

OKLAHOMA COMPANIES HONORED FOR BEST ETHICAL PRACTICES

On April 25 at the annual Compass Awards, a number of Oklahoma companies will be honored for best practices in the area of business ethics. Finalists include many large companies such as Boeing, BKD, Express Personnel and Enterprise Rent-A-Car. Tulsa-based Bama and Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group will also be recognized, as well as Coppermark Bank – the only company to be receive an honor as a mid-sized business. Principal Technologies as well as Norman-based Nextep will be recognized in the small business category.

Even with such a wide gamut – from the smallest employer of eleven to huge organizations with over 150,000 employees – there were some common denominators. Most of the companies that made it to the finalist level invested a great deal of team effort to complete the application. One may wonder what the benefits of such a tremendous time commitment might be.

Almost daily, the small staff of Principal Technologies met to discuss and collaborate on the award criteria. As Pam Fountain, CEO stated, “We applied for the Compass Award because we believe in what it stands for! Additionally, it turned out to be an excellent exercise for us to even improve upon the quality of our processes as they related to ethical business practices. Whether we receive the award or not, as a finalist, we are in excellent company with other honorees and are proud to be there. It was a very worthwhile experience that included the participation of our entire team”

What other qualities do these Compass Award finalists share? A desire to take a good hard look at their business practices and a willingness to use the Compass Award application as a tool for process improvement. The application itself was developed after months of discussions and is heavily based on Malcolm Baldrige Award criteria.

When asked why The Bama Companies applied for the award, Rob Martinek, Director of Legal Services replied that, “The rigorous Compass Award criteria aided our internal assessment of the systemic application of our processes, and ultimately highlighted the depth of our commitment to our core values as they relate to right conduct. Overall, we believe that the application processes provides an excellent means to continually improve business processes in the realm of "doing what's right".

People involved in the process shared a passion for that very sentiment. For example, Sean Simpson, Corporate Communications Director with Express Personnel, estimated that he spent at least a solid week gathering information and completing the application. He stated that he did it because this is core to his company's philosophy. From a personal standpoint, he believes that “taking a stand on ethics is one of the most important things that a business can do in their business and state. There is something to be said for leading by example.”

The Character First! program was another aspect that finalist companies such as Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Nextep and Principal Technologies shared. Their focus on promoting and celebrating the best of their employees' character is a key element in their organization's culture.

As Shannon Hiebert, Regional Human Resources Director for Enterprise Rent-A-Car stated, "What I like about Character First, is it gives you a practical process to recognize all individuals in your organization for promoting integrity in the workplace."

There is a "neighborly" willingness to generously share knowledge and experience with others. Finalists' applications will be posted on the website after the awards are made. Companies, such as Coppermark Bank and past recipients Valir Health as well as Eide Bailly have offered to help other companies complete applications in the future.

Finally, the best common denominator is the fact that so many companies place a high priority on promoting Oklahoma values of promoting integrity in the workplace. They serve as an inspiration to all of us.