

CHMIN 760 Advanced Leadership
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz
Good to Great by Jim Collins
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Agreement

I have read the book by Jim Collins, *Good To Great*. It probably was one of the most valuable and stimulating books I have read thus far in my leadership cohort. The book design of Collins' team impressed me and led to an easy -read format.

Application

To be honest, I'm not sure that my goal as pastor is to be a level 5 leader. On the other hand, I do yearn to be a leader of excellence. There are times when "great" simply scares me, but good is not as threatening. To be great in God's eyes, I guess would be a better goal. I still remember sharing with my dad recently on this subject of being great. He reminded me of my senior college class graduation speaker, H.T. Burr, who spoke on true greatness. His focus was on Jesus and His spirit of selflessness.

Yes, I would like to see the church I pastor thrive instead of survive. The business context calls for great leaders, but I wonder if our spiritual context calls for great leaders? I'm thinking about Bible characters like Enoch and Barnabas. Would you consider them great? As Pastor John Nixon cited at the Georgia-Cumberland camp meeting last night, Enoch never had statistics recorded on his baptismal reports, church attendance figures, or even left us a legacy of writings. But God took him to heaven—He couldn't bear to leave him upon this earth. Enoch was translated, but may not have matched up with the norms of "great" in our society.

Jim Collins' research team did discover that "great" leaders of companies disdained attention and charismatic power. It seemed like most of the eleven companies

with great leaders disparaged attention and power. There was a certain humility about their leadership and a spirit of team affirmation (p.72, 73). As the author stated, “the moment a leader allows himself to become the primary reality people worry about, rather than reality being the primary reality, you have a recipe for mediocrity, or worse” (p.72). Winston Churchill was so aware of this danger in secreting the facts from powerful leadership, that he created a department called the Statistical Office to give him the straight facts on war issues.

But back to the chapter order of Collins’ book. I can confirm that “first who” is so important in building a viable and successful organization. “Getting the right people on the bus” is crucial in developing a vibrant and growing organization. Over the years of my pastoral ministry, the church secretary has been a key cog in developing sustainable growth and ministry in the church. A secretary can be excellent PR for the church as well as profitable in recruiting volunteers for church ministry and service.

Speaking of staff, I’ve also observed the critical nature of adding the right pastoral staff to the church organization. In Grants Pass Seventh-day Adventist Church the former principal of Milo Adventist Academy came on board as our youth pastor initially. Even though he was senior in years, his counsel became so valuable. He had conducted senior class survival training with the young people of the academy. I was eager to embrace that type of leadership on our ministry team. We took a few hits because of his older age, but he gradually worked into a solid associate pastor with expertise in the area of counseling family and relationship crises. There was another associate pastor who spent more time in developing and tweaking our new TV station. His area of expertise did not so much support me as senior pastor, but his creativity built a valuable foundation for evangelism

in the community. I concur, that “first who” is strategically important for the organization.

One area in which I am less than effective as a leader is to confront the brutal facts. My nature generally is to avoid confrontation—probably like many folks. However, in listening carefully to the results of Collins’ research, conducting intense dialogue was a major factor in pinning ribbons on great companies. “All the good-to-great companies had a penchant for intense dialogue” (p.77). I know that this is an area which I need to pursue for growth in my leadership. My nature is to recoil into silence from any form of conflict into declarative peace-making overtures when difficulty in communication breaks out. This pursuit of peace is maybe a hold-over from my own early years in the home where mom and dad scrapped over issues. Interestingly, I resolved to avoid those scraps in my own home and family; because I detested the arguing and debate. My mom and dad did stay together; whereas, other families were splitting up. My early goal of peace-making in the family is probably a carry-over in my pastoral ministry. I want to practice more allowance for differences and feed the healthy type of debate on church committees and pastoral teams. I do believe that right team is necessary for debate to be valuable. That’s where the challenge of “getting the right people on the bus” comes first. I pray that God will lead me to grow in this area and override some of my past life commandments.

Collins research recommends leading with questions rather than answers when dealing with the pressure of conflict on committees that are facing tough issues (p.74). From Dybdahl’s class I remember that my leadership style generally portrays a low-key spirit, but tends toward dictatorial leadership under pressure. That’s where I need to send

up a prayer and remember to ask questions rather than make declarative statements in moments of conflict or debate. I pray for spiritual transformation in my leadership here.

