

## **Nomination for Willis Harman Spirit at Work Award**

**Eileen Fisher, Inc.**

**Nominated by Judi Neal**

### **1. Name of Company**

Eileen Fisher, Inc.

### **2. Contact Information**

Eileen Fisher, Inc.  
2 Bridge Street  
Irvington, NY 10533  
www.eileenfisher.com  
webemail@eileenfisher.com

### **3. Contact Person**

Susan Schor  
Vice-President of Human and Organizational Development  
2 Bridge Street  
Irvington, NY 10533  
914-422-4155

### **4. A brief description of:**

**a. The nature and scope of the business; current vision and mission; philosophy and core values; principal products and services; etc.**

Eileen Fisher, Inc. is a women's fashion company. Their mission is "To live simply. Eileen Fisher clothing is designed as a wardrobe system. Our goal is to simplify dressing, in clothes that inspire women to be themselves." (From their website)

The company was founded by Eileen Fisher in 1984 in New York City. Sales were \$112 million wholesale volume and \$35 million retail volume in 2001. Major retailers include Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, Marshall Fields, Macy's, Dillard's, Parisian's, Rich's, and Seibu. The collection is also sold in nearly 1000 specialty stores across the U.S. There are 22 Eileen Fisher stores in major cities.

The company is currently working on their vision and mission statement and think it will be ready by April if that is needed for the Awards ceremony.

The following is from a document they sent me called "Eileen's Management Philosophy: The 10 Points."

## 1. Engage People.

Encourage people to be confident about their creative contribution. Excite, motivate, involve - gather and utilize each person's energy. Listen. Share information. Ask questions. Explain projects in order to give meaning and value to all tasks. Communicate goals conceptually so employees feel comfortable presenting their perspectives and ideas. Seek new challenges for yourself and for your team members - growing and developing every person in the company expands our possibilities.

## 2. Team with People.

Bring people together. Create a balance between you and your team. See people's strengths and weaknesses; discover who is good at what. The team is responsible for the work; the manager doesn't stand alone. Don't be divisive. Teaming with other managers is also important because our work is connected to each department and we all can expand one another's perspectives.

## 3. Empower People.

Give your people the power. Support their style. Let them find their own way. If you direct people from a "this is the only way to do it" perspective, you micro-manage and confine potential. Defining the big picture and being flexible and open about how the team arrives there is great leadership.

## 4. Communicate the Big Picture.

Guide your team like a compass. Communicate the conceptual vision and give people background about the why's of our projects. This information provides a foundation from which each person's perspective can grow. Listen and identify priorities. It is so valuable to infuse as many ideas as possible into the process of decision-making and actions plans.

## 5. Create a Joyful Atmosphere

Have fun every day! This is our life, and we should feel joyful and relaxed at work. Acknowledge and reward. Focus on the positives; give the negatives less power. When there are negatives to address, be there to reduce tensions and help resolve conflicts.

## 6. Be Positive.

Support the company and emphasize positive, constructive outlooks. Present situations in a positive way. To come from a positive place conveys our belief in discovering the best possibilities in every situation -- Eileen's "something good comes out of something difficult" philosophy.

## 7. Communicate Openly.

This philosophy is about being open and honest. When we share information rather than withhold it, we all gain more insight into the company - where it is and how we can help it grow. It is vital to encourage people to admit mistakes. We make mistakes every day and we shouldn't feel afraid or nervous about them. Eileen believes that in the middle of our present mistake, we find the secret to our next success because we learn about another solution and another possibility. Communicating openly gives us infinite opportunities to learn.

## 8. Be Responsible.

Be responsible to yourself, your team and the company. Encourage integrity. Because Eileen needs everyone to be responsible for adding their perspective, have confidence about developing and presenting your opinions and encourage your team to do the same. Don't place blame in a situation, celebrate the solution instead.

## 9. Keep it Simple.

Simplify the work as much as possible. Projects and issues can become complicated and absorb too much energy. Question the pieces that don't feel simple and be creative with the team about ways to move towards simplicity. The connections with the projects that each person accomplishes become clearer and easier to develop when the process is simple.

## 10. *(I'm missing this one. I'll send it when I find it. Judi)*

b. The policies, programs, or practices that explicitly promote or enable spirit at work; nature and scope; when implemented; by whom; relevant background; public visibility; etc.

