

From Good to Great

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Introduction

Great . . . exceptional. We all want great camps. If you don't, you are in the wrong profession (see "Why be great?"). Great means providing the best value possible given available resources. This might mean doing an even better job of improving social skills, athletic skills development, academic instruction, fun, character education, or . . .

What does it take to be great and how do you know if you are great? Those are the questions answered in this resource to the degree possible given the present state of organizational development knowledge. Before addressing those questions, I would like to offer four introductory notes.

Prerequisites

Although it is possible to gain knowledge from this discussion without reading "The learning camp" resource first, it will make it more difficult. Much of the background information about what it takes to be a great camp is detailed in "The learning camp." Other useful resources to browse first include "Organizational culture at camps" and "Staff motivation."

It's obvious

Certainly, many or all of these points will strike you as perfectly obvious and natural. "Of course!" you'll exclaim more than once. Often, but not always, the mark of a great truth is its self-evident nature. The sneaky thing about "obvious" truths is that it is easy to believe they are already present in your camp. While that may or may not be the case, it is important to assess your success.

Pattern seekers

By nature, human beings are pattern seekers. Stereotypes, rules of thumb, scripts for behavior, and norms are just a few of the ways we make sense of the buzzing world. People are also always saying, "Oh, well basically that is just such and such" . . . boiling things down. We need those patterns, because our brains couldn't cope with the amount of information they would have to attend to on a continual basis otherwise.

That tendency is fine and necessary. Yet we can get into trouble when we use a pattern that isn't right, or perhaps not exactly right. In those cases, we operate with rules that aren't really in our favor, as in an incorrect stereotype.

The applicability of this point to the present analysis (what it takes to go from being a good camp to a great camp) is the nature of those elements. Let's say we could come up with 100 qualities for a leader. From those, we picked a set pattern of characteristics that we thought were really the very important ones that mattered. Such an effort leads to book titles like "The 22 principles of leadership." Different people are likely to come up with different sets from that list and believe them to be correct. The only way to know is to conduct rigorous, scientific research on what the key factors really are. Although that is quite complex for leadership (very situationally and culturally determined), it is easier to discern these factors in good-to-great organizations. Such a research project has been undertaken and the description of the results (and methods) is the bulk of this resource.

The evaluative attitude and self-esteem

People with high self-esteem have a natural tendency to think they're doing pretty darn good for themselves. They don't want to be delusional, but they are quite ready to give themselves the benefit of the doubt. For people with a high self-esteem, it usually goes with the territory. Somewhat counter to what allows us to have high self-esteem, we need to try and see reality as objectively as possible to reach desirable goals. For example, research shows that managers with an accurate view of their own performance (one-third of managers), as well as what their employees think of their performance, are much more effective than those who get it wrong (two-thirds). Virtually all of the managers felt they held an accurate view before two-thirds of them found out otherwise.

Thus, although the tendency might be to believe your camp is great and you are fine on all of the elements of a great camp/organization, practice "the evaluative attitude" and assess your success.

The book – Good to Great

Collins, J. (2001). Good to great. HarperCollins: New York.

“Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don’t have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don’t have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good - and that is their main problem.” Page 1

Quote/review from Dr. Peter Drucker: “This carefully researched and well-written book disproves most of the current management hype – from the cult of the superhuman CEO to the cult of IT to the acquisitions and merger mania. It will not enable mediocrity to become competence. But it should enable competence to become excellence.”

The core question

Using empirical data that is less open to opinion and subjective bias, Dr. Collins and his research team spent years figuring out what it is about companies that propels them to make it from good to great. The purpose was to build a theory by bootstrapping, instead of taking existing theories and mapping the data to them. In this manner, it was hoped that a new and “unbiased” theory of the characteristics for making it from good to great could be revealed.

The discovered elements had to be present in at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the great companies, and essentially no comparison companies. The comparison companies (matched control group) had to be similar in ways too numerous to list. With this comparison group, one could have greater confidence that the elements of the good-to-great companies were not just due to chance or some common factor. They would have to be distinguishable – discriminant validity.

Most of the elements were present in all of the great companies and none of the comparison companies. The comparison companies survived until the end of the study, and usually just matched the performance of the general stock market. Sometimes they didn’t do that well, and after the study ended, some got swallowed up.

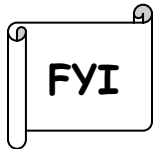
Standards

- All the companies had to be publicly traded on the American stock exchange. Companies were examined from about 1965 to 1999.
- To be in the study, the company had to at least triple market performance, and continue that for 15 years straight. That would eliminate one-hit wonders and insure that the company had what it took to be a truly great, enduring company. It also made sure the run wasn’t due to just one leader.
- Prior to their transition, the good-to-great companies were average – they tracked the market for at least 15 years. Thus, they were good for a long time before making it to great.
- Good-to-great companies averaged 6.9 times the general market in the 15 years following their transition to great. That means a great company would have grown 471 times (and so would your money invested in these companies), compared to 56 times for the general stock market.
- The companies had to demonstrate the criteria for the study independent of their industry, which meant they weren’t just riding a wave.

The high standards detailed above were utilized to find the critical factors necessary to go from good to great. Had lower standards been adopted, there probably would have been “noise,” which clouded what was really necessary with what might have been necessary. The discovered elements rose above that fray. While that is a useful approach, it is possible that a less colossal level of greatness might be achieved without such virtually flawless, sterling exemplars of each element. However, in such a case, a lesser degree of greatness might require *more* elements, because those characteristics help to compensate for not having the core factors in near-perfect form.

And what if you are already great? Dr. Collins cautions that “it is much easier to become great than to remain great.” Indeed, a few of comparison companies achieved momentary greatness for a few years, only to fall back to mediocrity when they stopped applying some (or even one in a couple of cases) of these concepts.

