense, but when engaged in a strategic planning process, it may be helpful to consider the specific factors listed above. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses in those areas will help you identify your issues, opportunities, objectives, and plans.

Yours in Improvement,

Brian S. Lassiter  
President, MN Council for Quality

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2. 2003 Fall Evaluator Training Dates Announced

The Minnesota Council for Quality is pleased to announce its fall training schedule for the 2003 Board of Evaluators. New Evaluators can select one of three dates for orientation: July 31, August 6, or August 12 (locations are being finalized). Training for all Evaluators (new and returning) is scheduled for September 9-11 at Medtronic Energy and Component Center in Brooklyn Center.

Applications for new Evaluators are due on a rolling schedule: July 18 if you plan to attend the July 31 training session, July 25 if you plan to attend the August 6 session, or August 1 if you plan to attend the August 12 session. Attending the earlier sessions will give you longer to complete the pre-work required before the September 9-11 training. Applications for returning Evaluators are due Friday, August 29 (and only require updates from your prior year application).

There are many benefits to becoming an Evaluator, including strengthening your ability to understand what factors drive organizational results, networking with peers across the state, forming deep relationships with evaluation team, reviewing performance of organizations throughout the state – possibly identifying best practices for your organization, and developing other professional skills such as analysis, consensus- and team-building, interpersonal, written communication, interviewing, and systems thinking.

And this year we are in need of additional Evaluators to handle the projected number of Minnesota Quality Award applicants! Your contribution as an Evaluator not only is valuable to you and your organization, but also provides tremendous value to other Minnesota organizations desiring to improve their performance and effectiveness.

If you are interested in learning more about the benefits of becoming an Evaluator or would like a fall 2003 application, please email the Council at [mc4quality@aol.com](mailto:mc4quality@aol.com) or visit our website at <http://www.councilforquality.org/assess.cfm>.

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### 3. Council in the Press

The Minnesota Council for Quality had the good fortune of getting three stories in three separate newspapers last month. The Rochester Post-Bulletin published a story on May 10 and the Minneapolis Star Tribune on May 17 on Bethel Lutheran Church receiving the Advancement Level of the 2002 Minnesota Quality Award. And Dave Beal of the Pioneer Press did a feature story on the Council's progress in the May 18 business section. It is printed below and can be found on the Pioneer Press website at [http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/business/columnists/dave\\_beal/](http://www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/business/columnists/dave_beal/) or on the Council's website at [http://www.councilforquality.org/about\\_press.cfm](http://www.councilforquality.org/about_press.cfm).

#### Council for Quality Makes a Comeback

The Minnesota Council for Quality is turning around, a fortuitous rebound that could soon guarantee its survival. In its early 1990s heyday, the council sent a message to the world that Minnesota was a stronghold for best corporate practices.

It was the first state quality council; today, there are 45.

Its efforts helped Minnesota produce more winners of the coveted Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award than almost any other state. With much fanfare, it patterned its own awards program after the national one.

But early last year, things looked bleak for the 16-year-old council. "We were going out of business," chairman Craig Robinson says.

The turning point came when 34-year-old quality consultant Brian Lassiter came on board — initially at no salary — as president. Lassiter, who once worked for The St. Paul Cos., is well wired in the "quality network."

He pumped new vigor into the council. Big corporate members returned. Overall membership has climbed back, to 86 from a low of 17 a year ago.

This spring, the council is launching an online "clearinghouse" to point members to the resources that enhance quality programs. This fall, it will unveil another new service for members, vendor referrals — a yellow pages of quality improvement consultants.

The council, which added governments, nonprofits and schools to its awards program in the 1990s, actually named a church — Bethel Lutheran in Rochester — as a winner this year. Lassiter believes Bethel Lutheran is the first church in the country to have participated in the full Baldrige-based assessment process.

In January, the council acquired the Deming Forum, a professional group named after the late quality guru W. Edwards Deming. Lassiter is shaping alliances with schools, professional associations and outstate groups.

The council was born as part of the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development. Its annual budget was close to \$500,000 in the early 1990s. Five years ago, it lost what remained of its state funding. Today, the budget is about \$110,000, but it's rising.

In hindsight, says Lassiter, the loss of state funding “might have been the best thing for our organization, because it forced us to behave more like a business.” Robinson agrees. “We had to get off taking money from the government,” he says.

