



*Why is excellence important? Through excellence our decisions are better, actions more ethical and time better spent.*

## 2008's Best in the Business Inspire Excellence

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This year's "Best in the Business" seem to have a common origin. Could it be desire? No, desire without action is worthless. How about intelligence? No, intelligence is just as easily used to avoid work as to do it better. Longsuffering? Accepting to suffer mediocrity is no virtue. Hard work? One can work hard pulling a load in the wrong direction. Those among us who are the Best in the Business set ourselves apart by seeking and achieving excellence. People will always find inspiration to achieve either mediocrity or excellence, and as we seek to provide inspiration toward the latter of these paths, we need to remember the fundamental questions.

What is excellence? By definition: extraordinary; the fact or state of excelling; superiority; eminence. It is the state one achieves through total dedication, perseverance, ethics and earned loyalty. It is excellence that allows one to expose graft rather than give in to it. It is excellence that prevents one from cutting corners when no one is watching. It is excellence that recognizes the value of credibility.

Where does excellence come from? Humanity will never precisely map the origins of a desire for excellence nor the discrepancy in the perceived value of excellence among individuals. However, one can argue that excellence comes from an infinite combination of a multitude of factors.

Who inspires excellence? Inspiration by its very nature may be orches-

trated but not mandated. Inspiration is imparted by those who can form a connection with the subject, those who "walk the walk" and are seen as not possessing hidden agendas. The person known to have faced temptations, doubts and weaknesses and to have prevailed against each is an inspiration. Though we prefer inspiring by positive means, the person appearing on a wall of shame for having forsaken his or her values is likewise an inspiration to some. The method and degree of inspiration to excellence depends on the subject's own observations and personal development.

How does one create observable excellence? One observes excellence the same way a black hole can be observed, by cataloguing its effects. Interestingly, those who achieve excellence often consider themselves as having performed to standard — their standard is just far higher than most. It is the actions of these people that superiors should promote as the true standard, rather than the typical standard of adequacy. The benefits that excellence brings to an agency and its employees must be publicized, and the one achieving excellence should reap tangible benefits. Excellence in a proper environment will have two observable effects — the agency moving forward and the subject moving up.

When does the vision of excellence transform into a mission of excellence? Once employees understand the true value and reward of excellence, they may experience an

epiphany — or at least an incremental shift in thought. More times than not, such shifts come in the form of a person deciding "I want to be like ..." and then seeking to emulate the observed person's qualities. Subjects may also reach these moments of transformation through life changes such as a new spouse or baby. Often while battling the quandary of how to support the new obligation, the rewards of excellence are distilled to perfect clarity.

Why is excellence important? Through excellence our decisions are better, actions more ethical and time better spent. These truths work together to improve one's temperament, defend public safety, protect civil rights of the incarcerated and increase efficiency. Success in these areas keeps a correctional agency out of negative headlines, courtrooms and contentious budget hearings.

The Best in the Business are people who we must support to ensure that they reach their potential and are appropriately rewarded. They are the ones who have chosen to be set apart by higher character and achievement, and they deserve recognition for it. The men and women featured in this issue are our reason for coming together to celebrate this profession. As we go forward through the year, we must dedicate ourselves to the continual recognition of excellence as it makes itself known. ♦