Praise for Excellence at Work and Author Sandy Asch

“In the Information Systems department at Mitchell International, we have used the Excellence principles to keep employees focused on priorities and establish a positive work environment. Turnover is at an unprecedented low of 4%.”
— Linda Amaro, Vice President, Information Systems, Mitchell International

“Sandy’s ‘Excellent Workplace Model’ provides a viable roadmap and an excellent jumpstart to create a work environment in which every employee has a sense of pride, loyalty and belonging.”
— Jack Giles, CEO, REMEC Defense and Space, Inc.

“Sandy Asch is passionately dedicated to creating uncommonly inspiring paths for individuals, teams and organizations to achieve excellence in ways they cannot imagine. She begins by exhibiting highly professional standards in her training workshops, and now in her book, Excellence at Work, Sandy offers a unique ‘excellence code’ based on six Excellence principles, which, when deeply embraced by an organization can transform its culture. The six principles optimize employees’ day-to-day work experiences, levels of engagement, interpersonal and team functioning, and ultimately organizational performance. This is one business book to study carefully and implement immediately.”
— Judith L. Enns, Ph.D., Executive Vice President, HR Solutions

“I am thrilled that Sandy Asch has published Excellence at Work. Sandy uses integrity, intelligence and humor to demonstrate standards of behavior and offers useful takeaways in her book. She delivers insightful manager tools to employers for the success of their company’s vision and focused best practices. Sandy brings passion to the workplace.”
— Wendy Evers, Senior Director of Program Development, San Diego State University President, North County Personnel Association

“Finally! I have worked on synchronizing and monitoring the success of strategic planning and budgeting processes in companies of all sizes. For two decades metrics from human capital management have been conspicuous by their absence. With this book Sandy has provided a framework for business intelligence dashboards to include the pulse of that most crucial element of any corporate initiative: the people.”
— David Moore, President, Business Avionics, LLC

“Sandy utilizes a revolutionary approach to attract, engage, optimize and retain top-tier talent. I strongly recommend that all HR practitioners incorporate these proven strategies into their organizations to distinguish themselves from their competitors.”
— Michael Milligan, Human Resources & General Affairs Manager, Toppan Optical Products, Inc.
“As a CFO, my goal is to create value in the organization. The Excellence program helps to build an environment where people can be most effective, become as good as they are, and even better than they should be, thereby adding value. The program has served to decrease the ‘human friction’ and establish an environment of creativity, innovation, trust and respect—all essential elements of a successful company. Modern Postcard’s continued growth and increased profitability is proof we have achieved ‘excellence.’ Some might ask how we can afford to offer a program like this to our entire employee population. I ask, ‘How can we afford not to?’”
— Bill Lofft, Former CFO, Modern Postcard

“Sandy provides a systematic model to build a sustainable ‘employer-of-choice’ organization.”
— Marc Brown, Vice President, Human Resources, Encore Capital Group Inc.

“The Excellence program opened a lot of eyes and challenged many assumptions about what is possible in a government agency. While each participant was positively affected in unique ways, the entire leadership was re-energized with a new commitment to changing the culture of the agency to one that brings out the very best in every staff member. The program systematically laid out the Excellence principles and promoted the kinds of practices that we’ve always wanted but didn’t know how to achieve.”
— Tom Cullen, Former CFO, Catawba Community Mental Health Center, Rock Hill, SC

“In today’s marketplace, attracting and keeping top talent is critical to having a successful and thriving business. The Excellence principles create a culture of high standards and high results, which fully engage every member of your staff. Such a culture not only retains top talent, but helps you to become an employer-of-choice where top talent is waiting in line to get on board.”
— Edi Holderman, Human Resources Manager, Vistage International, Inc.

“I participated in the Excellence program with Sandy seven years ago and it was life changing. Working in the government sector, I initially felt our environment was not conducive to these ideas. However, Sandy helped inspire my journey to a new way of leadership beyond my visible boundaries and I have never looked back!”
— Rob Claudio, Member, Board of Directors, International Association of Workforce Professionals

“There are many new business programs designed to ‘fix’ your organization that are no more than a fad. Sandy’s use of visuals, statistics and stories has a long-lasting impact on an organization as compared to other programs I have utilized in the past. The Excellence program really helps an organization re-energize their people and ‘make it happen.’ Thanks for the inspiring information. These are great tools.”
— Wendy Crawford, Director, Human Resources, Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital
EXCELLENCE at WORK
The Six Keys to Inspire Passion in the Workplace
Sandy Asch
About WorldatWork®

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Introduction

A group of senior executives from a successful manufacturing company was intrigued by a simple question I posed in an executive off-site meeting: “Where is the Excellence Thermostat set in your company?” After much consideration, the group agreed that, on average, the level of employee excellence was about 60 percent to 70 percent. When asked if they were satisfied with their assessment, the executives responded with a resounding “no!” They had realized, as have leaders in many companies, that if employees are falling short of their potential, lack passion and engage in unproductive behaviors that deplete their time, energy and focus, the company will be challenged to meet its goals. It was clear that if their company was going to meet its aggressive revenue goals and be recognized as a leader in the industry, every employee would have to contribute at his or her highest level.

