

## How Good Enough Prevents Excellence

*by Jon Craighead*

In 2001 Stanford Business School Professor Jim Collins authored his seminal treatise Good to Great. He begins the book with the following statement: “We don’t have great schools, principally 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 the main problem.” In short: “Good is the enemy of great.”

My consulting observation is that too many business leaders are less focused on long-term viability and too focused on short-term gains, particularly when things are going well. These are good companies, but they have a limited focus that leaves them unaware and often unprepared when change evolves. Good companies typically have reached their peak and begin losing their competitiveness, rapidly and unconsciously. It is not uncommon for these companies to be replaced by their industry rivals. History is replete with good companies that no longer exist. Another detrimental outcome for these organizations is a noticeably insecure workforce with a disgruntled survival mindset and lacking pride. This generates unsatisfactory productivity that further contributes to the organization’s inevitable failure.

Conversely, forward thinking market leaders are focused on long term goals. However, to accomplish these goals an organization must be aligned, alert, and creating needed breakthrough approaches to the market. This is a different platform than previously described. Here, employees are fully engaged in a process of skillful dedication, invention, and a motivation to give their all. There is a mindset of excitement and welcoming anticipation for the next challenge. This workplace environment promotes a setting of invention and discovery where technology and breakthroughs are created. This is the foundation of a great company.

How do you build such an organization? You can approach this challenge by creating and implementing a set organizational *core values*. A good place to start is to study the ideal of altruism, which is defined as the selflessness principle or practice of concern for the welfare of others equal to oneself. Focusing on a self-centered benefit at the expense of others leads one down an difficult path, and when businesses focus primarily on their own survival it inevitably results in unsatisfying and temporary gains. On the other hand, when an organization commits itself to the public good,

everyone wins. Great companies that operate from a thoughtful set of core values bring about excellent outcomes for themselves, their customers, and society in general. Examples include Ben & Jerry's commitment to the environment and Google's *mission* is to organize the world's information and make it universal.

Corporate core values are specific guiding principles that define how the corporation will behave. They are often expressed in the organization's mission statement, then expanded in detail. When specifically defined and developed, these values govern personal and corporate behaviors. They articulate what the company stands for and explain why it does business the way it does. Core values build togetherness and enhance a sense of purpose among employees and customers. They may be used as a benchmark for rewarding excellence. Core values are a set of operational ideals that provide specific actions which fulfill individual and organizational commitments such as: Respect, Integrity, Trust, Mastery, Honesty, and Service are classic examples.

Once this system is established, you can actually see the results in people's faces as they go about their daily work. Their eyes reflect excitement, versus trying to get through the day. People leave work fulfilled and refreshed rather than exhausted and empty. When core values are in place, it is as if money is incidental; these people would still be doing their jobs regardless of their compensation. Their work becomes indispensable to their quality of life, adding meaningful purpose, forwarding an ideal, and making a difference.

As I continue to explore the world of businesses, I am convinced that when organizations choose to implement a system of core values it results in alignment, success, and a passion for effectively getting things done – both professionally and personally. Being great at what you do is much more satisfying than being just good at what you do.