

“Great By Choice”

Jim Collins

Kindle notes by Dave Kraft

On the one hand, the great understand that they face continuous uncertainty and that they cannot control, and cannot accurately predict, significant aspects of the world around them. On the other hand, the great reject the idea that forces outside their control or chance events will determine their results; they accept full responsibility for their own fate. The great then bring this idea to life by a triad of core behaviors:

- Fanatic discipline
 - Empirical creativity
 - Productive paranoia
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What does this story have to do with “discipline”? Discipline, in essence, is consistency of action—consistency with values, consistency with long-term goals. Consistency with performance standards, consistency of method and consistency over time

The great did not generally make bolder moves than their less successful comparisons; both groups made big bets and, when needed, took dramatic action. Nor did they exude more raw confidence than the comparison leaders; indeed, the comparison leaders were often brazenly self-confident. But the great had a much deeper empirical foundation for their decisions and actions, which gave them well-founded confidence and bounded their risk.

The great differ from their less successful comparisons in how they maintain hyper-vigilance in good times as well as bad. Even in calm, clear, positive conditions, 10Xers constantly consider the possibility that events could turn against them at any moment. Indeed, they believe that conditions will—absolutely, with 100 percent certainty—turn against them without warning, at some unpredictable point in time, at some highly inconvenient moment. And they’d better be prepared. (We’re labeling instead the 10X behavior of turning hyper-vigilance into preparation and productive action.)

The great share Level 5 leaders’ most important trait: they’re incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the cause, for the company, for the work not themselves. Whereas Good to Great focused heavily on the humility aspect of Level 5 leaders, this work highlights their sheer ferocity of will.

Great leaders can be bland or colorful, uncharismatic or magnetic, understated or flamboyant, normal to the point of dull, or just flat-out weird—none of this really matters, as long as they're passionately driven for a cause beyond themselves.

Every great leader we studied aimed for much more than just “becoming successful.” They didn't define themselves by money. They didn't define themselves by fame. They didn't define themselves by power. They defined themselves by impact and contribution and purpose.

Great ones don't favor analysis over action; they favor empiricism as the foundation for decisive action.

Freely chosen, discipline is absolute freedom. —Ron Serino¹

Some people believe that a world characterized by radical change and disruptive forces no longer favors those who engage in consistent 20 Mile Marching (sustained effort in a single direction)

Yet the great irony is that when we examined just this type of out-of-control, fast-paced environment, we found that every 10X company exemplified the 20 Mile March principle during the era we studied.

We live in a modern culture that reveres the Next Big Thing. It's exciting, fun to read about, fun to talk about, fun to write about, fun to learn about, and fun to join. Yet the pursuit of the Next Big Thing can be quite dangerous if it becomes an excuse for failing to 20 Mile March “What Intel needed going forward was not the courage to take great leaps ahead but the discipline to take orderly steps in a controlled fashion.” Andy Grove said during this era,

More important than being first or the most creative is figuring out what works in practice, doing it better than anyone else, and then making the very most of it with a 20 Mile March

“How can we bullet our way to understanding?” “How can we fire a bullet on this?” “What bullets have others fired?” “What does this bullet teach us?” “Do we need to fire another bullet?” “Do we have enough empirical validation to fire a cannonball?”

Great leaders distinguish themselves by an ability to recognize defining moments that call for disrupting their plans, changing the focus of their intensity, and/or rearranging their agenda, because of opportunity or peril, or both

Rather, the principal finding is how the outstanding companies adhered to their recipes with fanatic discipline to a far greater degree than the comparisons, and how they carefully amended their recipes with empirical creativity and productive paranoia.

Change is not the most difficult part. Far more difficult than implementing change is figuring out what works, understanding why it works, grasping when to change, and knowing when not

The signature of mediocrity is not an unwillingness to change; the signature of mediocrity is chronic inconsistency.

No human enterprise can succeed at the highest levels without consistency; if you bring no coherent unifying concept and disciplined methodology to your endeavors, you'll be whipsawed by changes in your environment and cede your fate to forces outside your control. Equally true, however, no human enterprise can succeed at the highest levels without productive evolution.

Luck"—the luck of finding the right mentor, partner, teammate, leader, friend—is one of the most important types of luck. The best way to find a strong current of good luck is to swim with great people, and to build deep and enduring relationships with people for whom you'd risk your life and who'd risk their lives for you.

The greatest leaders we've studied throughout all our research cared as much about values as victory, as much about purpose as profit, as much about being useful as being successful. Their drive and standards are ultimately internal, rising from somewhere deep inside.

Intel cofounder Robert Noyce assembled Intel's founding team before deciding what products to make; he took personal responsibility for recruiting Intel's early talent and believed that the right people in the right culture would lead to great outcomes.