The Excellence Thermostat is a straightforward tool for identifying the standards of behavior to which employees are held. In many companies, such standards have eroded over time and resulted in organizationwide acceptance of gossip, criticism, complaint and condemnation. These behaviors in turn caused victim behaviors, “road kill” and general disengagement. In the case of the manufacturing client, an Excellent Workplace survey by Alliance for Organizational Excellence LLC showed that only 35 percent of employees were fully engaged—energized and motivated—by their work. For the remaining 65 percent of employees who admitted they were frustrated, resigned, barely interested in their work or just “coasting,” the following question arises: “What must the leadership do to reinvigorate and refocus employees on success?”

Most companies face overwhelming pressure to produce more, better, faster and cheaper in order to compete in a demanding global marketplace. To this we can add a shrinking workforce, an all-time low unemployment rate for college graduates and a projected labor shortfall of 26 million skilled workers. Leaders will thus
be increasingly challenged to extract the greatest value from a multiethnic, four-generation workforce, each generation of which has unique needs and demands. Failure to meet this challenge will put many companies at risk.

To be an “Excellent Organization” requires a new mind-set, a new set of habits and a whole new design of a company’s corporate culture. The new culture must be one in which there is a passionate commitment to excellence that is characterized by high productivity, full engagement and inspired leadership. Establishment of this culture enables companies to attract, optimize and retain the top talent they need in order to meet and exceed their business goals. Excellence at Work provides a practical road map for leaders at every level in an organization to do just that.

Research findings that suggest that establishing a strong corporate culture will help your business gain competitive advantage have been available for 30 years. So why haven’t most companies already done it? The answer is that few people welcome change, and most can’t make the leap from concept to action, which is why we spell it out in Excellence at Work. As you follow the steps I provide, you will establish a new set of standards or expectations for the way in which your people go about their day-to-day responsibilities. The goal is to lock in the Excellence principles so they become pervasive and embedded in every aspect of your business.

In companies where the Excellence principles have become “the way” and are accepted as the standard, the results have been remarkable. Excellence graduates report that the use of these principles has had a profound and lasting effect on them, as follows:

• 75 percent report they increased productivity by 10 percent to 50 percent.
• 95 percent communicate more effectively.
• 87 percent are more accountable.
• 91 percent improved relationships with internal and external customers.
• 89 percent bring more energy and passion to work every day.
• 76 percent are more effective leaders.

The effect of the Excellence principles on an organization goes far beyond these statistics and positively influences every aspect of organizational life. In one case, a vice president and a senior director who had barely spoken to one another for three years, other than to exchange insults and engage in screaming matches within the earshot of employees, called a truce. The two have since transformed their relationship and now conduct themselves in a professional and even collegial manner. By making this new “agreement” to treat each other with respect and dignity, they communicated to employees that it was no longer acceptable to behave unprofessionally. After all, what we allow, we teach.
Although individual successes have been significant, the greatest successes have come from organizationwide application of the principles. Where senior leadership has committed to integrating the Excellence principles and incorporating the Excellence Code, and has invested the time and resources to include all employees in the process, the results have been significant.

The San Diego Workforce Partnership’s forward-thinking leadership team, after participating in the Excellence training itself, decided unanimously to implement the Excellence principles enterprisewide. The Excellence principles quickly became the new shared language and served as a powerful compass for daily actions and behaviors at a time when employees were faced with a great deal of uncertainty due to budget cuts, reorganization and layoffs.

Employees at another company were so inspired that they created a game based on the principles. We will discuss this game later in the book and show you how to create an Excellence Game for your workplace, and we will provide other tools that will help you implement the principles. I believe deeply in the power of play and joy to create and sustain excellence at work. You can experience similar successes in your company by following the guidelines and implementing the strategies outlined in this book.

W. Edwards Deming said that the ultimate business of business is the human spirit. That is, business should provide people with the opportunity to flourish and thrive. We cannot measure “spirit,” but we can always tell when it is lacking in an organization. A workplace in which employees are tense and fear-ridden cannot foster creativity and sustain high performance. However, an environment that honors and respects the human spirit of all workers can only be a success. Committed leaders can create that environment. Excellence at Work offers them the blueprint.

The first part of the book, “Getting in the Game,” answers the question: “Why do you need the Excellence principles?” Its four chapters offer a rationale for implementing an excellence initiative, demonstrate the costs of employee disengagement and offer an overview of the Excellence principles. Part Two of the book, “The Principles, or The Rules of the Game,” explains each principle in depth and provides examples of desirable behaviors and steps for using the principles to promote and develop excellence at work at the individual level. Part Three, “The Strategies of the Game,” outlines strategies for operationalizing excellence and provides examples and models that show how to implement the principles organizationwide. Finally, in Part Four, “Winners of the Game: Case Studies of Excellent Companies,” we look at companies that live by the standards of “excellence at work” and that have, as a result, achieved recognition and success.
I suggest that while reading this book you keep an Excellence Journal in which you record your thoughts, ideas, examples and inspirations. You may find that you will continue to use an Excellence Journal for the rest of your working life as a reminder of your significant accomplishments and as a way of maintaining a strong commitment to excellence.

So, go ahead. Get in the game!