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SIX STEPS TO EXCELLENCE FOR LEADERS

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PLUS OTHER  
EXTRAORDINARY  
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



  
MARILYN A. McGRAW, Ph.D.  


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Marilyn A. McGraw, Ph.D.

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## Prologue



There are times in life when the spirit “knows” we have unfinished business to attend to. Such is the reason for the book you are about to read, just as it was seven years ago when *Running Away for Three Weeks* was written. If you were to read *Running’s* prologue, you would see that even as it was being finalized, I knew there would be a second book. True to the words written at that time, I have had numerous opportunities to observe individual leaders working to get their “house” in order before moving towards getting their “workplace” in order.

In 15 years of organizational development and leadership consulting work, I’ve learned that only when we have our personal lives in order can we then begin to perform with excellence as leaders. Time and again, I’ve seen that even the most seasoned leader’s effectiveness is hindered when distracted by personal concerns; not just on the job but in all aspects of life. As was the case seven years ago (when I wrote *Running*), I stand by my statement that personal issues must be resolved before maximum excellence can occur in the workplace. *Running Away for Three Weeks* was the first of two books addressing how to use our gifts to accomplish our work assignments, unrestrained by personal issues. *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* is the second and addresses how individuals can move towards excellence by simply exercising the talents and gifts they have been given in the home, places of worship, communities, and organizations. As you read this book, I hope that you are well on your way (or at least ready to begin the journey) towards engaging in the work necessary to address your personal issues so that you can take your leadership to the next level – the excellence zone.

As you peruse each chapter, you will be engaged in an interactive journey designed to help you discover what excellence means for you. Take heart. Your journey will not look like any one else’s and that is as it should be. Yes, it’s true you have been given a unique set of gifts and talents to utilize in the completion of your work assignments. You may be asking, “Why take seven years to write the second book?” That’s a valid question with a simple answer – one can not write a book on six steps to excellence until one has walked the journey themselves. As you will see throughout this book, excellence is not perfection. Had I waited for perfection, *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* would never have come to fruition.

By writing this second book and seeing it through to publication, I have completed the first set of tasks within my own workplace journey. As you hold it, the responsibility is now upon you to determine whether you are willing to embark upon what may very well be one of the most important journeys of your life. Just as with *Running Away for Three Weeks* (16 states), *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* (5 states) was birthed during a road trip.

As you read, I pray that you will experience a passionate desire to implement your individual six steps to excellence. Not simply because of the rewards you’ll obtain personally by doing so, but because those you lead need you to achieve all the excellence of which you are capable. I also pray that you clearly hear and see what God desires to communicate to you personally, as you embark upon this journey with Him as your guide. If you choose to move towards the excellence zone by taking your leadership to the next level, you can expect to receive all the blessings that accompany manifesting all you have been created to achieve.

In summary, *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* incorporates a definition of workplace that transcends traditional organizational boundaries to include our sphere of influence in any situation. The

term workplace is therefore expanded to include anywhere we perform the job description (our spirit recognizes) we have been assigned. Based on this, *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* focuses on ways in which we carry out our work assignments by using our gifts and talents both inside and outside corporate walls.

*Running Away for Three Weeks* was intended to encourage you to discover *what* your individual gifts are and move you towards understanding your value in God's economy. *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* will teach you *how* to use your individual gifts and talents in the workplace(s) God has assigned you. Unlike *Running Away for Three Weeks*, *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* is not filled with an abundance of Bible verses. Just in case you are curious, no, I have not lost my Christian faith over the last seven years. Quite the contrary, I have learned how to manifest it by living it rather than speaking about it. *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* will show you *how*, you too, can be spiritual in the workplace without being religious or using words when a spirit of excellence is all you need.

For the most current information regarding Excellence At Work, visit [www.DrMarilyn-EAW.com](http://www.DrMarilyn-EAW.com). There you will find up-to-date information regarding currently available products along with various services such as: leadership training opportunities, speaking engagements, and upcoming retreats.

May you always be encouraged to discover and walk in your own calling so that, you too, can become "excellence at work" within your workplace(s).


