

Leading in the Midst of Chaos

How do great organizations manage to thrive in times of uncertainty and chaos? After studying many such organizations, Jim Collins and Morten Hansen share their insights in *Great By Choice* (Harper Business, www.harpercollins.com). Here are the factors that distinguish spectacular leaders and organizations from those that fail to thrive.


The best leaders observe what works, figure out *why* it works, and build on proven foundations. They know that nothing is certain. But they utterly reject the idea that luck, chaos, or any other external factor will determine whether they succeed or fail.

The traits associated with great leaders are:

- **fanatic discipline** (sticking firmly to their goals, values, and standards)
- **empirical creativity** (making bold moves from a sound empirical base)

- **productive paranoia** (staying attuned to threats and changes in the environment, developing contingency plans, and maintaining large margins of safety).


The best organizations aren't more innovative than others but, rather, know how much to innovate and risk. In each environment, there's a level of innovation that's necessary to be a contender. Once above that threshold, being more innovative doesn't matter much. The combination of creativity and discipline, translated into the ability to scale innovation with great consistency, explains success stories better than the myth of big-hit, single-step breakthroughs.

It's what you do before bad events strike that matters most in determining whether your enterprise pulls ahead or falls behind when storms hit. Great leaders focus more than most people on putting buffers and shock absorbers in place. They maintain a conservative financial position, squirreling away much more cash than others do to protect against unforeseen disruptions. 

A New Direction in Evaluation

Based on 12 years of research with adolescent girls, *Thinking Outside the Girl Box: Teaming Up With Resilient Youth in Appalachia* (Ohio University Press, ohio.wallow.com) explores methods used to evaluate a youth development program in an economically-depressed West Virginia county. It's a fascinating account of what happens when evaluators find programs so compelling that they inadvertently influence those programs.

The evaluation process used is an ethnography — a systematic, highly participatory recording of a culture. The review of this particular ethnography is especially thorough and candid, setting an important new direction in the evaluation field.

The Girls' Resiliency Program helped middle- and high-school-aged girls find their voices through community building and social activism. In telling this story, authors Linda Spatig and Lynne Amerikaner demonstrate what can happen when people are given the tools to build their strengths, speak out, and engage in changing the world. Good research opens questions for further study, and that is what makes *Thinking Outside the Girl Box* a vital work. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Who Will Be Your Next Board President?

If you don't have a succession plan in place for your board, you may be inviting disaster. To ensure a smooth board-president succession, Dennis Miller (*The Power of Strategic Alignment*, www.dcmillerassociates.com) suggests the following steps:

1. **Assess the leadership talent** of current board members, and identify potential candidates for future board president.
2. **Institute ongoing board training** for all board members.
3. **Provide all board members** opportunities to participate in a wide array of committees, task forces, and advisory boards.
4. **Offer the chair-elect** a professional coach or mentor.



The Seven Qualities of Lucky Leaders

You can attract good fortune if you have:


- a **lucky attitude** (an openness to serendipity)
- a **lucky network** (a wide circle of people who at first glance may seem to have little to do with your goals).

To attain those essentials, say the authors of *Heart, Smarts, Guts, and Luck* (hbsp.harvard.edu), you need seven attributes:

1. **Humility** is the foundation of a lucky attitude. It's the root of self-awareness.

2. **Intellectual curiosity** is the lucky person's response to humility. Knowing all that you don't know, you're eager to explore new ideas. And the more new people you meet and questions you ask, the more you'll be exposed to — and rewarded by — luck.
3. **Authenticity** means that your dealings with your lucky network are true expressions of who you are. An authentic relationship with someone offers one of your best chances for success.
4. **Optimism** gives you the energy for change. Luck comes to those who see the good possibilities in new ideas rather than focusing on the bad.
5. **Generosity** means looking for ways to help others — a prime way to enhance your lucky network.
6. **Openness**, in the eyes of the lucky, is about “welcoming things that might not fit a traditional mold.”
7. **Vulnerability** gives you the courage to ask for help and to take risks that might make you look foolish if you fail. Vulnerability helps expand your lucky network, because it pulls people toward you.

How lucky are you? Ask yourself these questions (adapted from the book) to assess your luck quotient:

- **What is your “ask-to-answer ratio”?** The more tilted it is toward asking lots of questions and answering few, the luckier you're likely to be.
- **Do you listen to people whose positional power may be low but whose real-world experience is high?** Crowdsourcing was built on this idea that great insights can come from anywhere.
- **Do you “make time to be curious”?** Do you set goals to meet new people and try new things? Do you work them into your calendar and resolve not to cancel?
- **Do you work hard to build a broad, far-ranging network?** Rather than over-calculating these relationships, do you simply add people who bring diversity and openness to your life, independent of any specific professional objective?
- **Do you do as many favors as possible** for the people in your network? Do you also ask for help from your network? Do your interactions reflect your authentic interests and feelings?
- **Do you follow the 24 x 3 rule?** Try it the next time you hear a new idea. Wait 24 seconds before criticizing the idea. Once you've mastered this, try pausing for 24 minutes before thinking or saying anything negative. Finally, work toward waiting 24 hours before considering the cons against something new. In the meantime, focus only on the possibilities inherent in the idea and all the reasons it might work.
- **Do you focus more of your time** on knowing yourself, growing as a person, and evolving as a leader than on material trappings of power and success? 



