

# THE MAP: Twelve Questions for Building a Great Company

**A GOOD TO GREAT®  
Strategic Tool**

“Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.”

## Background on THE MAP – A Note from Jim

The origins of THE MAP trace all the way back to when I first began my research and teaching career at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. One day, as I sat down to craft a new syllabus for the course on entrepreneurship and small-business management, I impulsively typed out a course overview that challenged my students with a lofty aspiration. Instead of focusing solely on the fundamentals of launching a start-up venture and managing a small to mid-sized business, I reframed the entire course around the question of what it would take to build an enduring great company. I fell in love with the question. And I felt energized by the vision of my students doing something noble and audacious with their lives. If they were going to become entrepreneurs, I wanted them to create some of the most successful companies in the world, companies that would make a distinctive and positive impact, companies worthy of admiration, companies that would endure. But I also realized I had a lot of work to do. I just kept looking at the phrase “enduring great company” and thinking to myself, “Wow, I don’t know anything about that, but I’m going to figure it out!”

And that sparked a passionate effort to discover and teach what makes great companies tick. Little did I know that it

would take a full quarter century of work to satisfy my curiosity.

After decades of research and multiple books, I began to get questions from people who wanted to engage with the entire body of work in a systematic sequence. The questions were along the following lines: “As a leadership team, where should we begin?” “How do all the ideas across the different books fit together?” “Is there a best order in which to read your work or engage with the concepts?” “Should we proceed book by book or concept by concept?” “Is there a master map of principles across all the books?”

Reflecting on these questions, I realized that, in a sense, I’d actually been doing one giant multi-decade research project that came out in installments, book by book. I decided to cull the most essential concepts across all the research studies, settling upon the twelve most fundamental principles. I then worked to place them in proper sequence, linked together in an overall framework, that would define a path that leaders could follow to create a great company. My goal was to distill my life’s work on great companies into a single “map” that could fit on a page.

### How to Use this Tool

I've constructed a series of twelve questions that serve as a mechanism of disciplined thought for you and your team. Each question corresponds to one of the twelve input principles in THE MAP. Along with each question, I've included directed readings that correspond to the underlying principle. You can use the twelve questions as an individual exercise to learn and reflect on the principles, doing the related reading as you move through THE MAP. To get the most out of this tool, I encourage you to work through twelve questions as a team; one possibility is to engage as a team with one question per month for a year.

### What Defines "Great"

THE MAP has both *inputs* and *outputs*. The inputs delineate the *path* to building a great company, composed of a sequence of fundamental principles we derived in our research. The outputs define what a great company *is*, not how you get there.

I've designed the twelve questions to lead you through the inputs (the path). Before jumping into the twelve questions, let me define the outputs (the destination). There are three criteria that define whether an organization has attained greatness (1) superior results, (2) distinctive impact, (3) lasting endurance.

### Superior Results

In business, performance is defined by financial results—return on invested capital—and achievement of corporate purpose. In the social sectors, performance is defined by results and efficiency in delivering on the social mission. But whether you're operating in business or the social sectors, you must achieve top-flight results. To use an analogy, if you're a sports team, you must win championships; if you don't find a way to win at your chosen game, you cannot be considered truly great.

### Distinctive Impact

A truly great enterprise makes such a unique contribution to the communities it touches and does its work with such unadulterated excellence that, if it were to disappear, it would leave a gaping hole that couldn't be easily filled by any other institution on the planet. If your company went away, who would miss it and why? This does not require being big; think of a small but fabulous local restaurant that would be terribly missed if it disappeared. Big does not equal great, and great does not equal big.

### Lasting Endurance

A truly great organization prospers over a long period of time, beyond any great idea, market opportunity, technology cycle, or well-funded program. When clobbered by setbacks, it finds a way to bounce back stronger than before. A great enterprise transcends dependence on any single extraordinary leader; if your organization cannot be great without you, then it is not yet truly great.

Finally, I caution against ever believing that your organization has achieved an end-state of greatness. To be built to last means embracing the idea that good to great is never done. No matter how far we have gone, or how much we have achieved, we are merely good relative to what we can do next. Greatness is an inherently dynamic process, not an end point. The moment you think of yourself as great, your slide toward mediocrity will have already begun.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim". The signature is stylized, with a long horizontal line above the letters and a small flourish at the end.