Marilyn A. McGraw, Ph.D.  
Founder/CEO  
Excellence At Work

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## CHAPTER THREE

*This book is dedicated to Nana who always said I could do and be anything I wanted to...*



### What is Excellence



*True excellence is achieved in the absence of striving to be or do anything other than what we were created to do or be.*

*“Excellence is what happens when eloquence and passion work together with courage to execute the impossible.”  
Marilyn Ann McGraw, Ph.D.*

As you know, “My name is Dr. Marilyn and my company is Excellence At Work. The left top corner of my business cards read ‘Excellence At Work’ and have my name ‘Marilyn Ann McGraw, Ph.D.’ across from the logo in the top right corner. At first blush, that may sound pompous until you understand that excellence is not perfection. It is doing what you were created to do by knowing your skills and using them. It’s also not about comparing yourself to others (that can be pride) but rather running your own race.”

The preceding paragraph contains some of the words I use to begin my message when I share the *Six Steps to Excellence* teaching with live audiences. I go on to communicate that motivational speaker Les Brown is famous for saying “You got to be hungry.” This book, just like the live teaching, is intended to show that your road to excellence

depends on you knowing your excellence zone and operating in it. Your part is to simply get hungry!

A little about myself: I have 15 years of professional consulting experience. According to my mother I actually began at the age of 12 which makes me 27 years old or something like that... Over the last several years I've been to many workshops, spoken at some, and listened at all. If you're lucky, you stay motivated for a week or a month at best. This book is not intended to jazz you up to have you lose momentum as soon as you put it down. Rather it is intended to be an aide in helping you get the most out of the time you put into reading it and working through its exercises.

Much as I do when speaking to live audiences, I am going to ask you to do your part to help yourself to gain the most out of our time together. What I would like you to do is to enter into a psychological contract with me. In business this occurs when one or more parties holds the belief they will obtain something through their partnership with the other. In our case, I'm going to ask that you open yourself to receive information that is going to add to who you are at this moment in time.

Before proceeding I must offer the following disclaimer for our time together. Because you chose to read *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders*, you have the opportunity to actively move towards your own personal excellence or to discover how long you can stay pumped-up without doing anything. Now, while you are welcome to continue reading, I must share that I did not write this book just for the purpose of providing you a short-term pick-me-up. This book is for every reader who has pen and paper ready to take notes because they understand the time of playing small is over. I should also say that this book will not educate you on accounting principles, marketing, sales strategies, or HR topics, etc. By virtue of your choice to explore what excellence means for you it's a safe bet that you already have some success in those areas (or others pertinent to your career track) by the

very nature of your interest in the topic of excellence. I should also share that I am focused on individuals who know what they excel in and more importantly are hungry for a higher level of excellence. The "In the Zone" level of excellence. Moving forward, you will quickly become aware that your road to excellence depends solely on you knowing your zone and operating within it.

Winston Churchill said, "Sometimes it is not enough to do your best. You must do what is required." This book is for those who are currently endeavoring to do their best but also know that more is required. One final disclaimer before we begin. Will Rogers is quoted in *Dogs Don't Bite: When a Growl Will Do* (Weinstein & Barber, 2003) as saying, "If you get to thinking that you are a person of some influence, try ordering someone else's dog around" (p. 145). By that I mean to say that as we move towards excellence over the next few chapters, we must be aware that we are doing so because we have all been called to manifest our personal best selves. When we focus on trying to step into another person's lane we often are quickly reminded that our true success lies solely in the path we were created to execute. It is for that reason that we want to focus on what is required from us as opposed to someone else.

As I shared in *Running Away for Three Weeks*, during my time at Cisco in Silicon Valley, California I learned one of my greatest life lessons to date. Simply stated, it was how to be blessed by surrendering my desire to a higher power's will (no, I'm not referring to Cisco's CEO John Chambers). As I founded my company, Excellence At Work, I incorporated the six steps to leadership excellence I'll be sharing with you over the next few chapters. In my case those six steps have led to a business that helps successful leaders become more effective through training and meeting facilitation, speaking engagements, and retreats. Everything the company does is designed to support the achievement of business and personal goals that facilitate leaders' responsibilities for creating positive outcomes within their workplaces. Using customized solutions, we focus on

outrageous outcomes because our bottom line is to facilitate leaders' abilities to impact their bottom line by:

- Creating action plans and events to motive excellence
- Improving communication within and across functions
- Increasing team and workplace meeting effectiveness
- Building congruent personal and professional goals

I share the overall mission of *Excellence At Work* to show just how strongly I believe in the power of *Six Steps to Excellence for Leaders* and the fact that its principles can be distilled down to six basic actions. During my own journey for personal excellence there were numerous times when I asked that God put the knowledge in my head, send an angel to help, or get me out of a current predicament, because I clearly did not have all the knowledge needed to start a business. The bottom line is that we must accept help from others, accept that we do not have to be perfect, and accept the assistance we need when it arrives.

