

(Book review by Martha Hall Findlay, in Maclean's, August 2009)

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

By Jim Collins (co-author of Built to Last); 2001, HarperCollins

Jim Collins is an internationally renowned business strategy guru, and a bestselling author of business strategy books. This book is the result of a study of companies that moved from “good to great” (GtoG) and sustained those results for at least 15 years.

It is a business book, but I particularly enjoyed it because many of the principles in it can also apply to political parties and, indeed, Canada. I summarize here some key points that hit home for me—as a former business person, but now very much as a politician. To see my more comprehensive comments, please see www.marthahallfindlay.ca

Whenever you see the word “company”, replace it, alternately, with the words ***[political party]*** and ***[Canada]*** and you'll see what I mean.

Surprisingly, the GtoG companies were NOT led by people who were “big personalities” --the GtoG leaders instead showed a mix of personal humility and professional will. They were ambitious, very much so, but first and foremost for the company, not themselves. Key was “getting the right people on the bus, and getting the wrong people off, before figuring out how to drive it.” Leaders also put their best people on their biggest opportunities, not their biggest problems. Sustained great results also require a culture of self-disciplined people--NOT to be confused with one person who “disciplines” the rest.

Moving to greatness requires an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth, the *real* truth, of the company's situation. This is not nearly as easy as it sounds, and requires a culture where people are encouraged to speak honestly and, importantly, can be heard. Not only is knowing what you are deeply passionate about key, but success also determining what you can be the best at--importantly, NOT what you WANT to be best at, rather what you CAN be best at.

People often point to technology as a cure-all. Interestingly, the GtoG companies never used technology as a panacea or cause of success, but only as a source of well-selected tools to more effectively implement the agreed-to strategies.

And finally, how to take a company with great results, and turn it into something *enduring*? Collins is unequivocal: “Core values and a purpose beyond just making money.”

In that last sentence, replace “just making money” with “just getting votes”. Interesting, no?