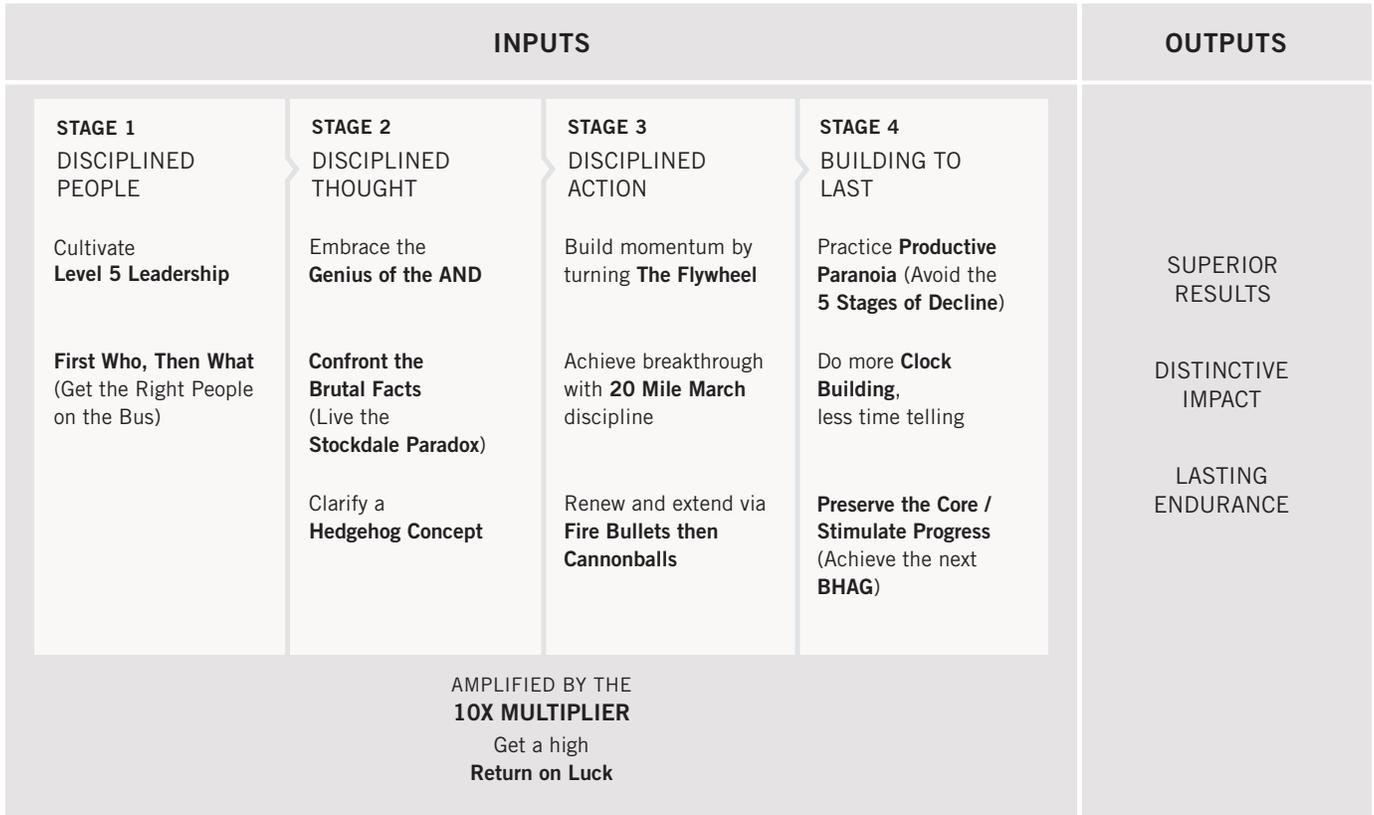
The Good to Great Project LLC  
Boulder, CO