As with every speaking engagement I have presented, this book was written because of my unfailing belief in the magic that occurs when we simply do what we were created to do using the gifts and talents we were innately provided. Whether within a corporate environment, our households, communities, or places of worship, it is time that we reach beyond our own self-doubts, to more fully realize and execute our greatest strengths. The strengths we have always possessed and can not lose because they are who we are. As you continue your journey to excellence, allow your self-confidence to be buoyed when you feel it rising. When you find yourself smiling as you reflect on your past accomplishments, go with it. Your decision to play big will make it possible for those around you to achieve more than they themselves initially believed was possible. As you'll see, your becoming excellent was never about you. On that note, remember, excellence is not perfection and don't stop thinking about how your natural abilities are used (have already been used) when

you're in your excellence zone (i.e., fully manifesting who you have been created to be by executing your innate talents and/or gifts).

As we move into the next chapter, here are a few points to remember going forward:

- Set goals, don't over think the manner in which you'll achieve them but rather focus on your need to execute them.
- Peoples' opinions of you don't define you; never did, never will, no way, no how.
- Think about what ignites passion within you and risk discovering that you are capable of achieving a life that allows you to live that passion.
- Modify or remove relationships that are no longer working or contributing to your ability to become excellence at work.
- Participate in your own liberation, and don't look to others when you already possess your own life preserver.
- Be willing to do things others won't do today so that you can have tomorrow what others won't.
- The best revenge for any past wrong done to you is to become more successful than you were when it occurred.
- No matter what your talent or giftings, always provide more service than expected or what you get paid for.
- Build relationships; position yourself for openings to come.
- If anyone tells you you're "less than", stop speaking to them.

With that, don't stop thinking about tomorrow. The dreams you dream today will be the vision you walk in tomorrow. For everything that is on your heart will come to pass if you only believe that excellence is already within you. We are simply going to embark upon a journey to show it off to the world now.

### ***Real Life in California***

Over the years I have come to realize that when we are in our

excellence zone or in the process of doing something meant to get us to it, life cooperates. Such was the case as I committed to head off to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks after thinking about doing so for just a couple of days. I believe it was Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> when I first began to seriously contemplate running away from the California Bay Area for the second time. By Saturday morning, May 31<sup>st</sup> when I left, my car's oil had been changed, its tires rotated (at which time a nail was discovered and removed), and a neighbor scheduled to take in my newspaper. Everything I needed for a successful journey fell into place without any major effort or forethought.

While I must be honest and share that none of the amazing things that serendipitously fell into place over those four days surprised me, I was so blessed to know in my “knower” that I was once again released to take a road trip. By this time I also realized that this book would be the fruit of the trip and planned for its writing accordingly. Not only did I take my journal as I had on the first cross country road trip, but this time I was backed up by a cell phone and computer. Technically I could have stayed away much longer given the tools I now had at my disposal. However, I opted to exercise self-discipline and refrain from abusing my additional tools and instead planned to return to the Bay Area within a week and a half.

*Point One, when you feel a “knower” moment coming on, dare to take a risk and go with it; but remember, even “knower” moments often have expiration dates.*

Armed with that understanding, I drove east towards South Lake Tahoe, California for a day at one of my favorite places – Emerald Bay. However, before I arrived at the three plus hour destination, I had to first bypass a destination that was no longer mine to stop at. It was the same “prior dating relationship” destination I had to avoid just a couple of months previously and because I had done so successfully (at that time) was now being allowed access to open highways and

dreams. Without going into unnecessary details, the point I'd like to share at this juncture is that we each have various destinations along our journey towards excellence. Some are those we are meant to stop at and others are those we must avoid. In some cases a destination may simply be a place we are not yet ready for, in other cases it may be a place we are never meant to visit.

*Point Two, stop right now and take the time to ascertain what will assist you on your journey towards excellence and what will only derail you. Make the commitment to yourself to do what it takes to avoid detours in favor of driving open highways.*

Before you continue to the next chapter, take a few minutes to contemplate unnecessary pit stops you know you need to avoid. These pit stops may be people, places, or activities you know you need to stay away from. If you have any question as to whether *something* or *someone* is an unnecessary pit stop, ask yourself, “If I allow this into my journey, will it support my goal of excellence or hinder it?” Using the racing analogy, never forget that an appropriate pit stop is a “slow down to go quicker” moment, whereas an inappropriate pit stop simply adds delay or completely derails. With that, let us continue the journey towards excellence...