Limitations



- Stock price was the single metric for both good and great.
- None of the companies was engaged in social service, or working for personal outcomes. But, examples are provided at the end of the book to demonstrate how the concepts translate.
- This is only one study, in one country, using very specific and stringent criteria. While the demonstrated discriminant validity is impressive, predictive validity for current and future companies will be even more impressive. Time will tell.
- The number of elements necessary likely exceeds the ones identified in this study, probably depending on the country and industry to a degree. Many elements of exceptional companies identified in past research were not examined. Thus, their correlation with good-to-great companies and lack of correlation with comparison companies is unknown. This point is partially addressed in the “What else?” section near the end of this resource.
- Unlike the companies noted in his study, some camps may not have the resources to go from good to great. It takes time, talented staff, and money. I believe most camps have the resources, although it may require a shift in priorities.

General notes

Only .008 companies achieved the “from good to great” designation by his stiff criteria. Just 11 companies out of 1435 possible ones.

Let’s say the benchmark is set too high. Let’s say that it was set **10 times** too high. That would mean that only 8% of companies made the transition from good to great. If there are 8000 camps in America, then only 640 of them would make it. Now, let’s say that his tough benchmark holds true as a general rule. It would mean that only 64 camps made the transition from good to great.

The concepts are not new. The elements had already been discovered and are well known. For example, the “hedgehog concept” is largely the key drivers and value-driven literature. While it may seem obvious that all the identified elements are essential, the value of this study lies in finding out which ones are necessary to go from good to great. Think of it this way – out of a possible 73 candidates that might be responsible for taking an organization from good to great, these are the ones that rose to the top.

Go ahead and pick up the book. It’s worth the read even given its limitations. My summary and analysis is a limited one. You can make your own judgments, get a fuller picture, and read all the case study stories that bring these concepts to life. Some of the stories are wonderful and well worth the book’s price. If you appreciate this sparse summary, you’ll really want to read the book.

Elements of Good to Great

Level 5 leadership

In great companies, leaders exhibited “Level 5 Leadership” characteristics. I’ll also briefly describe the other four levels for comparison’s sake.

Level 5 - - executive

Professional will

Great results and a catalyst for development. A resolve to do whatever it takes come hell or high water. This person will fire family, change the outcomes and goals, and do almost anything necessary to get results. Mediocrity in any form is not tolerated. Dedicated to value and excellence in a manner that leaves ego out of the picture. “I never stopped trying to become qualified for the job.”

Personal humility

Modest and self-effacing. Does not like the lime light and does not boast when thrust into it. Has inspiring, high standards coupled with a quiet determination. This leader doesn’t have inspiring charisma; he believes that people’s jobs should be the motivating force, rather than a leader’s sparkling personality. Sets up successor for achievement at personal costs. Works a 40 hour work week and then goes home. Lives way beneath means – truly a humble existence. People would consider this person kind, and would enjoy having her or him as their friend.

The window and the mirror

When things go well, the leader looks out the window and points to situational factors (luck, the environment) and other people. This leader shuns responsibility for success. When things go badly, the window is a mirror and reflects the “poor abilities” of the leader. S/he takes the responsibility and the fall. In the comparison companies, it worked the other way around – window for bad results and mirror for good results.

What they get out of it

Leaders in the comparison companies got fame, fortune, adulation, power, ego kick, etc. Leaders in the good-to-great companies were there because it was their passion and joy – often getting paid far less than their peers.

Level 4 – effective leader

Creates commitment toward a high and compelling vision. Has very high standards.

Level 3 – competent manager

People and resources are effectively and efficiently managed toward preset goals.

Level 2 – team member

Marshals individual skills toward the goals of the group. Works well with the group.

Level 1 – capable individual

“Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits.”

First Who . . . Then What

The gist

The normal idea is to set the direction and then get people in line with that goal. In the good-to-great companies, the opposite occurred. First, they got great people who would stay around even if the goal changed dramatically – changing the industry or what was sold entirely. Then, they would set out. If the direction changed, people easily redirected their efforts because they weren’t caught up in the details of a specific end.

Dr. Collins likens this to a trip on a bus. The first task is to get the right people on the bus. They know where the bus is supposed to go, but if that changes, no one is going to want to get off. They are there because the want to be with the other people on the bus (and very roughly the same general industry).

Some elements of the camp experience might change, and you would want your administrative staff to stick around even if that happened. For example, the session length might change, the core outcomes desired might shift, the population of campers might change, or year-round school might be instituted and the camp program might change drastically. You want your camp counselors to be on the bus even if their job description technically changes. In my experience, one summer we needed someone for the kitchen. Another summer we needed a supervisor to live in a cabin with the kids. Who knows what will happen, but when you have great people, you want them to stick around even if things are going to change to a degree. Thus, when people are hired primarily for their talent and high-level goals (e.g., giving kids a world of good), they will stick around.

F o c u s o n q u a l i t y p e o p l e

It probably won't shock you to hear that the good-to-great companies focused an enormous amount of effort on hiring exceptional staff. The comparison companies didn't have the same caliber of employees – especially in the higher ranks. I'll summarize Dr. Collins' key points below – hire for core qualities and train your people very well.

Values, emotional intelligence, and cognitive brilliance are the key core qualities. When people are hired for their values and alignment with your outcomes, there is no need to motivate them, because they are self-motivated. That's certainly true to a large degree – see the “Staff motivation” resource. With the wrong people, the right direction won't matter. I won't further address hiring for values here, because it is covered in detail in the enculturation section of the “Culture book.” Likewise, the importance of emotional intelligence and how to select for it is covered in those (“Emotional intelligence”) resources.

