

### **Good to Great: Freedom and Responsibility within a Framework**

Throughout my career I have struggled to balance the competing needs for entrepreneurial thinking, innovation, and initiative and the necessities of organization, structure, consistency, and control. How does one create and sustain a nimble organization that can quickly respond to new technologies, changing member wants and desires, and the competition of the marketplace while maintaining an efficient operation and conscientiously meeting regulatory requirements?

No thinking business person wants to saddle their operation with a bureaucratic mindset, yet efficient operations need systems to function properly and avoid risk, liability, and regulatory problems. The very word “bureaucracy” carries the negative connotation of inefficiency and stultifying processes where crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s become an organization’s reason for being.

In examining this never ending challenge for businesses, Jim Collins and his research team at Stanford University found that the good to great companies they examined gave people the freedom to do whatever was necessary to succeed within a highly developed system or framework. Then their people were held strictly accountable for their results.

The analogy that he gave was a commercial airline pilot who works within rigid air traffic control and safety systems on the ground and in the air, but who has the ultimate responsibility for success – that is, the safe delivery of plane and passengers from location to location. That singular responsibility allows a pilot, at his or her discretion, to remove unruly passengers, abort landings, fly to alternate airports, and any other action deemed necessary for the safety of the flight.

But essential to bestowing such freedom and responsibility is the necessity of defining the system and clearly identifying constraints. In the airline industry the Federal Aviation Administration establishes all standards, policies, and procedures for both commercial and private pilots and ensures their ongoing understanding of the system through licensure, certifications, simulator and cockpit training, as well as continual flight and safety bulletins. To quote from the book:

*“The good to great companies build a consistent system with clear constraints, but they also gave people the freedom and responsibility within the framework of that system. They hired self-disciplined people who didn’t need to be managed, and then managed the system, not the people.”*

As a club manager at any level of the organization, you cannot do it all yourself. Holding the reins tightly creates a bottleneck where all decisions have to come through you, thereby stifling the initiative and creativity of your subordinates. It also puts a tremendous burden on you to perform, requires you to be on property at all hours, and leads to burnout.

The only way to be truly successful in any complex enterprise is to empower those under you and give them the freedom and responsibility to succeed in their portion of the operation. But to do this successfully you need to fully develop the framework for their empowerment and a means to hold them accountable. This means you have to have well-defined organizational values and written standards, policies, and procedures. Lastly, you need measurable accountabilities for performance.

With these in place you have the basis for greatness in your enterprise, but Collins offers much more to those willing to invest the time in this well-researched and written, as well as entertaining, book.

The book is [\*Good to Great – Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't\*](#), Harper Business, New York, NY, 2001.

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