Book Review on
"Good to Great" by Jim Collins
(Review by Gary Tomlinson)
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Technology is the theme for this month's issue of Business Leader magazine. Not too long ago, the logic went, "new technology will change everything!" "The Internet is going to completely revolutionize all businesses," the gurus chanted. "It's the great Internet landgrab: Be there first, be there fast, build market share – no matter how expensive – and you win," yelled the entrepreneurs. "Why take all the hard steps to go from buildup to breakthrough, creating a model that actually works, when you could yell, 'New technology!' or 'New economy' and convince people to give you hundreds of millions of dollars?" We all lived through this and saw the results. "Technology-induced change is nothing new. The real question is not, What is the role of technology? Rather, the real question is, How do good-to-great organizations *think differently* about technology?" The answers to this question, is why I've chosen Jim Collins' *Good to Great* for this month's book review.

Collins found, through his research, that "Good-to-Great organizations think differently about technology and technological change than mediocre ones. He found that:

♦ Good-to-great organizations avoid technology fads and bandwagons, yet they become pioneers in the application of carefully selected technologies.
♦ Good-to-Great organizations always ask the key question about any technology: "Does the technology fit our organization?" If yes, then let's be a pioneer in the application of that technology. If no, then let's ignore it.
♦ Good-to-Great organizations used technology as an *accelerator* of momentum, not a creator of it.
♦ Good-to-Great organizations respond to technological change with thoughtfulness and creativity, driven by a compulsion to turn unrealized potential into results. Mediocre companies respond because of the fear of being left behind.
♦ Good-to-Great organizations use an effective approach of "crawl, walk, run" when approaching technology, even during times of rapid and radical technological change.

Collin's research also found, that "no technology, no matter how amazing – not computers, not telecommunications, not robotics, not the Internet – can by itself ignite a shift from good to great. No technology can turn the wrong people into the right people. No technology can instill the discipline to confront brutal facts of reality, nor can it instill unwavering faith. No technology can create a culture of discipline. No technology can instill the simple inner belief that leaving unrealized potential on the table – letting something remain good when it can become great – is a secular sin."

Collins begins his book with a powerfully strong statement: "Good is the enemy of great." He goes on to say "that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that

becomes great. We don't have great schools 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."

Good to Great is a must read. Collins and his research team spent five years contrasting the good-to-great companies with a carefully selected set of comparison companies that failed to make the leap from good to great. What was different? Why did one set of companies become truly great performers while the other set remained only good? After sifting through mountains of data and thousands of pages of interviews, Collins and his team discovered the key determinants of greatness – why some companies make the leap and others don't.

The findings of the *Good to Great* study will surprise many readers and will shed light on virtually every area of management strategy and practice. The findings include:

> ♦ **Level 5 Leaders:** The research team was shocked to discover the type of leadership required to achieve greatness.
> ♦ **The Hedgehog Concept:** To go from good to great requires transcending the curse of competence.
> ♦ **A Culture of Discipline:** When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get the magical alchemy of great results.
> ♦ **Technology Accelerators:** Good-to-great companies think differently about the role of technology.
> ♦ **The Flywheel and the Doom Loop:** Those who launch radical change programs and wrenching restructuring will almost fail to make the leap.

Enjoy this month's selection, *Good to Great* and share it with others in your life because as Alvin Toffler says; *"The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."*