The following list is from Susan Schor, VP of Human and Organizational Development:

## Ways we nurture employees' spirits:

1. Employee wellness benefit - each person is allotted \$1,000 per year to nurture themselves in any way they define it. Encouraged and common uses for the money includes massages, yoga, nutritionists, facials, anything new-age-like, gym memberships, etc. People are held accountable for how they used this money in their Professional Development Plans, but the money must be used for personal self-care.
2. Employee educational benefit - another \$1,000 allotted to educate yourself in ways that you want to learn. Examples include dancing lessons, guitar lessons, voice lessons, yoga teacher training, as well as for skill related if that is what the employee chooses.
3. In-house, we have a yoga instructor who comes on site twice a month. We are planning to add massage therapists & nutritionists in the next couple of months.
4. In March 2002 we are beginning a discussion group for parents with young children (lead by a therapist who specializes in this area), addressing issues of being a working parent with young children.
5. We offer a series of in-house workshops. In January, a holistic physician had three 2-hour experiential workshops (one at each site) on stress management. In late February and March and again in the summer, we have a dance and movement specialist doing 2-week residencies with us. She will offer workshops to employees, management team, and store employees, as well as individual work. Then in May through November, faculty from the Omega Institute will be running holistic education workshops for us on-site.
6. There are other things in the works for this year and the following along the same lines.
7. We have two on-going teams - Strategic Wellness Team (higher level management to plan strategic direction for company related to wellness) and Employee Wellness Team who plans many of the activities and in house communications.

Eileen Fisher, Inc. has very progressive employee policies including Partner Benefits and Day Care Support.

The company is a very active member of Businesses for Social Responsibility, and Social Venture Network. They are also forming a partnership with Omega Institute which includes programs by Eileen Fisher at Omega, and Omega Programs at the company's headquarters. The Omega Institute is one of the most successful wholistic retreat centers in the country.

Customers also get a sense of the spiritual values of the company in the packaging of clothing that is purchased. Each garment is wrapped in tissue paper and sealed with stickers that have inspirational sayings. The store bags also have inspirational sayings around the lip of the inside of the bag. Examples:

Think like a leaf

Levitate above worry

Slip into yourself

Occupy your Spirit

c. Effect of policies, programs, or practices on stakeholder community - employees, owners, customers or clients, suppliers, communities in which business has a presence, etc.

Eileen Fisher, Inc. is considered a very desirable company to work for because of these policies and practices. Every time there is a job opening, there are hundreds of applications. Employee commitment and loyalty is extremely high, and employees believe in both the product and in Eileen Fisher herself.

Customer loyalty is also extremely high. I don't know if there are any figures on this, but my anecdotal experience is that Eileen Fisher customers often stop buying any other clothes except Eileen Fisher clothes because of the wardrobe concept and the quality of the product. The service in stores is impeccable and very caring.

The company has won awards for their social accountability and it has been written up in numerous business publications including Working Woman and Fast Company. Some of the awards include:

New York Area's Largest Women-Owned Companies – Crain's (1999, 2000, 2001)

Top 500 Women Owned Businesses – Working Woman Magazine (1999, 2000, 2001)

Partners in Excellence Award – Nordstrom's (1998)

Working Woman Magazine (May 2001) has an article about Eileen Fisher, Inc. titled "Holding Herself Accountable: Eileen Fisher weaves workers' rights into the fabric of her company." The article describes her efforts to assure that every factory supplying her business moves towards international standards for working conditions. She turned to Social Accountability International (SAI), "a nonprofit organization devoted to corporate responsibility and the improvement of work conditions around the world. SAI developed an international workplace standard, SA8000, that provides guidelines on child labor, compensation, working hours, and health and safety....Eileen Fisher is setting a standard for corporate responsibility by training suppliers so they can prepare for certification and by footing the bill for their audits.

d. Effect of policies, programs, or practices on nominee's business success.

The company's sales are growing steadily, despite the recession and economic downturn.

e. How the company has been a model or inspiration for others.

I'm not sure how well known the company is. That is one of the reason's I nominated it. I would like more people to know about what a fabulous company this is and have them be inspired to emulate some of Eileen Fisher, Inc.'s practices and policies.

5. Name of nominating party, including contact information and their relationship to the company being nominated.

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I am a friend of Susan Schor, through the Eastern Academy of Management and the Organizational Behavior Teaching Society.

6. References (two or more are recommended) including name, contact information and their relationship to the nominee.

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7. Sources of additional information on the nominee; include website links, articles or other resources.

[www.eileenfisher.com](http://www.eileenfisher.com)