



Baldrige Performance Excellence Program

American Chemical Society
1155 Sixteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

July 13, 2017

Dear Sirs and Madams:

After learning recently that Dr. Willie E. May is a candidate for the position of 2018 president-elect for the American Chemical Society, I am writing to share my favorable observations of his leadership in recent years as director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

I have been employed at NIST for the past 12 years within the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, where I am team leader for a group that manages our extramural program's publications, communications, Baldrige Award process, non-award-related organizational assessment services, and examiner selection and training.

Although one would assume that my non-scientific work would not have given me a lot of opportunities to interact with Dr. May personally, in fact I had several one-on-one conversations with him in elevators and hallways because, as he walked about the campus, he was always friendly and accessible to all 3,000-plus employees of our agency. He also fostered trust and good rapport with the staff by responding candidly and respectfully to employee questions at the town hall meetings he held as director. Similarly, in meetings of the advisory boards of both NIST and the Baldrige Program, he cultivated deep respect through his strong interpersonal skills as well as great knowledge and experience.

I would like to share an example of an action I believe reveals much about Dr. May's character—one that he is not likely to share himself out of modesty. A few years ago, the contract custodial crew that served the administrative offices at NIST included a young man named []. I got to know [] after he expressed condolences for the then-recent tragic death of my sister. I learned that [], despite being only in his early twenties, had already suffered similar personal losses. Through our short conversations as he visited our office space, I increasingly appreciated not only how caring [] was, but also how bright and ambitious he was—and underemployed (regardless of the dignity we both recognized in every job, including that of a janitor). He desired to attain a college degree and a professional job in a business or nonprofit organization. But financial constraints limited him from taking more community college classes.

I was not the only one who noticed []'s promise—and wanted to see him succeed in achieving his dream. Several colleagues of mine also spoke highly of what a friendly and diligent employee he was. And it turned out that the director of NIST had similarly gotten to know [] by striking up conversations with him while he was cleaning—and reached out to help him get a better job at NIST. [] has been working in the NIST director's office for more than two years now. When I saw him in the lobby today, he proudly told me of his progress toward his degree in business administration. He is now looking forward to his classes in the fall semester.

I know from others that Dr. May was a respected scientist, and I know from my own observations that he was a great leader of our agency. But among all Dr. May's great accomplishments, I think hiring [] is one of the most exceptional things he did. For me, this act of kindness showed that he never became arrogant or disconnected from people at every level of the organization as he ascended the leadership ranks. And the greatness of his heart is the measure some may remember as making the most lasting—and life-transforming—impact on those who worked for him. The American Chemical Society will be fortunate to be led by this highly accomplished scientist and leader of exceptional character.

Sincerely,
Christine Schaefer, Education Team
Baldrige Performance Excellence Program