

## Engineering firm improves performance

Inside Tucson Business February 03, 2005



In an industry with an acute shortage of engineers, and coping with a slow economy, Albert Romano, V.P.'s west region opened 4 new offices last year. When promoted to his current position early in 2004 Romano recognized the value and accepted the challenge of a company wide initiative to better serve clients by improving processes. The question Baker's leaders ask is valuable to any business: "How do we create, implement and measure powerful processes to serve our core value of delivering great service to clients?"

Over twenty-five years of executive management and consulting, I've seen many organizations have varying success in improving processes. I worked in Japan when Deming made history - introducing TQM and worked with companies to bring those processes to the United States. Over the years, process improvement has surfaced under many names – the latest evolution is **Balanced Scorecard** and Baker chose to improve processes and measure them against business metrics using this philosophy. While some consultants and companies make continuous improvement very complicated it really is common sense and of value to any business. The basics:

1. Obtain commitment at the top to improving processes
2. Involve staff
3. Find out what your customers want
4. Analyze your processes to see what you need to improve
5. Tie improvements to business metrics
6. Measure Results

Small or large, slow economy or not, any firm can improve their performance by improving their understanding of what their clients want, improving processes to better serve them, and tying improvements to business metrics.

The following best practices helped Baker surpass industry standards and grow 8 to 10% per year over the past three years:

1. **Standardize** "Growing organizations have relatively large numbers of new people

entering the organization bringing processes from their previous employer and often creating a hybridization of Baker processes." Romano said. While innovation is good, Baker needs to be able to assess innovations and consciously pick and choose. Romano said, "We've developed process standards that we call **"Project Management - The Baker Way** and our project managers are trained to use these standards." The Phoenix office has a client base of 90% repeat clients and many, according to an independent survey, cite superior processes as the key to their loyalty.

2. **Training** "We've developed 12 written modules on such topics as Change Management, Contracts, Project Reporting and Quality Management to name a few. We train our senior managers and they train their direct reports. We tie performance evaluations to education and performance regarding these standards." All training materials are on the intranet and easily accessible. "70% of our managers are trained on our modules. 100% will be trained by the end of 2004," said Romano.
3. **Client feedback.** Baker hires outside consultants who measure client satisfaction. On their latest evaluation, 93% of Baker's clients gave an excellent rating on this independent survey. In addition, "Each major client receives a visit from myself or an office manager at least once a quarter", said Romano.

Baker intends to keep refining their best practices. "Our next best practice step is to improve measurement of business metrics. Every office does it a little differently," said Romano. "In 2005 we are focused on developing standard measurement approaches. We will continue improving," Romano said.

*Sharon Youngblood is a Certified Management Consultant, coach and speaker. She may be contacted at [say@youngbloodconsulting.com](mailto:say@youngbloodconsulting.com) or (520) 795-7498. Additional articles are available: [www.youngbloodconsulting.com](http://www.youngbloodconsulting.com)*