Looking Inward and Outward

by Raimundo Rodulfo, City of Coral Gables, FL

The City of Coral Gables (FL) IT department worked together on our response times and efficiencies improvement project. The process empowered our team to look inward and outward, identifying opportunities that could make a difference over a short period of time. All team members were involved in our brainstorming and ideation process. We listened to one another's work experiences and how we interact with systems, processes and customers every day.

We were able to quickly identify problems and improvement opportunities by having everyone together in the same room—giving them the freedom to challenge processes and discuss issues openly. The team was oriented with a positive mindset and focused on providing solutions and moving forward.

Using lean Six Sigma process improvement tools and techniques opened possibilities and helped us uncover issues that otherwise would have stayed buried in daily routines. In addition, team members were empowered to make all necessary corrections—even if that meant disrupting some old processes.

Our entire team was made aware of the process improvements put in place and of the positive results shown in various metrics of our balanced scorecards (financial, performance, customer satisfaction, change and innovation). We celebrated those results together, acknowledging everyone's contributions, commitment and dedication. Because our team saw and experienced these results and customer feedback was positive, our department goal of fostering an organizational culture around quality and customer service became an organic process.

Our team made it a priority to listen to customers by meeting frequently with stakeholders from different departments and organizations, and directly with citizens and members

In a city of Coral Gables IT leadership meeting, Nelson Gonzalez, Mark Hebert, Gisela Rodriguez, Raimundo Rodulfo, Lemay Ramos and Ayanes Apolinar (left to right) review process improvement and strategic planning matters.

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of the community. A helpful and impactful initiative was to dedicate assigned IT liaisons to each city department. This helped us build better channels of communication and improve response times, which increased customer satisfaction.

A customer centric and quality-driven approach has aligned our team with our mission as a city to continuously improve quality of life and customer service. This means that sometimes we put aside the complexities of engineering and technology areas of responsibility to look more closely at our mission as a service provider.

We make the satisfaction of our customers and the quality of their experience when interacting with our systems and services the first lens of our assessment. That can be particularly challenging for a team of technologists and analysts steeped in daily technical duties.

ASQ's ITEA Process

Since 1985, thousands of teams worldwide have participated in ASQ's International Team Excellence Awards (ITEA) Process. Organizations such as Alcoa, Anheuser-Busch, Bayer, Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Co., General Motors, Johnson Controls and Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. have showcased proven results with long-term implications, resulting in collective cost savings of billions of dollars. For more on the process and information on how to participate in the 2019–2020 ITEA Process, visit asq.org/team-excellence or email itea@asq.org.

As a team, our approach is to rise above technical practices to focus on the value we provide to our customers in Coral Gables (residents, visitors, businesses and employees). The customer experience drives our business. We, as citizens ourselves, can drive the business by how we relate to customer expectations. Benchmarking against world-class organizations and industry standards and best practices also has proved fruitful to push our team to strive for excellence and high standards of customer service and satisfaction.

Strengthening Your Team

by Yuan Zhong, Shanghai Nuclear Engineering Research and Design Institute, China

Strengthening a team to become an excellent one has been discussed at length in recent years. Our team remains strong in the projects it takes on because it follows these five guidelines:

1. Shared expectations should be established among all team members and stakeholders at the beginning of the project so the project selection criteria and the identification of risks are well understood. Based on trust and understanding, the team can face obstacles and overcome difficulties.
2. Various communication tools can be used to make everyone on the team clear about what to do and how to do it. Nowadays, a combination of formal and informal communication tools—such as meeting minutes and instant chat apps on mobile devices—is vital to strengthen the team, resulting in higher work efficiency.
3. Teams should embrace the power of new technologies to achieve continuous improvements in the process of projects. For instance, the application of virtual reality, hardware and software prototypes, and real-time simulators offer the team technical strength to optimize design and implementation of projects toward user-centered principles by iterative means.
4. Voice of the customer data should be collected and analyzed. User complaints can be of great value. Systems on an organizational level should be set up to cope with customer feedback.
5. Team building activities, such as group visits or team barbecues, are usually welcomed. Training, too, can be beneficial because it enhances the team's knowledge and skills needed to handle the projects. Team building and training lead to cohesive, strong teams by encouraging all team members to try their best.