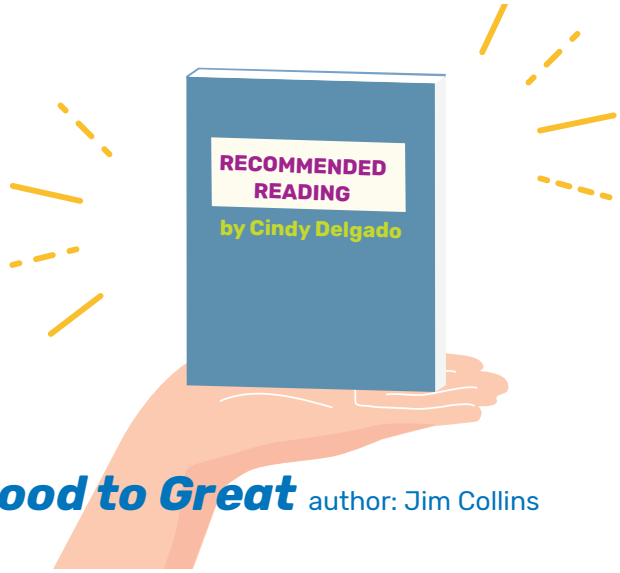


Good to Great author: Jim Collins

Jim Collins assembled a team of researchers that investigated what made a great company and contrasted their findings with comparable companies that remained good companies. This book lays out their findings with concepts that include: Leaders, Hedgehog Concept, Discipline, Accelerators and the Flywheel.

I was struck by so many thoughtful revelations from their research. For me, Chapter 8 titled The Flywheel and the Doom Loop was an illustration that summed up a simple but powerful concept. You are asked to picture a huge flywheel weighing about 5,000 lbs and it is your task to get the flywheel moving as fast and as long as possible. You push with great effort only to move the flywheel inch by inch. The longer you push, the flywheel begins to move a bit faster. You continue pushing and you see progress with each turn of the wheel. Momentum builds and the wheel moves faster and faster with each turn. At some point there is a breakthrough, and the wheel begins to rotate seemingly under its own power because now you are not pushing any more vigorously than when you began.

Now ask yourself, "what was the one big push that caused this wheel to go so fast?" Jim Collins explains that you probably cannot answer this question. Was it your first push? The Second push or the 100th push? Each push alone wasn't the key to your success, but the overall accumulation of your effort applied in a consistent direction. Some pushes may have been larger than others, but all the pushes were each a small fraction of the entire effect upon the flywheel. Each push or experience has an important place in the journey toward the breakthrough.

Make no mistake, it may take years of turning your flywheel, maybe even decades before you experience the breakthrough. AND, once you experience your breakthrough you cannot stop pushing or your momentum will diminish. Remember, once you have momentum the task of pushing your flywheel turns into more of a function of maintenance rather than starting from a standstill.

Jim Collins is a former faculty member at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business where he received the Distinguished Teaching Award. Jim now works from his management research laboratory in Boulder, Colorado.

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