Cognitive intelligence is the second most predictive factor for general job performance. The first is emotional intelligence. Dr. Collins counsels that people should only be hired when they meet all these criteria. He indicates that the comparison companies hired staff who didn't possess all these traits, often because of some pressing necessity. Good-to-great companies hired only A people who would put out similar effort. If people were hired that didn't make the cut, and they couldn't be useful elsewhere, they were immediately released.

Dr. Collins believes that people should be primarily hired for those core qualities. If they don't have some other necessary job skill, they can be trained. See the “Staff training best practices” resource for the methods that work well. In particular, the leadership must *all* possess these qualities. The companies who didn't go from good to great had a fantastic leader with mediocre people under him or her.

For camps, the implications are perhaps obvious. Hire staff with these core qualities (very difficult). When the director/executive director eventually leave, make sure the people under them are equally qualified. When succession does occur (key leadership leaves), follow the principles in the succession section of the “Culture book” to insure continuity of great people who fit the values of the company.

P a y , h u m a n i t y , o p p o r t u n i t y , a n d b a l a n c e

Like the “staff motivation” resource details, pay doesn't make a difference unless you offer much less than a reasonable average. In Dr. Collin's study, even exorbitant pay didn't make a difference in terms of performance. In general, the kind of people who are motivated by pay aren't the right people. The truth for camps is a little bit different, because hiring exceptional staff would be easier if the pay were much higher. Excellent staff can be had for an average camp salary, but they are harder to find.

Companies who made it from good to great were rigorous, but not ruthless. For example, if they had staff who weren't achieving to the high standard necessary, they were given a chance in other positions. If that didn't work out either, they were immediately let go. There are two reasons for this quick process of sorting and keeping people. First, it is humane to let people find another job where they can thrive, instead of keeping them in one where they will wallow. Second, excellent people do not appreciate picking up the slack for mediocre people. Other characteristics of rigor without ruthlessness in good-to-great companies included making sure their dealings with people were fair, honest, direct, and caring. Executive perks were few or none. Information was shared freely and quickly. People bragged about what a wonderful place to work these companies were.

When there is a significant problem, companies usually put their best people on it. In the good-to-great companies, they put their best people on their biggest opportunities, not their biggest problems. Generally good people were thought to be sufficient to handle problems, but to truly capitalize on opportunity, you needed someone great for the job.

Leadership in good-to-great companies maintained balance in their lives at all times. They worked about 40 – 45 hours a week and then left their work at work. They had a life outside of their jobs. They enjoyed their families. They relaxed. In the comparison companies who didn't make it to great, the leadership were hard driving and would often put in 80-hour weeks. Dr. Collins surmises, based on his interviews, that great companies had great people and enough staff, so things got done in a reasonable manner. There was also a norm surrounding reasonable workdays. One great CEO said that he worked a normal work week even during the most difficult, darkest days of his company. Camps are always going to be demanding places to work, but there can still be balance even during the summer – see the “Organizational factors” resource. Dr. Covey (Seven habits of highly effective people) would certainly offer three cheers here.

Confront the brutal facts

“The learning camp” (TLC) resource covers all but one of the subjects addressed in this section of Dr. Collins' book. Thus, only a brief review of the points will be offered here, with directions to the appropriate section in “The learning camp.” Again, the reader is encouraged to buy Dr. Collins' book for further examples and insight.

Facts are better than dreams

To make good decisions that will make dreams come true, you must have good data. Good-to-great companies had no tolerance for ignorance. Their motto would be: “There is no knowing without research.” Brutal facts, even crushing ones, are better than warm-fuzzy feelings. The corresponding TLC sections are: personal mastery, mental models, and practicing the discipline of evaluation. In general, it is having an evaluative attitude, which TLC discussed as being the linchpin for successful organizations.

In my opinion, this point is the one where camps have the most difficulty. Remember that, according to Dr. Collins, in order to make it from good to great, an organization must have *all* of the good to great elements – not most of them. Camps usually aren't able to answer the five critical questions about their outcomes – How many campers are impacted (gain in the core outcomes desired)?; What is the magnitude of the impact (effect size)?; How long does that impact last?; How many weeks/sessions/summers are necessary?; and What are the characteristics of campers who do well, stay the same, and do poorly? To continually improve, some insight into those questions must be obtained.

Unwavering faith amid the brutal facts

Often, the good-to-great companies were faced with brutal, dispiriting facts. Their capabilities in terms of staff, facilities, monetary resources, and outside competition would have made many among them surrender. Instead, they rolled up their sleeves, started pushing the flywheel (see later point), and gave it their best shot. According to Dr. Collins, because they had all of the elements, their best shot was always good enough. Sometimes, it would take ten or more years to make it, but they kept pushing that wheel with their best efforts the whole time.

The Stockdale paradox

In essence, Stockdale was a prisoner of war. Despite undergoing years of brutal imprisonment, he made it out in good spirits. He credits his ability to an unwavering knowledge that he would get out and that he would turn this horror into a success. The shocker is that the prisoners who didn't make it were the unrealistic optimists. They kept setting dates for their hoped for release. Those dates came and went and that eventually broke their spirits. The lesson is to have faith that you will win, but understand it may take a while (who knows how long) and that the facts must always prevail. Of course, Stockdale was an optimist as well, just a realistic one. See the “Art and science of mistakes” resource for more similar information.

A climate where the truth is heard

This section can be divided into two parts – leadership and process. For the former, I must quote three sentences from the book. “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. This is one of the key reasons why less charismatic leaders often produce better long-term results than their more charismatic counterparts . . . Your strength of personality can sow the seeds of problems, when people filter the brutal facts from you.” The corresponding TLC sections are: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, and practicing the discipline of evaluation. The “Emotional intelligence” resource is also useful here.