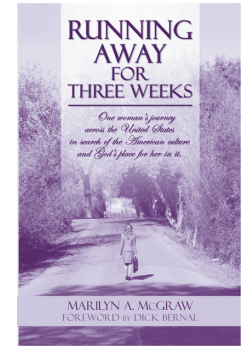
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Weinstein, M., & Barber, L. (2003). *Dogs don't bite: When a growl will do*. New York: Perigee Trade.

## Appendix B: Additional Excellence At Work Resources

### **Running Away for Three Weeks** (Purchase \$10.99 + \$3.00 S/H)

The revelation in these pages will dramatically impact and transform your business and personal attitudes forever. Without ever packing a bag, you will experience the victory that comes from knowing anything is possible if you believe...



Dr. Marilyn is widely recognized as a woman of faith and tenacity. A remarkably gifted teacher, her ability to motivate and encourage individuals is captured in the pages of *Running Away for Three Weeks*.

More than ever, Americans are searching for meaning to their lives. For some, this may be the first time they are asking, “Why am I here?” or “What is it that only I can offer the world?” Some may even be asking, “Is there really a God?” As individuals grapple with these valid questions, *Running Away for Three Weeks* offers answers by leading readers through a three week expedition across America through the eyes of Marilyn McGraw after her 2001 lay-off.

Not until *Running Away for Three Weeks* has an inspirational Christian autobiography so masterfully:

- Shown how God leads in situations so readers can learn to be sensitive to His leading in their own lives
- Motivated readers to maintain forward momentum when potentially negative life circumstances occur
- Encouraged discovery and execution of individual gifts

Dr. Marilyn’s gift for instigating “excellence at work” in others is openly shared throughout the pages of *Running Away for Three Weeks*. Readers will be left saying, “If she can make it with God’s help, I can too.” Lives of men and women will be changed as they implement the spiritual lessons described in this book.



## Discovering Your Workplace Gifts

(Purchase \$3.99 + \$2.50 S/H)

This assessment will help you discover your unique “value-add proposition” and the gifts you possess to achieve your personal and professional workplace assignments...



Identifying and understanding the gifts we possess is critical to fulfilling the calling God has for each of us in His workplace. As we begin to work with understanding of who God has created us to be, we move towards becoming excellence at work as He defines excellence in His workplace. This in turn allows the body of Christ to grow and mature as God desires. To achieve our divine purpose in the most effective manner, we must know which gifts God has given us to complete our work assignments. We must also understand that our workplace transcends traditional organizational boundaries into every aspect of our lives. Armed with this knowledge, we can begin to move towards “being about our Father’s business” wherever it may lead.

Dr. Marilyn is the creator of *Discovering Your Workplace Gifts*. By combining her academic studies in Organizational Psychology with her desire to help others discover their workplace gifts, she has created an assessment that encourages readers to achieve their life’s purpose. With over fifteen years of experience in survey development and workplace interventions, she is widely recognized as a Christian woman who understands how to combine secular training with spiritual insights. *Discovering Your Workplace Gifts* serves as a tool to help readers fulfill the workplace assignments they were motivated to discover in her book, *Running Away for Three Weeks*.

## How Christian Spiritual Practices and Charismata Influence Perceptions of Workplace Outcomes and the Ability to Attain a Sense of Purpose and Become Self-Actualizing – A dissertation by Marilyn Ann McGraw, Ph.D. (Purchase ebook \$4.99)

This study developed initial theory regarding how a select group of Christians who reported incorporating spiritual practices (such as prayer and meditation) and utilizing charismata (i.e., gifts provided by God) perceived their impact in various workplaces (i.e., communities, places of worship, households, and organizations), and whether doing so affected their ability to attain a sense of purpose while becoming self-actualizing (i.e., becoming everything one is capable of becoming). This was achieved using a grounded theory approach as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Study participants included 11 individuals who (1) identified themselves as Christians (believed they have an intimate and alive relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit), and (2) reported that they incorporated spiritual practices and utilized charismata they believed they possessed to affect various workplace outcomes.