



Jim Collins' book has been used by countless organizations driven to emulate the characteristics that have catapulted companies to extraordinary levels of performance. This book isolates the performances of top companies over the course of recent decades and details with amazing simplicity the keys that contributed to their success. Incredibly, success is simple and, not surprisingly, a result of hard work, risk, focus and determination.

Jim Collins began the study for this book based on a challenge. A CEO who read Collins first book, Built to Last, told Collins that he failed because he had not told business leaders how to take a broken company and fix it or, more importantly, take a "good" company and make it great. Thus Collins and his team of young scholars investigated the stock performance and characteristics of hundreds of publicly traded companies. They were seeking companies that not only outperformed the general stock market, but also (dramatically) outperformed other companies in their sector over a 25 year period. So, yes, Microsoft stock skyrocketed for two and half decades...but so did dozens of other technology companies.

The result was a list of eleven companies that met the criteria; they went from good to great. After selecting these companies, the team then investigated the characteristics and practices of these companies to determine the common themes and business practices that enabled such outstanding performance. In the beginning, end and middle, it was and is about people. They discovered that great business leaders are a lot less like the charismatic, high-profile CEOs such as Jack Welch and Lee Iacocca but rather more like Abraham Lincoln, Darwin Smith, and Colman Mockler. (If you don't know who the latter two men are, maybe you'll enjoy reading the book and learning their story).

Like any book, it is not perfect and like so many business books of the past few decades, the power of this work has been diminished, albeit slightly, in the ten years since it was first published. Of the companies profiled in the book, several have failed to achieve the continued growth levels that made them subjects of the book. (E.g. Circuit City, Walgreens, and Fannie Mae.) Additionally, I am not convinced that the book fully develops the best methods for "getting the right people on the bus". Nevertheless, this book still rates high on my list because of the outstanding comments it provides on leadership and the single-minded focus that all the organizations took to achieve excellence.

This is not merely a book for high level executives; I strongly recommend it for anyone in business. The chapter highlighting the amazing power of Admiral Jim Stockdale is alone worth investing in this book. I particularly enjoyed reading Collins' profile on the humility of "Level 5" leaders and recommend that any manager take heed of this section of the book. The book concludes by illustrating how the principles work not only for large, publicly traded companies, but can work for smaller companies as well and even for individuals...like you!