In terms of process, lead with questions. The goal is to gain answers as a group, rather than individuals providing them. Often, informal meetings were held just to get people's thoughts about a question facing the company. The leader would put more questions to his or her team and board than they put to him or her. Again, the other TLC sections cover more of these other points, like engaging in debate without coercion, and conducting postmortems for things that go wrong. In particular, as the "Staff motivation" and "Behavior management" resources discuss at length, I appreciate his observation that blame and consequences are unnecessary when you've got the right people working for you. Instead, the goal is understanding, learning, and restitution with the situation, others, and the individual taking appropriate responsibility. See "The art and science of mistakes" for further explanation.

The hedgehog concept

The good-to-great companies had a "hedgehog concept," while the comparison companies did not. In a nutshell, a hedgehog concept is a blood-simple, focused target that fits three criteria. The hedgehog is a simple animal that knows one big thing, instead of many little things. The book contains stories and copious examples that explain the term and concept (based on a fable of sorts), but I shall be quite brief here. With that one large concept, the company can create simplicity and focus out of complexity. *Understand that it isn't about having a strategic or master plan. All of the companies had one of those.* Rather, it is having a simple plan (usually only a sentence long) that fits three central criteria.

W h e r e c a n w e b e e x c e p t i o n a l ?

The first criterion is knowing in what area you can be exceptional. It is not what you can be *good* or *pretty good* at, but what you can be *great* at. All camps have outcomes, and it is never just about making money, although for a few that might be a primary aim. The purpose of any organization lies outside itself. Look at the outcomes chart in any of the evaluation resources and pick your top five (or perhaps just one). Dr. Collins stresses that these shouldn't be the outcomes you *want* to be great at, but the ones you *can* be great at. It isn't a goal, a strategy, an intention, or a plan, but rather a declaration of what is certain. Warren Buffet said of an admired company, "They stick with what they understand and let their abilities, not their egos, determine what they attempt." Dr. Collins said, "You need piercing insight and egoless clarity." For example, if one of your core outcomes is markedly improved leadership skills, a one week program probably isn't going to be enough.

To determine this point, the "Process maps" resource should be fully utilized to assess if the structures, policies, and processes fit with your desired outcome goals. If the recipe is a great one, then utilize the "Evaluation 101" resource to assess your actual influence, because what you have on paper doesn't automatically translate into reality. Great, as Dr. Collins defined it, is something very difficult to achieve. Great in terms of the number of campers influenced, the degree of that influence, and how long that influence lasts is something that is equally difficult to achieve. See the "Issues with evidence that camps often rely on" appendix in the TLC resource for more on this point.

W h e r e c a n w e a l s o m a k e m o n e y ? (create value, be successful)

The second criterion for the hedgehog concept is what drives the economic engine. What can you make money doing? Is there a market for the service/outcomes you're selling? You might work this out in several ways, such as – money generated (or cash flow for non-profits) per cabin, per acre, per activity area, per counselor, per day of use, per family, or per camper. For example, generating substantial benefits in emotional intelligence, leadership, skill in activity areas, and math and science grades might be so cost intensive in terms of staff and days required that they are unreasonable outcomes given the economic realities your camp faces. Another example might be that effective year-round environmental education programs are just too expensive given what the school market will pay per camper. However, the market for providing brief, effective emotional intelligence or explicit character education might be something your camp is both great at and that it can make money from.

The state you strive for is to not only break even, but to actually make money as well. For non-profits, generating "extra" money isn't so much a goal, but reducing the cost of attendance and improving services is. Those can be accomplished when the camp generates more money. When all three criteria are present, as well as the other good-to-great elements, the camp will make money.

Finally, I must note that camping is an odd industry, because camps can make money even when they don't provide the outcomes they purport to. There is plenty of evidence of this in the existing scientific camping research. The reasons are detailed in TLC, but they involve the problem with return rates as signs of effectiveness, and the difficulty people (including parents and camp staff) have in determining if soft outcomes were achieved or not.

Understanding your passion

Just because it is obvious and makes sense doesn't mean that people give it a lot of hard, honest thought. That could be true for most of these points, and certainly for understanding your passion. A lot of companies try and get passionate and motivated about what they do. Instead, one of the secrets of good-to-great companies is that they only continued doing what they were already off-the-charts passionate about.

The simple idea is that motivation can't be manufactured. Pep talks, speeches, stories, and all the perks and benefits in the world are not going to get people very motivated to do what they aren't already enthusiastic about. The "Staff motivation" resource goes into this point in great detail. The application of this point is to assess the degree to which the leadership and seasonal staff are there because they have an inherent, deeply-held, passionate belief in their work and its specific outcomes. When that is very true for all leadership and the vast majority of the staff, your camp possesses this element of what it takes to go from good to great.

A culture of discipline

Culture is covered in far more depth and with direct relevance to camps in the "Culture book." Because of that, I will only briefly outline the very few points Dr. Collins addresses.

When you have successfully utilized the enculturation process (selecting staff for their norms, values, and core beliefs, and reinforcing those everywhere), you'll have a staff who usually police themselves. Policies and consequences become very rare. Staff members develop their own immune system, instead of leadership being the primary enforcers. When you have the right people, training, education, and the opportunity to make restitution are what is necessary. Bureaucratic rules and supervision mechanisms are in place to manage those who don't have the values, beliefs, and skills to be effective. Using discipline to get the wrong people to do the right things is ultimately ineffective and excessively resource intensive (see the "Behavior management" resource).

