

**Partners in Learning
Learning to Lead Change: Building System Capacity
Leadership for Change Library**

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... And Others Don't

Jim Collins

New York: Harper Collin, 2001

300 pages

Good to Great and the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great

Jim Collins

Boulder, CO: Collins, 2005

36 pages

Everybody's favorite slogan: *Good is the enemy of Great*. But more than a slogan, Collins and his team do careful, unhurried, insightful work. In examining and winnowing 1,435 companies down to 11 that had gone from good to great as measured by continuous financial success. The book compares the nature of these 11 companies with a matched group of other companies. All companies are named.

Carefully analyzed and studiously documented, *Good to Great* identifies six interrelated themes which Collins displays as a flywheel going from *Disciplined People* (Level 5 Leadership; First Who Then What) through *Disciplined Thought* (Confront the Brutal Facts; Hedgehog Concept) to *Disciplined Action* (Culture of Discipline; Technology Accelerators).

Level 5 Leadership "builds enduring greatness" by not only focusing on steady productivity but by doing so through developing other leaders who can carry on and go even further after the original leader departs. Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines, the good to great leaders are self-effacing, quiet, reserved. These leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

First Who Then What concerns paying attention early to getting the right leaders on the bus, the wrong ones off the bus, and the right ones in the right seats. You cannot achieve greatness unless you have a critical mass of developmental leaders working on the themes captured in the flywheel.

Confront the Brutal Facts meant maintaining an unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time having the discipline to confront the most brutal facts or data of your current reality. This is assessment for learning with a vengeance.

The Hedgehog Concept is focusing on your core business with powerful simplicity around three interacting themes: what are you deeply passionate about, what can you do best in relation to that passion, and what drives your economic engine.

A Culture of Discipline means interaction, disciplined inquiry and problem solving related to your Hedgehog focus or core business. It is not hierarchical authority but disciplined interaction.

The *Good to Great* companies think differently about technology. They never use technology as the primary means of initiating transformation. Yet, paradoxically, they are pioneers in the application of carefully selected technologies. These use selected technologies to accelerate what they are doing.

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Good to Great **Jim Collins**

The *Flywheel* effect builds in positive momentum: visible results, more momentum builds, energy becomes focused consistent with the hedgehog concept and so on — a phenomenon consistent with "winning streaks" so well captured in another of our top 20 books, *Confidence* (Kanter, 2004).

Collins book became wildly popular with great interest being spawned in the social sector as well as in the business community. In fact, Collins was so much in demand in education and other social sector institutions that he recently responded by writing a 36 page booklet, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great* which delves into the issues of applying good to great to non-business entities (Collins, 2005). He first warns that the main message of good to great is not that educators should learn from business (most businesses are mediocre, or good at best). Rather, he advises, the themes in the flywheel are not principles of business, but principles of "greatness." Embrace the language of greatness he advocates.

Collins makes a significant refinement to the Hedgehog Concept — passion remains, as does being the best in the world at your core work. But instead of economic engines, he recommends that the deeper concept for the social sector is a *resource engine*. While money is both an input and output measure for businesses, it is only an input for the social sector. Achieving your mission is what should drive the social sector. Thus, the resource engine consists of greater "time, money and brand recognition." Passion combines with rigorous assessment of what you can best contribute to the communities you serve with the resource engine being tied directly to the previous two elements.

By focusing on your Hedgehog Concept, you build results. Those results, in turn, attract resources and commitment which you use to build an even stronger organization. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choices and discipline.

Why We Like This Book

This is the gold standard for insights into leadership. Painstakingly researched with powerful, interpretive capacity to identify and nail a small number of key interrelated themes and concepts, *Good to Great* simultaneously captures the complexity and exquisite simplicity of what's entailed in making the leap to greatness.



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