

# LEADERSHIP WITHIN LAW ENFORCEMENT: A BOOK REVIEW ON JIM COLLINS' "GOOD TO GREAT"

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## Introduction

That the law enforcement community often finds itself operating in the middle of many social crossroads is obvious. What remains is the manner in which each entity, each department, each supervisor, and each officer manages those intersections. If those choices are managed consistently and with a clear set of guiding principles, perception becomes the ally of the entity, department, supervisor, or officer. Conversely, if enforcement and relations are erratic and inconsistent, perception works against law enforcement, and the very communities those officers have sworn to defend and to serve will often withdraw the trust and cooperation essential to success.

Leadership and vision are essential to winning the battle for perception, the hearts and minds, of the community, and it is in finding and nurturing great leadership that law enforcement should look to the wisdom afforded by the business community. The business community has long recognized that strong leadership heralds in change and change management (Bass, 2000). The management of change is critical in law enforcement because of the ever evolving communities within which law enforcement must interact with.

The core of this essay's discussion of leadership will involve the concepts and principles put forth by Jim Collins in his

bestselling *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. The focus will not involve the financial elements of running a company, but rather the essential measures leaders must take to find, cultivate, and direct great leadership at all levels of their organizations (Vosburgh, 2005). The argument for this is simple enough: If law enforcement can make leadership (at all levels) a priority, and can inculcate core values and instill a core purpose in all levels of the organization, the organization will of necessity be in a stronger position to deal with whatever eventualities may arise.

## Finding Leaders

Jim Collins admits early on in his discussion of leadership that he was not looking for leadership to solve all his problems. Quite the contrary. The problem arose when, despite his constant admonition to his researchers to, "Ignore the executives" kept meeting resistance from his staff, who insisted that there was something about the leadership of "Great" companies that was absent in the merely "Good" (Collins, 2001, 21-22). One of the primary distinguishing characteristics of what Collins calls Level 5 leaders is that their egos do not get in the way of their desire for corporate success. In fact, such leaders "want to see the company even more successful in the next generation"

(Collins, 2001, 26). Essentially, for great leaders, it is at least as important (if not more so) that when they pass the mantle to the next generation they can rest assured that the organization is likely to be managed even better than they themselves could.

The opposite of this impulse is what Collins calls “A Genius with a Thousand Helpers” mode of leadership, where an exceptional individual surrounds himself with a competent support group, but does not leave the organization in a position to sustain (or surpass) the successes of the leader, because choosing a successor is never made a priority (Collins, 2001, 46-47). While Mr. Collins could provide no sure litmus test for how Level 5 leaders come to be, he does have recommendations as to how to recognize, and possibly become one by simply doing as Level 5 leaders do (Collins, 2001, 38). If law enforcement agencies can tap into this character trait of great leadership, they can navigate the treacherous shoals of competing interests and political intrigues with a better chance of keeping their core values intact and achieving their missions.

### **Cultivating Leaders**

Finding and cultivating great leadership should be the primary function of those at the highest levels of management in any organization, but none more than law enforcement, where officers and agents touch so many lives so deeply on a daily basis. It is not essential, for Collins, that one know exactly what one wants an exceptional individual to do, so much as knowing that one has an exceptional individual at hand (Collins, 2001 42-45). Collins calls this the “First Who ... Then What” principle: Finding exceptional potential leaders, and then finding where their talents can best serve the

organization. It is a difficult principle to uphold, especially if there is external and internal pressure to hire for a position, but this core principle is an essential element of great leadership (Rao, 2001, p.118). How else is one going to ensure that future leadership will be as exceptional as the current regime if the current regime does not take pains to ensure that all positions are filled with the best possible candidates, regardless of how many shuffles of the organizational chart it may require?

### **Turnover vs. Churn**

This willingness to be persistent in finding talented individuals, then finding where their talents are best put to use is called “churning.” The dynamic opposite of churning is turnover. What great organizations do, that good or mediocre organizations do not, is they churn better (Collins, 2001, 57). That is, they are better able to move talented persons where they could contribute, and moved incompatible personalities out of the organization more efficiently.

The “turnover versus churn” debate is intellectually compelling on its own merits, but why is this concept important for law enforcement? The answer is because in any organization, but especially in law enforcement, exceptional, motivated individuals want to make a difference and want to believe that they will be placed in a position to succeed, and that they will be rewarded for their hard work and sacrifice. Law enforcement agencies invest a great deal of time and effort in developing their officers, but if those officers do not feel that their contribution will lead to recognition and promotion, they will move to where they believe they have a chance to succeed on their merits (Bowman, Carlson, Colvin, & Green, 2006, 133). Finding good law

enforcement leaders at every level, and then giving them work that is fulfilling and satisfies the individual's desire for success is essential to cultivating a culture of competence that can become self-sustaining. The alternative is fumbling in the dark, having no programs for finding and fostering talented persons, and wasting precious time and resources having to repeat the process, because the individuals leave for greener pastures.

### **Facing Facts**

Essential to creating a culture of leaders concerned in raising the overall level of competence of the organization are several virtues that can fall under the general rubric of "Facing Facts." Great leadership cannot be afraid to confront the facts of any situation, nor can it surround itself with persons afraid to face facts or speak truth to power. Great leaders must empower their teams to raise the red flag and question anything, without fear of reprisal (Collins, 2001, 79-80).

Collins recounts how Winston Churchill created a whole department to provide him with unfiltered, stark, unadorned facts. Because he was unafraid to face those facts, Churchill never allowed himself to be lulled into a false sense of security, while still maintaining the highest stated goals. "Facts are better than dreams," he said (Collins, 2001, 73). That is not to say that greatness does not dream, nor that greatness is devoid of vision. Law enforcement organizations embracing the principle of facing facts will be in a better position to respond to situations in a reasoned manner, while remaining true to their core mandate to serve and protect, because they will resist the temptation to look for easy answers to complex problems. Refusing to be

simplistic, in turn, will engender a better perception of law enforcements commitment to their core mission.

### **Conclusion**

It is not accidental that the concept of core mission recurs in the discussion of leadership. If nothing else persists of this paper's discussion of leadership and law enforcement, preserve the idea that leadership in law enforcement must clearly define and disseminate the core values and core mission of their entities and make every effort to ensure that the individuals responsible for realizing that common vision are the best possible candidates, empowered to question authority and effect change and progress and armed with facts. Then they can make what would otherwise be empty slogans into a reality that the community can see in action and rally around. In this way, those remarkable individuals who stand in the intersections of our society can be made powerful and positive agents for the safety and preservation of the communities to which they have been entrusted.

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