



# How do you know if you are at Excellence?

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**Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?**

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**T**en years ago I thought that my 300-person software company's successful performance and a happy staff was reason to believe that my firm was at "Excellence". I was dead wrong – which I found about out ten years later when I started to really understand business.

Today I smirk at business newspapers and magazines which continually pump out awards for best companies by looking only at the surface issues – profits, growth, press clippings, etc. The smile reflects my skepticism, as so often these same paragons of corporate achievement find themselves in deep trouble a very short time later. In fact I have just begun work with such a company – awards galore in its portfolio, but now in a terrible fix; this is a good organization and we will repair its ills in a timely fashion but if they had looked at the right measures they would never have been subjected to this ghastly pressure.

### Keeping it Brief

Where shall we begin in a 600-word essay to fix all your ills? How about starting with people – your number one issue, anyway? Before we provide our simple answer, be aware that a far more in-depth solution is needed than this paper can offer. The in-depth answer is one that, fortunately, can provide you with leading indicators of how well you are doing – long before your financial statements will warn you. It allows you to keep tweaking your already well performing machine.

### Listening

The common characteristic of all firms in trouble is that they have stopped listening – not listening to clients, to employees, to suppliers, or to the public at large. Reflect on any company you know that is in trouble and I am sure you will see this very simple source of difficulty. The reason is that if they stop listening, they will no longer be aware of changing developments and they will fail to respond to the reality of the situation. 10 years ago, employees of Nortel told participants at one of my seminar that the Nortel bosses had stopped listening..... When CCCC assists companies, we inject a dozen different listening mechanisms. If you do not listen, not only do you end up on the wrong path, the employees who are not listened to become frustrated and reduce

their cooperation. We have a bottom line saying: **If you increase cooperation of staff by 10%, your company performance will increase by 30%.** These are actually measured results. The converse is equally valid – if cooperation decreases by 10%, performance will drop by 30%; just ask any football club that loses a match by a big score to an equally ranked team.

### The Tests

Here are tests to tell you if you are at "Excellence", listed in an inverted pyramid, so that if you can adopt only one of these as your goal, choose the last one; if only 2, choose the bottom two, etc.

- You have continuous reports of how your staff really<sup>1</sup> thinks.
- The left hand of the factory or company knows what the right hand is doing (and assists each other).
- Despite your size, you remain flexible in responding the customer change requests or demands.
- Staff is not frustrated with your bureaucracy (processes, procedures or communications).
- Your absentee rate (and staff turnover) is almost zero, or well below the industry norm of 4%.
- You are in awe of the people who report to you.

Did I mention profits, growth or press clippings? No; because I am sure that you will find the above measures, if in place, are so enduring that they alone will assure you of continuous success and profits over the long term.

Good luck

Bill Caswell

<sup>1</sup> To know what employees really think, you will receive the equivalent of 30 reports per employee per quarter