What Makes Great Companies Tick

# THE MAP

A Good to Great® Strategic Tool

Developed by Jim Collins



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- 1** | Where are we on our journey to Level 5 leadership?  
Readings: *Good to Great*, Chapters 1 and 2; *Great by Choice*, Chapters 1 and 2; *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, full monograph.
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- 2** | Do we practice first who, with the right people on the bus and in the key seats?  
Readings: *Good to Great*, Chapter 3; *BE 2.0*, Chapter 2.
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- 3** | Where must we replace the Tyranny of the OR with the Genius of the AND?  
Readings: *Built to Last*, Chapter 1, Interlude, and Chapter 3.
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- 4** | What are the brutal facts, and how can we better live the Stockdale Paradox?  
Readings: *Good to Great*, Chapter 4.
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- 5** | Do we make disciplined decisions within the three circles of the Hedgehog Concept?  
Readings: *Good to Great*, Chapters 5, 6, and 7; *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, full monograph.
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- 6** | What is our flywheel, and how far can it go?  
Readings: *Good to Great*, Chapter 8; *Turning the Flywheel*, full monograph.
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- 7** | Have we embraced 20 Mile March discipline in every element of our flywheel?  
Readings: *Great by Choice*, Chapter 3.
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- 8** | What bullets and cannonballs should we fire to renew and extend our flywheel?  
Readings: *Great by Choice*, Chapter 4; *Turning the Flywheel*, full monograph.
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- 9** | Where should we channel our productive paranoia, to avoid the five stages of decline?  
Readings: *Great by Choice*, Chapter 5; *How the Mighty Fall*.
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- 10** | Have we made the shift from time telling to clock building?  
Readings: *Built to Last*, Chapter 2; *Great by Choice*, Chapter 6.
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- 11** | How can we better embody preserve the core/stimulate progress, and do we need a BHAG?  
Readings: *Built to Last*, Chapters 4, 5, and 10; *Good to Great*, Chapter 9; *BE 2.0*, Chapter 4.
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- 12** | What is our return on luck – whether good luck or bad - and how can we increase it?  
Readings: *Great by Choice*, Chapter 7; *BE 2.0*, Chapter 5.

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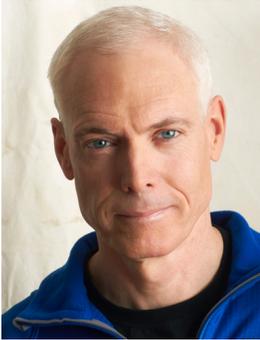
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## About Jim



Jim Collins is a student and teacher of what makes great companies tick, and a Socratic advisor to leaders in the business and social sectors. Having invested more than a quarter century in rigorous research, he has authored or coauthored a series of books that have sold in total more than 10 million copies worldwide. They include *Good to Great*, the #1 bestseller, which examines why some companies make the leap and others don't; the enduring classic *Built to Last*, which discovers why some companies remain visionary for generations; *How the Mighty Fall*, which delves into how once-great companies can self-destruct; and *Great by Choice*, which uncovers the leadership behaviors for thriving in chaos and uncertainty.

Jim has also published two monographs that extend the ideas in his primary books: *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* and *Turning the Flywheel*.

His most recent publication is *BE 2.0 (Beyond Entrepreneurship 2.0)*, an ambitious upgrade of his very first book; it returns Jim to his original focus on small, entrepreneurial companies and honors his coauthor and mentor Bill Lazier.

Driven by a relentless curiosity, Jim began his research and teaching career on the faculty at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where he received the Distinguished Teaching Award in 1992. In 1995, he founded a management laboratory in Boulder, Colorado, where he conducts research and engages with CEOs and senior-leadership teams.

In addition to his work in the business sector, Jim has a passion for learning and teaching in the social sectors, including education, healthcare, government, faith-based organizations, social ventures, and cause-driven nonprofits. In 2012 and 2013, he had the honor to serve a two-year appointment as the Class of 1951 Chair for the Study of Leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Jim holds a bachelor's degree in mathematical sciences and an MBA from Stanford University, and honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Colorado and the Peter F. Drucker Graduate School of Management at Claremont Graduate University. In 2017, Forbes selected Jim as one of the 100 Greatest Living Business Minds.