Such an environment exceeds what most camps face in a given summer. It is a very high ideal. However, companies that made it from good to great had such a culture. Cornerstones included freedom, responsibility, commitment, diligence, compassion, fairness, caring, dedication to the highest quality, driven by the goal instead of fear, and discipline. For example, at a camp, monitoring activity areas, rest hour, and bed times would be necessary to *enhance quality, not insure it*. For most, the curfew would be something that happened, not something that had to be made to happen.

What these companies also had in place was an effective system of structures and processes, so that people had the general guidelines, tools, and direction in which to apply themselves. Examples of structures include having enough staff, enough of the right staff, and the tools to do the job. Processes involve how things are actually carried out. They are the elements (activities) that lead to a given outcome. For example, if the outcome is fun, then process elements might include archery, camp fire, wacky olympics, and swimming. It sounds ridiculously simple, but it is *very difficult* to get all those ducks in a row, as detailed in many of the other resources (e.g., the learning camp, process maps, culture, and staff motivation).

Dr. Collins harps on discipline within the leadership as a central characteristic of great companies. They have the discipline to discover and go after their hedgehog concept. They have the discipline to create the necessary culture that lives and breathes inside everyone. They have the discipline to face the brutal facts and find the truth.

Finally, companies that made it from good to great had a "stop doing" list. Everyone has lists of things to do, but good-to-great companies had lists of things to stop doing. For camps, that list might include stop trying for an outcome that isn't possible, such as significant leadership development within a week. It might also incorporate: stop supervising curfew, stop worrying about pay, stop water-skiing because it is too expensive, stop allowing smoking -- period, stop hiring staff who don't meet the high minimum standards no matter what, stop having cabin groups travel around to activities together because it doesn't work for the desired outcomes, stop handing out rewards to everyone, stop working 60 hour weeks off season and hire someone part time, or stop allowing supervisors twice the time off as regular staff.

Technology accelerators

The basic point is that technology can accelerate good to great, but it does not initiate the transition or focus it. It simply enables the change to happen on a somewhat faster scale. Remember that the transition for most companies took about 10 years. Also, the companies that didn't make the transition had the same technology, but it didn't matter. You need all the elements.

The focus of all technology should be, “Does it help provide value to the people we serve?” “Does the technology enhance the outcomes?” Customers, staff, other camps, and experts are all rigorously and systematically asked that question so that decisions can be based on the best information possible.

The flywheel and the doom loop

T h e f l y w h e e l

The “Innovation and continuous improvement” resource discusses the flywheel concept in greater detail, but a brief description of the analogy here is useful. A flywheel is usually a massive object that is incredibly heavy, which stores energy in its motion. Imagine a house-sized lead disc about two feet thick. It is parallel to the ground and sits on a well-oiled, ball-bearing axle. The goal is to get the flywheel turning very fast so that its own stored energy and momentum will keep it going for a very long time. That motion is energy toward a goal (which is often electricity in the real world).

Because of the flywheel’s weight and size, getting it to move is extremely difficult. The only way to manage it is to start pushing and to get a lot of people to help you. The massive wheel budes and then makes a single revolution after Herculean efforts and a good deal of time. Everyone is always pushing as hard as they can – no letup. After a while, the flywheel makes a few more turns, and it has picked up speed. No one is pushing any harder than they already have been, but the wheel is moving faster and faster. After a great deal of time, the wheel is spinning very fast, because it has all the stored energy from everyone all the way along. That momentum is the energy and speed you need to be great – to achieve your outcomes to an exceptional degree.

There are several key lessons from this analogy. Creating a great camp is not about any single effort. It isn’t a really big push, but rather everyone making their small contributions over a long period of time. Many good-to-great companies took 10 years to get the flywheel really moving. None of them could point to any program, big effort, or push that resulted in the transformation. There were no hoopla or motivation programs, because the right people were on board and pushing for the right reasons. When the flywheel really gets moving, people start to notice. Just the natural, spirited pace of camp is rewarding, fun, and valuable. People are motivated by the goal and noting changes in the speed of the wheel. Staff and campers who return over months or years really note a change. *Continuous improvement in a consistent, coordinated direction is the key.* It is a whole bunch of interlocking pieces in line with the hedgehog concept. It’s not change; it’s evolution.

T h e d o o m l o o p

In contrast, the comparison companies were engaged in the doom loop. When things weren’t going as well as they liked (or going badly), they would make a fairly big change. Sometimes they would even stop the wheel and start it in another direction. Even the good-to-great companies made a few big changes, but when they did, they stuck with them. They had a stop-doing list, but what they stopped doing was in line with their hedgehog concept. The comparison companies in the doom loop would make a series of big changes that were not in a consistent and coordinated direction. They created new programs that would come, and then go. Comparison companies brought in new leaders who would create changes, many of which were undone when the next new person came along – no good succession management. They would create killer one-step magical moves that proved to not be so magical over time. They would name their new initiatives and projects and announce them, while good-to-great companies had no name for their continuous improvement. Generally, the doom loop is “fits and starts” in efforts to find the way, while good-to-great companies sail toward a specific point on the horizon. Comparison companies also had slackers who weren’t pushing, and people who would push in the wrong direction.

The only way to implement something as massive as all the good-to-great principles, as well as the other elements identified in the “What else” section below, is to make slow, steady, determined, effective steps in a consistent direction. Turn the wheel. Over a period of years, one should be able to look back and see large, remarkable changes, even though they happened bit by bit over the summers. When did things really speed up and start to dramatically improve? You won’t be able to tell, because the increased velocity of the wheel happens like watching corn grow – steadily and imperceptibly. Such an endeavor must be systematic, rigorous, and continuous.

Why be great?

