



Leadership Tips & Tools

AUGUST 2008

“Put your life to good use.”

---Jim Collins

Those were his final words with us at our 2008 International Conference in Denver. Jim Collins, our opening keynote speaker, inspired us with his intellect, thoughtfulness, understanding of our work, and honest appreciation for what we do everyday.

Since the conference I have visited with many of you who have commented not just on the words Jim shared, but his genuine insightful presence with us. He modeled enlightenment, one leader said.

“The moment of enlightenment for the wave . . . when it realizes it is water.”

---Thich Nhat Hanh

For those of us lucky enough to be in attendance at the conference, Jim’s opening conversation was one of those moments! He is enlightened! In our time with him our reverence and respect for this extraordinary thinker, researcher, writer, and teacher gave way to a oneness of being. As a great teacher, Jim did not flow over us with his wisdom, he was with us.

This issue of Leadership Tips and Tools is dedicated to a few thoughts as follow up to Jim’s profound visit with us.

Our Leadership Journey from *Good to Great!*

We Don’t Have a Choice! When asked, “Why greatness?” Jim was quick to respond that our work in post-secondary education is so critical to individuals, our communities, and society that we don’t have a choice! *“We must work to make our organizations great,”* he said. *“Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice.”* What choices will we make this year to move our colleges, departments, and teams to greatness?

“Disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought who take disciplined action – operating with freedom within a framework of responsibilities – this is the cornerstone of a culture that creates greatness.”

---Jim Collins

Beat the Odds! Jessie Arroyos made the choice. She is one of 12 leaders profiled in a major research study cited by Jim during his conversation with us about greatness. Relying on the methodology of Jim's research, Mary Jo Waits and her research team, under the sponsorship of the Center for the Future of Arizona and the Morrison Institute, found 12 elementary and middle schools in Arizona – schools whose students are mostly Latino and mostly low-income – that are "beating the odds" on reading and math scores.

Regardless of Circumstance! As a Level 5 leader, Jessie Arroyos is fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce results. She is ferociously driven to "beat the odds" for the students in her school. Her story exemplifies the essence of Collins' Level 5 leadership. *"It is very important to grasp that Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, and almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done"* to create greatness.

Six Keys to Success! A clear bottom line; ongoing assessment; strong, steady leader; collaborative solutions; sticking with the program; and building to suit specific needs . . . these are the keys to success in the *Beat the Odds* research. Key among the recommendations is the creation of leadership programs, with the goal of sharpening analytic skills and creating collaborative environments that allow effective, knowledge-based and customized education within schools and classrooms. *Beat the Odds* is a must read for every leader! The report is available online at <http://www.beattheoddsinstitute.org/articles/beat-the-odds-report.php>.

Captain and Ballast! One of my favorite passages from this research project is a metaphor about leadership. The study reports that in the heavy seas of educational leadership, leaders must be both *"the captain guiding the ship's route and the ballast providing stability."* A mixed metaphor? For sure! Isn't this the balancing act we play each day as we rally our students, colleagues, teams and organization to a brighter future and tend to the internal demands of balancing, managing, and maximizing each person's talent and performance? How can we be both the captain and the ballast? Isn't this what being a leader in education really involves?

Being Qualified for the Job! *"I never stopped trying to become qualified for the job,"* reflected Darwin Smith. A Collins' Level 5 leader of exceptional performance, Smith gives us a glimpse of his humility. In higher education we focus much of our attention on the top of the Leadership Hierarchy. The concept of the duality of the Level 5 leader – modest and willful, humble and fearless, captures our attention. Jim's clarity in helping us understand that fully developed Level 5 leaders embody all five layers of the Leadership Hierarchy: Level 1 – Highly Capable Individual; Level 2 – Contributing Team Member; Level 3 – Competent Manager; Level 4 – Effective Leader; and Level 5 – Executive Leader is essential in our journey to become "qualified" for our jobs.

More Successful in the Next Generation! In addition to his conversation about Level 5 leadership, other findings in Jim's chapter in *Good to Great* on disciplined leadership are critical to us in post-secondary education. For one, successful leaders want to see their team, organization . . . college even more successful in the next generation. So, how do we find people who will help our teams and colleges be more successful in the next generation? Collins answer? Look for Level 1, 2, 3, 4 leaders who have the potential to evolve.

Potential to Evolve! Either the seed is there or it is not! The potential to evolve to the highest levels of leadership reside within individuals. Collins points out that some will *"never bring themselves to subjugate their egotistic needs to the greater ambition of building something larger and more lasting than themselves."* Some will!

The Seed! Perhaps the seed for the potential to evolve into a Level 5 leader is buried or ignored, but there nonetheless, argues Collins. Under the right circumstances – self-reflection, personal development, a mentor, a great teacher, a significant life experience, a role model, or any number of other factors . . . leaders begin to develop. One of our most important roles and responsibilities as post-secondary leaders is to help make our organizations be more successful in the next generation and to be watchful for those who have the potential to evolve.

Built to Last! Jack Welch, former CEO of GE (a Collins *Built to Last* company), reports that he spent about half of his time on people: recruiting new talent, picking the right people for particular positions, grooming young stars, developing managers, and reviewing the entire talent pool. *“Having the most talented people is the most important thing,”* Welch reports in his autobiography, *Winning*. Are we spending half our time developing talent by coaching and mentoring?

The Sixth Element! Our most recent *Leadership Tips and Tools* have discussed 12, *The Elements of Great Managing* by Rodd Wagner and James Harter. The Sixth Element is essential here: *“There is someone at work who encourages my development.”* The notion of a personal guide is central to our growth and development argues the Gallup research. The craftsman and apprentice, resident physician and intern, doctoral candidate and thesis advisor all examples of working closely with someone who supervises, coaches, and mentors the less experienced person’s progress. Although mentors have existed throughout the ages, the neurological mechanism behind the power of example was discovered only in the early 1990s.

Mirrors! *“The discovery of mirror neurons . . . completely changes the way we think about how the brain works. Mirror neurons will do for psychology what DNA did for biology.”* The implication is that that humans don’t just passively observe other people in action, but in their minds “do” whatever they see. The discovery of mirror neurons suggests that if we want others to evolve through the 5 levels of leadership *“there is no better conduit to a protégé’s brain than watching a good role model in action.”* So, we must work to be disciplined leaders, with disciplined thought, and disciplined action working to implement the *Good to Great* findings with our teams, in our departments, and across our campuses. We must work to evolve and as we do we might become a “mirror” for others in their journey.

A Year to Remember! Few things bond people together like a shared memory. Those of us who were present with Jim at the 2008 Conference will forever have that memory. Author Lewis Carroll wrote, *“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backward.”* Carroll is right! The richest memories are often those we plan and intentionally create. It’s up to us now. Jim is a great teacher! He is authentic! He is our mentor . . . with his wisdom and his being. Can we create memories with healthy mentoring relationship that flow out of intimate listening and authentic encounters? Let’s make this a year to remember!

*“By faith, the heart rests in simple trust and simple being.
Authentic communion with the spirit of truth sparks that faith.”*

—Marsha Sinetar

We want to hear from you! We would love to hear your suggestions, experiences, stories, discoveries, and successes with putting these tips and tools to work. What topics would be most helpful to you for up-coming issues of *Leadership Tips and Tools*? We value your feedback. We are listening!

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