

Good to Great, the 2001 publication by author Jim Collins, takes us on a journey to examine the transformation of eleven good companies into great companies. Collins' research team compared the corporate performance, as indicated by stock returns, over the latter decades of the 20th Century to identify the truly great companies as well as comparison companies within similar industries. The team looked for companies who had good returns and after vaulting to great returns were able to sustain their great returns for at least 15 years. Eleven great companies, eleven comparison companies within similar industries, and six companies with unsustainable great performance were selected on which to base this book. After reviewing thousands of writings and conducting hundreds of interviews of key leaders and employees of these companies, he and his team arrived at the conclusions in this book. He identifies six key principles which focus on leadership, culture, organizational analysis, and technology. The principles are essential elements of successful management, yet rarely effectively practiced. When applied appropriately to a good company, they spark breakthrough innovation and momentum, in a process that is akin to strategic planning. This book has many supporters but also many critics. The purpose of this article is to examine a few of the principles as they relate to healthcare management, specifically becoming a high reliability organization (HRO), and not to speak for or against the entire content of the book.

THE GOOD TO GREAT PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The most striking and profound principle of all is that of level 5 leadership. Level 5 leaders are the quintessential strategic thinkers. They are focused externally and in the future while constantly looking to improve by challenging the status quo. The level 5 leader is ideally suited to provide the mission, a forward-looking vision, and set of organizational values which drive strategic management. They are not afraid of making the necessary difficult decisions. The 5 levels of leadership described by Collins are depicted at this link: <http://www.thindifference.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Jim-Collins-leadership.png>.

Level 5 leaders build upon the previous 4 levels using a unique mix of humility and will to drive innovation. Level 5 leadership is difficult to attain, even within the military. Military leaders frequently stray from the level 5 leadership path due to external, and sometimes internal, influences. Many would say that military leaders should not truly be level 5 leaders as we are functioning within a hierarchical system. However with the move to flatter leadership structures, level 5 leadership is essential in military healthcare. Level 5 leadership will help to build the momentum necessary to continue to improve against the status quo and drive us forward.

Leadership alone, however, is not enough to transform an organization from good to great. The organization must be primed for the transformation by possessing a strong culture. A culture of discipline, as Collins calls

it, brings together organizational culture and discipline towards that culture and the organization's values. Level 5 leaders drive the culture and model the necessary discipline to the mission, vision, and values. The discipline described here is not the same as military discipline, but the discipline of employees to model the organization's values. Culture and discipline are a challenge in any large organization, including the military. A good culture can yield great positive results whereas a negative culture can quickly be your downfall. The military is a values-based organization which can be utilized to effectively build a culture of discipline which is necessary to become great.

The team is an essential component for the great organization as well as being critical in strategic management. Creating an effective team is all about getting the right people on the bus, and the wrong ones off, both frequent challenges in our military system. Great companies work tirelessly and succeed in personnel management. Civilian personnel management can be a daunting task as we need to work within applicable employment law and regulations, however, navigating this system can pay huge dividends for the health of your organization. It may not be easy to get the wrong people off the bus as Collins says but we can certainly work to get the right people on the bus. We need to ensure that we have a solid screening and interview process in order to ensure we bring on new employees who subscribe to the values we have in military healthcare.

THE GOOD TO GREAT PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO HEALTHCARE

The *Good to Great* principles are applicable to all industries, especially healthcare, despite only one healthcare company being on the great list. Every healthcare company should strive to be great as defined by Collins. Because of its ever presence in our lives, it is worth noting that Collins makes specific comments regarding technology in innovations through the good to great journey. His feeling is that technology should not create or drive innovation but should be used as tools in the innovation process. All too frequently we look to technology to create innovation but really innovation should be supported by technology, not driven by it.

The principles in Collins' book align with the principles of high

reliability on which healthcare is currently focused. High reliability organizations (HROs) need leadership engagement, a culture of safety, and robust process improvement (PI) in order to achieve greatness (Chassin & Loeb, 2013). Collins' description of a level 5 leader is the type of leader required to become an HRO in healthcare, the culture of safety aligns with the culture of discipline, and robust PI is akin to the momentum and innovation developed from buildup to breakthrough. HROs consider safety to be a key value and thus the level 5 leader needs to instill the culture of discipline to ensure safety is a priority. By striving for level 5 leadership, developing a culture of discipline, and effectively managing our personnel, we can move one step closer to high reliability.

CONCLUSION

Good to Great is a good read for any executive especially a healthcare executive. Healthcare leaders are generally considered to be compassionate, caring, easy going, and passionate people. However this may not be enough to propel healthcare organizations to greatness. Applying the principles within *Good to Great* will take their existing goodness and transform it into greatness helping to continue the journey of military healthcare towards excellence.

REFERENCES

- Chassin, M. R., & Loeb, J. M. (2013). High-reliability health care: Getting there from here. *Milbank Quarterly*, 91(3), 459-490.
- Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't*. New York, NY: HarperBusiness.