I t ’ s e a s i e r

In the grand scheme of things, it is not any more difficult to build a great camp than a good one. Indeed, it is easier. At great camps, people’s jobs are much easier than at good camps. They need to expend less effort achieving the same result, because the flywheel is already spinning like a top. Things are simplified and effectiveness is increased. In my experience at over ten different camps for the full summer, I’ve found this to be true.

On the face of it, such an analysis seems counterintuitive. Going from good to great often seems like a massive goal that is unachievable given the current reality of being good (if that is your situation). For camps, I would agree that the initial phases of creating a great camp are indeed more resource intensive. For example, it may be difficult to marshal the staff and monetary resources necessary, whereas companies with millions at their disposal might find that a bit easier. Yet after an initial hump, I believe working toward being a great camp is easier than just being average. The primary advantage would be the caliber of staff and what they spend their time on. Things that took a lot of unnecessary time would melt away and be replaced by tasks that yield pushes on the flywheel, increasing its momentum rather than just keeping it at its current rate. The added bonus is that tasks become much more rewarding.

Although the road may seem long and the hump daunting, the heartfelt desire to keep taking steps (push the wheel) is truly the greatest prerequisite.

Y o u c a r e

If the camp has a true, deep-down concern about the outcomes of the camp experience for its campers and staff, then becoming great is a constant mandate. In a given summer, you want to increase the number of campers and staff who receive the outcomes, increase the degree/size/effect they experience, and do it in an effective time frame. To settle for average or pretty good should be an affront that strikes at the core of those who have their heart and soul invested in the camp experience. Remember the flywheel and the Stockdale paradox. It may take years, but utilizing these principles and the others noted below cannot fail to create momentum on your way toward being an exceptional/great camp.

What else?

Dr. Collins’ study of good-to-great companies is impressive, but it is one study. There have been thousands of studies of great organizations, average ones, and poor ones. As a very general organizing scheme, you could lump most of those principles into “Organizational culture at camps” and “The learning camp” resources. When high performance is achieved in each of those meta-domains, the camp is bound to be great/exceptional.

The value of this one study is in the sorting and organization of the key elements necessary to go from good to great. However, you do need the other pieces research has identified as important. Yet as you will see, they are more a refinement of the principles, and symbiotic elements, rather than something entirely different. For example, all of the good-to-great companies used benchmarking and knowledge management, even though Dr. Collins didn’t specifically mention it. Let’s start with a table of matching concepts and then list some of the other pieces. From there, look over a description of your camp’s stage to see where you might currently reside along the continuum of organizational development.

Matching table of concepts

Good to Great Concept	Creating Exceptional Camps Resource (s)
Level 5 leadership	Nothing directly, but emotional intelligence, staff quality (in “Organizational factors” resource), and the “Art and science of mistakes” have many of these components.
First Who . . . Then What	Not precisely the same, but organizational factors – staff quality, the enculturation and succession sections of the “Culture” resource, “Staff motivation,” and “Staff training best practices” are close.
Confronting the brutal facts	“The learning camp” and “The art and science of mistakes”
The hedgehog concept	The “Process maps” resource for what you can be great at, the personal mastery portion of “The learning camp” resource for passion, and numerous portions of “The learning camp” for discovering where you can make money.
Culture of discipline	“Organizational culture at camps”
Technology accelerators	Nothing, but see the very last part of the “Knowledge management” handout
The flywheel and the doom loop	“Innovation and continuous improvement” resource

Other cornerstone pieces

Again, managing the culture and fully being a learning camp are critical and comprehensive elements. The items below are a few other resources that don't explicitly appear in the above table.

