

What separates the good from the great? The merely successful from the very best? The effective from best-in-class?

Insights gleaned from extensive research can be found in a book by author Jim Collins entitled *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*. The second in a series of books by Collins which include *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (coauthored with Jerry Porras) and *Great by Choice*, *Good to Great* has applicability not just to businesses, corporations, and the corporate world, but to government organizations, including the Department of Defense and defense acquisition organizations. It also has staying power, and is still readily available fifteen years after first being published.

In *Good to Great*, Collins seeks the answer to one fundamental question, “Can a good company become a great company, and if so, how?” Based on a five-year research project comparing companies that made the leap to those that did not, *Good to Great* shows that greatness is not primarily a function of circumstance but largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.”

A surprisingly easy read, *Good to Great* is an interesting, insightful, engaging, research-driven and perhaps most importantly, relevant book. Collins summarizes his premise in the first sentence with the truism, “good is the enemy of great,” and then proceeds to delve into the common characteristics of great organizations who successfully made the transition from good. Those characteristics include:

- What Collins calls “Level 5 Leadership” (“a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will”),

- “First Who, then What” (“first get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats – and *then* figure out where to drive it.”),
- “Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith) (“maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality”),
- “The Hedgehog Concept” (cornerstone of the book, “if you cannot be the best in the world at your core business, then your core business absolutely cannot form the basis of a great company”),
- “A Culture of Discipline” (“When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get the magical alchemy of great performance.”),
- “Technology Accelerators (“Good-to-great companies...never use technology as the primary means of igniting a transformation. Yet paradoxically they are pioneers in the application of carefully selected technologies”),
- “The Flywheel and the Doom Loop” (“Those who launch revolutions, dramatic change programs and wrenching restructurings will almost certainly fail to make the leap...Tremendous power exists in the fact of continued improvement and the delivery of results”)

Although several of the companies identified as having made the leap from good-to-great back in 2001 have subsequently fallen off of the pedestal for a variety of often unrelated reasons, the foundational tenets and principles Collins and his team identified

remain as timeless and relevant to successful organizations today as they did fifteen years ago when this book was first published.