The council closed its office in Bloomington. Instead, Lassiter runs the organization from his home in Minneapolis. He communicates by e-mail with part-time staffers in Plymouth and Faribault and 90 volunteers scattered across the state.

Lassiter and Robinson, president of Robinson Capital Management in Edina, have been trying to get ahead of the changes sweeping across the world of quality improvement. New systems of measuring and improving performance are complementing and enriching efforts that use Baldrige criteria. Jim Buckman, who led the council from 1989 to 1993, says more than 100 Minnesota companies are now implementing Six Sigma, the most significant of the new systems.

Minnesota retains a special status on the quality front.

- The Baldrige award program is named after a Reagan administration Commerce Department secretary who died in a rodeo accident. In Minnesota, six companies — Zytac, IBM-Rochester, BI, 3M's dental products unit, Cargill's Sunny Fresh Foods unit and Custom Research — have won Baldriges.
- The Twin Cities chapter of the American Society for Quality is one of its largest and most active.
- Joseph Juran, a widely known East Coast quality expert who grew up here, gave the University of Minnesota \$1 million to establish the Juran Center for Leadership in Quality. Buckman is a co-director and Juran, now 98 years old, is writing his memoirs.

In this kind of setting, it just wouldn't seem right not to have the quality council around.

Robinson heaps credit for its rebirth on Lassiter. “The turnaround came when Brian Lassiter became president,” he declares.

Lassiter and Robinson first began talking about the job early last year during a meeting at a downtown Minneapolis coffeehouse. Lassiter said he didn't want the council to go away and offered to go to work for it.

Six months later, the council cobbled together enough money to put him on salary. But Robinson says the council is only about a third of the way back to where it wants to be. The council, he says, won't be in the safety zone until Lassiter is making more than his “still very nominal salary.” That hasn't happened yet, but it could soon.

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4. Performance Improvement Network (PIN) Off in July; Resumes August 7

Due to the July 4 holiday, the Council's Performance Improvement Network will not meet in July.

Our next meeting is scheduled for August 7 – mark your calendar! The topic is mastering projects and will focus on the practical aspects of making projects successful – on things such as setting goals, building community, identifying barriers, and managing expectations during unpredictable projects.

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5. St. Thomas Offers Quality Curriculum to Council Members at a Discount

The Management Center at the University of St. Thomas recently announced its fall courses. In partnership with the Minnesota Council for Quality, Council members can receive a 15% discount by mentioning your membership at the time of registration.

Upcoming courses include (prices are before member discount):

- 8/6: Leadership Skills Update, \$355
- 9/8-12/15 (18 sessions): Six Sigma Black Belt Training, \$10,495
- 9/11-10/23 (7 sessions): Supply Chain Quality Management Certificate Series, \$1295
- 9/12-12/13 (10 sessions): Mini MBA® In Leading Growing Companies, \$3495
- 9/23-9/24: The Influential Leader, \$595
- 9/23-12/9 (12 sessions): Mini Master of Quality Management, \$1695
- 9/25: Strategic Thinking, \$345
- 10/1-10/2: Lead With Your Strengths, \$995
- 10/21-10/22: The Leader as Coach and Collaborator, \$595
- 11/17-12/9 (8 sessions): Six Sigma Green Belt Training, \$3895
- 12/4-12/5: Introduction to Six Sigma, \$595
- 12/16-12/17: Basic Statistical Process Control (SPC), \$655

For more information on any of these courses please see

<http://www.stthomas.edu/mgmtctr/>.

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6. Transforming Organizational Performance – One Project at a Time

True North pgs, a Minnesota Council for Quality member, is pleased to announce two valuable workshops this summer at a discount to Council members.

Mastering Projects Workshop -- Practical project approaches focused at dealing with the real world of performance improvement. Project leaders and team members develop judgment needed to deploy practical techniques for coping with the common challenges of organizational cultures, setting goals, creating real participation, useful planning,

assessing progress, and managing yourself in the midst of the unavoidable chaos that comes with instigating real change. June 23-25, and August 1, 2003. Cost is \$1,595 (\$1,395 for MCQ members).

Mastering Project Work -- Designed for project workers to discover how to be really effective in the different, and often fuzzy, world of projects. By understanding the keys to a 'free-lance' mindset, project workers discover their own power and authority to contribute fully to creating exceptional results for themselves, the project, and their organization. June 26-27. Cost is \$895 (\$695 for MCQ members).

For more information visit: <http://www.projectcommunity.com/TNpgs%20Inc-MP%20Approach.html>.