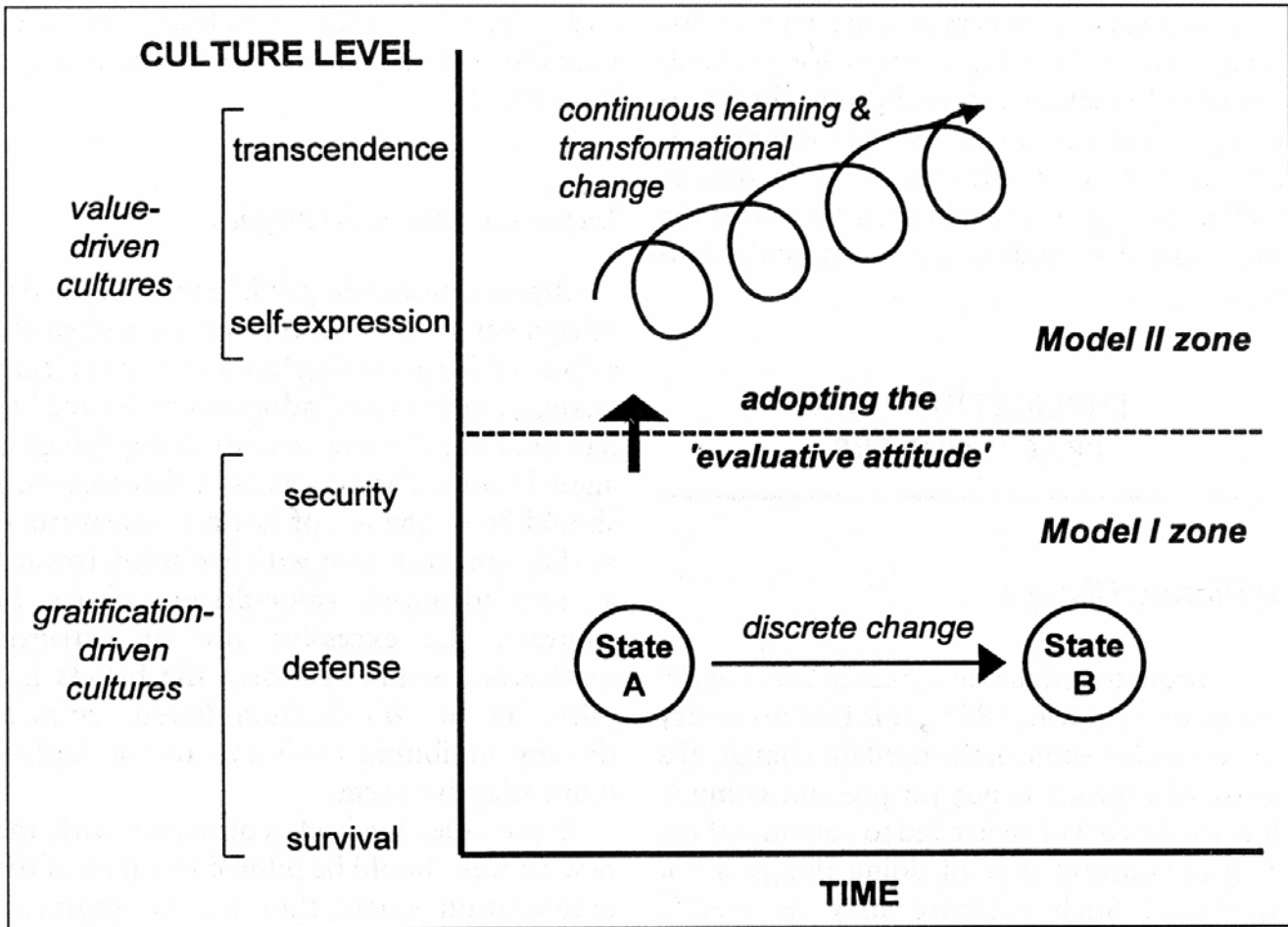
- ✓ Knowledge management – keeping track of great knowledge for your own camp
- ✓ Benchmarking – searching for best-practice methods wherever they reside
- ✓ Organizational factors – staff quantity, and camper return rates in relation to outcome
- ✓ Evaluation trilogy – assessing how well you are achieving your outcomes
- ✓ TLC Focus on personnel development
 - Personnel evaluations
 - Staff training best practices (as indicated above)
- ✓ TLC Systems thinking
 - Understanding interdependence
 - Seeing systematic causes
- ✓ TLC External & future scanning
 - Scanning the current environment
 - Scanning and probing the future
 - Change seen as natural
- ✓ TLC Experimentation
 - Marketplace for ideas
 - Support for risk-taking
 - Diversity of methods and practice
- ✓ TLC Practicing the discipline of evaluation
 - Flexible use of goals
 - Use of multiple perspectives
 - Focus on customer needs

As a final note here, the camp must intimately understand the principles involved in the outcomes it is trying to achieve. If it is social skills (emotional intelligence), environmental attitudes and behaviors, character education, or serving a special population, those principles must be accurate, working knowledge.

For example, camps often say they increase self-esteem, but many do not understand the principles involved and the utility of doing so – see the “Self-esteem” resource. The principles involved in a given outcome are largely the same whether the environment is a school, home, church, or camp. To use another example, means of transportation vary between cars, planes, and trains – the methods are different. But the underlying principles of physics apply in any case. If you jump off a cliff wearing feathered wings (some wrong or absent principles), you're in trouble.

Self-analysis - where is your camp?

The following pages offer a graph and short descriptions, which allow you to assess your camp's level of performance. Rather than just “good” or “great,” this analysis creates a wider and more useful range. Take a moment to study the graph and its description. Then, read the short descriptions of camps on the various levels. Again and again, readers have commented on how useful these three pages are. This analysis should prove both insightful and directive.



Description of graphic Levels & models

Think of the levels as being similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Survival, defense, and security are gratification driven camps. To elaborate, these camps are usually primarily interested in themselves, as opposed to the campers and staff they serve. They certainly care about the campers and staff, but their first allegiance is to their own comfort, security, and way of life. The exception is when a camp is in one of these stages, but is trying to move up to the value-driven levels. Although camps on this level would deny it to their last breath, they usually aren’t looking to provide *true* value to the customer beyond fun and satisfaction. If true value were their goal, they’d just be passing through “security” on their way to “self-expression.”

Perhaps confusingly, the “self-expression” level indicates that the camp has turned the tables and put the campers and staff above the people who run the camp. What happens at camp is determined by whether or not structures, processes, and policies add value to the campers and staff. Model II organizations are usually “Very high” or “Extremely high” learning entities (see TLC for descriptions). They have a laser-like focus on true value for everyone who comes in contact with them. Everywhere the careful, informed observer looks, there is evidence of it. On the transcendence level, the camp has reached the “great” or “exceptional” level where value is experienced to a very high degree for all concerned.

Change

Discrete change is somewhat similar to the “doom loop.” Camps here make changes, but they often don’t amount to the kind of transformational change that makes a dramatic improvement on the outcomes over time. Things might be better in a sense, but rarely quantumly or categorically better. Transformational changes are like the “flywheel” in line with the “hedgehog concept.” Changes make a substantial difference on the outcomes people experience.

Where are you?

Below are some *gross generalizations* that might help with the distinctions. It is certainly possible for some of the higher-level elements to be present in lower levels, but it is uncommon.

Survival

At this stage, the camp is fighting to stay alive, or reach that point where it can rest easy about meeting numbers. Finances are usually a big concern and a lot of effort is spent trying to fill beds/slots and increase return rates. A camp in this stage wouldn't have the luxury of reading this information, let alone have the time or resources to act on it. Heroic efforts by a small group of people are the norm here.

