

## Greatness is a personal choice, just ask Miss Betty!

Management books take up a lot of shelf space in bookstores these days. Every possible idea seems to be available, touting the latest concepts with exclamation points and “how tos” in the title. One recent book stands out from that lineup in its clarity.

I’ve been spending the last year studying and learning *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins, whose book represents six years and over 15,000 hours of research to answer this key question: “*Are there companies that defy gravity and convert long-term mediocrity or worse... into long-term superiority?*”

The research started by looking at 1,435 companies that made the Fortune 500 between 1965 and 1995. From that starting point, the researchers made four major cuts to find companies that make fundamental leaps in success and sustain them – who went from good to great. At the end of the process, only eleven companies remained. The eleven *Good to Great* companies all experienced:

1. Cumulative stock returns at or below general market (1965-1980), then
2. Transition point where performance improved notably, and
3. Cumulative returns averaging 6.9 times the general market following their transition point (1985-2000)

*Let’s put that in perspective, General Electric considered by most to be a great company, outperformed the market by 2.8 times during the same period, the last fifteen years of the century.*

The core of the study about the eleven *Good to Great* companies that made the final cut was the development of a deep understanding of what you could be great at and sticking with it through rigorous discipline. The Hedgehog Concept, as it is aptly called, emanates from searching and finding meaning through the answers to the following questions:

- What are you deeply passionate about?
- What can you be the best in the world at?
- What drives your economic engine?

Some students of Good to Great asked me recently, “What if you have a person who does their job well, but doesn’t aspire to move up in the company maybe they just lack the drive and the ambition for greatness?”

I thought for a few minutes and replied, “Well, I don’t want to move to any other place in my career, I just want to be the best Organization Development consultant to others that I can possibly be. I don’t aspire to go back into companies and serve as a CEO/COO or any of the like.” What I realized in my answer is that I have found my Hedgehog Concept and am committed to staying where I am with ever improving zeal.

So here's my real learning. Greatness is not necessarily about moving up, it's about being great where you know you can.

Last night my husband, Bob, an Innkeeper, came home and was talking about his workplace, the Wentworth Mansion, a small luxury hotel in Charleston, SC. With respect and admiration, he brought home the next in a string of stories about Miss Betty, the Mansion's breakfast hostess. Miss Betty represents the quintessential southern lady. She is a petite woman of an undisclosed age who has been in this field of work for over 20 years. Her fine southern drawl, which is special to the coastal plains off the Atlantic Ocean, along with the twinkle in her deep brown eyes are part of her special formula to create greatness while remaining humble. While Miss Betty may not be familiar with the word, "authentic," she is definitely authentic with her guests in the way that I as an Organization Development practitioner can only hope to be as I serve my clients. She develops relationships seamlessly and quickly with Mansion guests and often "blesses them" as part of her heartfelt good-byes. This week Miss Betty did such a great job of welcoming a couple to Charleston that they decided to buy a house and move here!

So how did Miss Betty create greatness, not by moving "up the ladder", but by knowing that she could be the best at what she is the most passionate about, serving as hostess to some of the finest visitors to our wonderful city and choosing to do it better and better every day. Yes, this job drives her economic engine that allows her to earn a respectable living, even at that undisclosed age, while she makes a difference for people who benefit from her special and most personal greatness.



Margaret Seidler  
Seidler & Associates  
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