

# JIM'S TWELVE QUESTIONS

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

## Background on the Twelve Questions—A Note from Jim

In 1988, I had the great privilege to inherit teaching responsibility for a course on entrepreneurship and small business management at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. As I was preparing for my first year of teaching, I began to revise the syllabus for the course. The opening line of the syllabus read something like, "this will be a course on the mechanics and challenges of the entrepreneur and small business manager." For some reason, I impulsively changed the opening line to reframe the course around the question of what it would take to turn an entrepreneurial venture or small business *into an enduring great company*. I remember looking at that new opening sentence, and thinking to myself, "Wow, I don't know anything about that."

And thus began what would become a passionate quest—a quarter century of research, writing, and thinking about the question of what it takes to build an enduring great company or social sector enterprise. The result is more than 6,000 years of combined corporate history in a research database, six books, a range of articles, and a monograph translating some of the key ideas into the challenges faced by social sector leaders. These works included *Built to Last* (co-authored with Jerry Porras), *Great by Choice* (co-authored with Morten Hansen), *Beyond Entrepreneurship* (co-authored with Bill Lazier), *How the Mighty Fall*, and the cornerstone work *Good to Great*, along with its companion monograph *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*.

In 2012, I began to get a lot of questions from people who wanted to engage with the body of work, not just one book, so that they would have the best chance to build a great enterprise. The questions were along the lines of: "Where as a leadership team should we begin?" "Is there a best sequence to the reading, or to engaging with the concepts?" "What is the best way to challenge a team to engage with the full body of work?"

After reflecting on these questions, I decided to construct a sequence of Twelve Questions that would serve as a mechanism of disciplined thought for a leader and his or her team. The questions are designed to help you efficiently access the full body of work, in what I believe is a highly-effective sequence, along with readings corresponding to each question. I encourage you and your team to discuss one question per month, to fill out an entire year of disciplined thought. The most powerful results will come from repeating the cycle, rigorously hitting each question at least once per year. At the end of a year, you can further self-assess using the Good to Great® Diagnostic Tool, available at [www.jimcollins.com](http://www.jimcollins.com).

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1

Do we want to build an enduring great company (or social sector enterprise), and are we willing to strive for Level 5 Leadership?

- Reading: *Good to Great*, Chapters 1, 2; *Great by Choice* Chapters 1, 2; *Built to Last*, Chapter 2; article at jimcollins.com: "Built to Flip"
- For leaders in the social sectors, first read: *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*

notes:

2

On what core values and enduring purpose will we build our culture for 100 years?

- Reading: *Built to Last*, Interlude, Chapter 11; Useful tool at jimcollins.com: Vision Framework
- For those in small business, also consider: *Beyond Entrepreneurship*, Chapters 2 and 3

notes:

3

Do we have the right people on the bus, and are 95% of our key seats filled with the right people?

- Reading: *Good to Great*, Chapter 3; *Great by Choice*, FAQ #3; *How the Mighty Fall*, Appendix 5

notes:

4

What are the brutal facts, and how can we better live the Stockdale Paradox?

- Reading: *Good to Great*, Chapter 4

notes:

5

What do we understand so far about our Hedgehog Concept—what we are fanatically passionate about, what we can be the best at (and cannot), and what drives our economic (or resource) engine?

- Reading: *Good to Great*, Chapter 5

notes:

6

How can we accelerate clicks on the Flywheel by committing to a 20 Mile March?

- Reading: *Good to Great*, Chapters 7, 8; *Great by Choice*, Chapter 3

notes:

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7	<p>How can we better blend empirical creativity AND fanatic discipline, and thereby scale innovation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: <i>Good to Great</i>, Chapter 6; <i>Great by Choice</i>, Chapter 4, FAQs #10, 11</li></ul>
notes:	
8	<p>What is our BHAG – our Big Hairy Audacious Goal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: <i>Good to Great</i>, Chapter 9; <i>Built to Last</i>, Chapter 5</li></ul>
notes:	
9	<p>What is the right 20% to change, so as to best Preserve the Core and Stimulate Progress?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: <i>Built to Last</i>, Chapter 4; <i>Great by Choice</i>, Chapter 6</li></ul>
notes:	
10	<p>How can we increase our Return on Luck (ROL), adapting our strategy to both good luck and bad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: <i>Great by Choice</i>, Chapters 5, 7 and Epilogue</li></ul>
notes:	
11	<p>Do we show any signs of the Five Stages of Decline, and what should we do about them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: <i>How the Mighty Fall</i></li></ul>
notes:	
12	<p>What should we Stop Doing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading: articles at jimcollins.com: "The Best New Year's Resolution", "Aligning Action and Values"; Useful tool at jimcollins.com: Good to Great® Diagnostic Tool</li></ul>
notes:	