Defense

A moderate degree of success has been achieved. There is no pressing danger or concern, but overall, things are still somewhat precarious. Higher order activities like careful evaluation of processes or outcomes, benchmarking, creating good knowledge management centers, and focusing on the heart of customer value instead of satisfaction/declared needs are rarely if ever done. When they are, transformational change seldom (but not never) occurs. Talk of return rates, satisfaction, nuts and bolts operations, and finances takes up a lot of time. People here often collect lots of ideas and throw them into the stew hoping for the best, although they don't see it like that at all. These camps might be achieving some of their outcomes, but the number influenced and the duration of impact is *exceedingly* below their potential. Culture change and improvement usually isn't possible on this level.

Security

Staying afloat isn't a problem now, nor is it likely to be. Camps on this level may even be wildly successful in terms of money, return rates, and satisfaction. Average return rates, or a little above, are common. Sometimes extremely high return rates are possible. These camps often have quite a few raving fans. Things look very good from this level – people are generally happy and the lands are filled with milk and honey. Life is good. Evaluation and the focus on value are still not present to a large enough degree to make a substantial difference, although camps on this level often believe (without sound evidence) that they are achieving near miraculous feats in terms of their outcomes. These camps are usually quite satisfied with their performance – they look out over their domains and smile. What they don't fully realize is the scope of their potential – how much they could be accomplishing and achieving beyond their current point. It is on this level that many camps seem to be stuck. They believe they are great. These are the good camps that need the good-to-great principles in order to transition to great.

Adopting the evaluative attitude

“Almost every aspect of organizational learning relates in some important way to high-quality evaluation of the organization's personnel, policies, programs, products, processes, and/or practices” (Davidson, 2001). It is for this reason that evaluation, the 8th learning domain (TLC), can be viewed as the key to the kingdom. The evaluative attitude is “the relentless pursuit of the truth about quality and performance” (Sathe, & Davidson, 2000). Confront the brutal facts. It goes beyond the accountability-focused function (control, measurement, and monitoring) to determine the degree to which the organization is making the best use of available resources to achieve outcomes of maximum possible value (Scriven, 1991).

Evaluation focuses the attention in an unbiased (as much as possible – see evaluation resource) manner. It can also shed light on areas in the shadows or that were completely unseen. With that light can come the action necessary to improve performance. Indeed, major organizational change is evidence that the camp has failed to create enough continuous change and improvement – the flywheel and the doom loop. As a result, the current way of doing things has been rendered ineffective, defunct, or perhaps even dangerous. The ensuing overhaul is often quite traumatic in terms of money and/or emotions. However, good (security) level camps can stride happily along without any “need” for great change. It is when the need is realized that the ensuing change is often a lurch.

Self-expression

This camp has *at least* a “High” learning designation with a mandatory “High” on the 8th domain of evaluation (see TLC resource). It knows precisely what the main factors are for campers and staff that do and don’t return. It has taken a healthy stab at rigorously evaluating its outcomes, processes, and structures. The camp takes small comfort in financial success, return rates, satisfaction measures, and the like. It is focused on providing true value to the customer beyond satisfaction (see “Issues with evidence” appendix in TLC). An enormous amount of thought has gone into its practices and values, and they are reflected in its print and virtual materials, the actions of its people on a day-to-day basis, and in what camp looks and feels like. This camp has at least an implicit view of organizational culture and is focused on developing it with a holistic view of outcomes in mind. The knowledge management center (OWL) is in the fourth stage of development, which propels the camp forward. This camp is a safe place to make mistakes, learn, and speak your mind. Instead of episodic changes, the camp on this level relies on continuous change on a smaller scale, which is smoother and often more effective. This camp has its “hedgehog” concept: knows the core outcomes where it can be excellent, has counselors and administration that are driven by their passion for the outcomes, and they are profitable. There is no doubt that this is a good place to work and that staff are almost uniformly saddened to leave. Level 5 leaders can be found here, or those people actively and consciously working toward it.

Transcendence

This camp has a “Very high” or “Extremely high” learning organization rating (see TLC resource). It rigorously conducts process and outcome evaluations so that it knows where it stands based on best-practice methods and measures. It can answer most or all of the outcome questions – e.g., how many, after how long, for how long. This camp utilizes those results to improve the value it provides to its customers via process, structure, policy, and sometimes mission changes. Rather than conducting one-time evaluations, there is a systematic evaluation schedule that takes years and repeats itself. Leadership is based on values and commitment, not power. Level 5 leaders are very common here. Rules and policies have been largely replaced with guiding values. Internal, rather than external, bases of power are utilized to shape behavior. This camp has a very strong culture (see culture resource) in line with valued outcomes. Selection and enculturation processes are consistently strong. The camp is open to change, instead of being a victim of its strong culture. Everyone is pushing on the flywheel in the same consistent, coordinated way. The doom loop is avoided. Systematic and effective best-practice searches occur every year as part of the strategic process. The knowledge management center (OWL) is usually in the fifth stage – full implementation. People are always busy, but they really do have time for the important things. Most notably, a camp that’s been on the transcendence level for a few years is an exceptional/great one that *achieves its outcomes at a level and to a degree unknown to those on lower levels*. Sometimes these camps act as black holes for staff and campers, because they don’t want to leave a place that is so *truly* valuable to their development.

Reading the introduction stories in the culture book and “The learning camp” resource should also be *very* instructive.

Conclusion

From good to great. It is a high goal, but an achievable one when the elements responsible for the shift are in place. The motivation to move forward rests solely in one’s passion for the camp experience. When enriching lives and changing the world is in the very fabric of the people and the camp, moving forward in a flywheel fashion is the only course of action that makes any sense. Not doing the best job possible is inconceivable. God speed.

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