Another area I wish to probe deals with “non-agenda” meetings (p.75). I sense that building relationships for the sake of a melded team is so critical. I have found that spending non-agenda time with staff and family builds those relationships so much more than even the best weekly staff meetings. This goes back to the value of having the “right people on the bus.” A team leader can maintain and add the right people on the bus if these non-agenda meetings occur. Some of my best mentoring times were when the assistant/youth pastor and I were traveling between visitation appointments. The young pastor would be discussing his agenda with me, bringing up his questions and pursuing his dreams and vision. Those times have been most valuable. It makes me wonder if we should schedule this type of time in our church board meetings.

I found the Stockdale Paradox quite interesting. Those North Vietnam POW’s that endured the ordeal of their tortuous experience in prison camps were not sheer optimists that kept setting dates for their release, but the ones prepared to prevail over the long haul. That speaks to the “hardiness factor” (p.82) also; because, the CEO’s that are designated as “great” have that special core value of endurance in their portfolio of leadership. Relentlessly and doggedly, the leaders of “great” companies chase their vision and mission. I’m reminded of several scriptural references that speak to endurance (Matt 24:13; Rev 14:12).

How fascinating that Collins’ research revealed that motivating people doesn’t occur best by promoting and hype, but from seeing the results of the vision working and coming on board the team. In fact, having people who are self-motivated is a real key.

Plus, a leader can de-motivate his team members by choosing to avoid or ignore the brutal facts (p.89).

A major component of Collins' book has to be the "hedgehog concept" (p.90). Basically, the fox and hedgehog have a constant war going on, but the hedgehog wins; because he focuses upon one method or strategy of approach: rolling up into a ball of porcupine-style spikes when provoked by the fox. The CEOs researched by Collins explicitly interviewed the value of being simple and having one approach to their business' success rather than diversification or multiple ways of doing business. The obvious lesson here is to be simple and have one major focus.

My pastoral ministry has been challenged by this hedgehog concept; because, we are taught to be generalists. We are trained to deal with the issues of church like a family-practice physician. We are allegedly supposed to handle all areas of potential ministry: family life, youth work, evangelism, Christian education, preaching, training the laity, etc. Wow, what a challenge to bring together in one kernel of a paragraph the Holy Spirit-ordained vision for a church! In some ways a business organization has an advantage; because they can specialize in one product, but churches are expected to cover the wide range of ministries mentioned above. What a challenge to a pastor, but at the same time it can be energizing! And it's kind of scary to think that what you might have thought you and the church were doing well may not even be the area which you can best at! I mean, can you conclude that your church is not good at prayer and drop that (p.140, 141) to excel in community services ministry?

I further found the chapter on "rinsing your cottage cheese" to be thought provoking and most challenging. If I understand it correctly, this factor of going the extra

mile in disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action makes good organizations/people transform into great. Collins used the illustration of the triathlon athlete, Dave Scott, extracting the last ounce of energy from his experience to be the winner of the race. I sense that our church at Greeneville does a number of things quite well, but very few, if any with excellence. We cover evangelism, loving people, church school ministry, community medical work, and community services quite well, but what do we do with excellence? I have a growing sense that one area we possibly could pursue would be the area of visitation; because, we are a congregation that loves people, in spite of the pain and difficulty of human relationships. I see our people rallying to those who have been hurt. I just wonder if we might give consideration to visitation as the one area of ministry where we could “rinse our cottage cheese” to the point of becoming great?

Finally, I must refer to the flywheel concept in Collins’ material. I rejoiced as I read this particular concept. Erroneously, I have thought in the past that most organizations or companies hit a moment when their entity just took off. But Collins points out from the interviews with CEO’s that “there was no miracle moment” (p.169) when a program launched their success.

The flywheel concept basically conveys that an organization gains momentum toward their vision by staying with their vision and one specific direction. As the shoves and turns begin to mount, momentum builds into success. Ironically, leadership wasn’t even aware of what was happening in their buildup to success until they were well into transformation (Ibid.). Collins states that “after pushing on that flywheel in a consistent direction over an extended period of time, they’d inevitably hit a point of breakthrough”

(Ibid.). Fortunately, that's when people started to "line up" with the vision and throw their shoulders to the wheel to help the organization build and advance in progress.

I must admit that our church does not have alignment with a vision for our future. There are too many flywheels to turn at this point. We have a mission that takes us in too many directions. Our vision and mission need revision. We need to pull together our group of visionaries for a weekend retreat and build that guiding coalition for support of a unified future.

The shocking thought revealed by Collins comes with the "doom loop" (p.178). If there is not an understanding of how the process works, the company or organization is doomed to failure, frustration, no good-to-great growth, and little alignment of stakeholders.

This pastor certainly wants to understand experience the vital ingredients of a good-to-great church: first who, confront the brutal facts, the hedgehog concept, the culture of discipline, and the technology accelerators. At the same time, I want our church and my leadership to only be great in God's eyes.