What to Do with an Under-Performing Team

If your team isn't realizing its potential, don't give up on the team. Instead, try these fixes:

1. **Develop Team Members.** Your job as a team leader is to help team members grow. Draw out their potential. Determine what your team members need based on these categories:
 - **Enthusiastic beginner** — needs direction
 - **Disillusioned learner** — needs coaching
 - **Cautious completer** — needs support
 - **Self-reliant achiever** — needs responsibility and challenge.
2. **Add Someone New.** It may be time to recruit new talent. Sometimes all the team needs is one new person with a key characteristic or skill to fill in an important gap or create a new synergy.
3. **Change the Leader.** Different challenges require different kinds of leadership. Sometimes the best thing you can do is ask someone on the team to step into a leadership role, either permanently or for a short time. Each time you face a new problem, ask yourself: Who on the team has the strengths necessary to lead us through this challenge?
4. **Remove Members.** If team members lack the skills, traits, or attitudes you need, you may have to ask them to leave. Otherwise, they can demoralize the whole group.




— adapted from *Teamwork 101* by John C. Maxwell

How to Turn Upcoming Trends into Opportunities

Today's information tidal wave is driving new trends that you can turn to good use. Here are a few ways to do so:

- **Use online platforms to support fundraising.** For instance, ask a major donor for a gift that matches each share, like, or retweet your organization receives online. This strategy will help you spread the word while bringing in funding.
- **Be sensitive to people's individual needs.** As staff retention becomes a greater and greater challenge, put energy into maintaining lasting relationships with current and former employees, within and beyond the organization.
- **Find insight in big data and marketing analytics.** You needn't be a data scientist, but you must think broadly and analytically so you can ask the probing questions that frame solid data analysis. You must help to make wise purchasing decisions and manage technically savvy teams. Understand that in the future software, content, creativity, and infrastructure will be completely interwoven.
- **Build loyalty programs and chances for people to earn points in ways that benefit your organization.** For example, let people earn points (or products, services,

or special access to something you provide) by watching a 30-second commercial or ad on your Web site. Consider providing free mobile apps that track and manage people's rewards, making participation easy.

- **Be sure the technology you use to engage people is so simple that it's invisible.** At the same time, try to make every personal interaction between your employees and customers so helpful that people are delighted.
- **Meet people's in-context needs, marketing to them where they are at each moment of the day.** Focus in on contextification, the trend by which you address others based on their place in space and time. Take advantage of the technologies that make it possible to predict not only where people are but where they will be, thus anticipating customers' wants and needs. This shift from responsive to predictive marketing relies on vast quantities of data, which continue to grow by the minute, allowing you to finely target your messages. Next-best offer (NBO) analytics help you estimate the probability that someone will be interested in your targeted message. When you combine NBO algorithms with search engines, you can create cross-marketing experiences such as, "You may also like . . ." At-risk models can help you identify changes in usage patterns, thus predicting when someone may be losing interest so that you can intervene quickly.
- **Evaluate what you do on a continuous basis.** Just as you maintain 360-degree reviews for your employees, implement 360-degree reviews of your processes, services, and communications.
- **Think entrepreneurially, creating evidence for or against ideas through immediate and frequent testing.** Entrepreneurial decision-making includes pursuing multiple options simultaneously and building purposeful partner networks.
- **Identify people in your organization who are strong at managing processes.** They will be key to operational effectiveness as you rely more and more on the cloud.
- **Help people connect to their deepest beliefs** in how to live in the world. Create a true connection to underlying values, not a superficial greenwashing.
- **Provide interactive experiences.** People want more from you than services and products. They want meaningful experiences. Create communities — digital, physical, or both — where people can interact with you and with one another.
- **Spend time fostering collaboration between functions and across regions, countries, nationalities, and cultures.** Be diverse in all senses of the word. 

See these articles at NonprofitWorld.org/members: "Exercising Board Leadership with Social Media" (Vol. 32, No. 1), "Ten Reasons to Move to the Cloud" (Vol. 32, No. 2), "The Best Marketers Money Can't Buy" (Vol. 32, No. 2).

— adapted from *Leadership 2030, The Nonprofit Fundraising Solution*, and *Data Crush* (all available from AMACOM (amacombooks.org) and *The Digital Marketer* (Wiley, wiley.com))

Tools for the Journey

Strengthen yourself and your leadership skills with these self-improvement exercises:

Look for the lesson or unexpected insight that hides within every challenge. Try the following exercise to get started: List some hardships or troubles you're facing now or have encountered in the past. For each one, instead of thinking, "Who's to blame?" or "Why did this have to happen?" answer these questions: What can this teach me? What's the lesson in it for me?

Visualize. Create a mental picture of the life — or the experience — you desire. Imagine how you'll feel and how you'll look, the environment that will surround you, the people beside you. The clearer the reality you envision, the more likely that you'll make it come true. Also visualize moments in the past when you felt you were your best self. Use those visual memories as touchstones in your journey through change, reminding yourself that you've faced change in the past and triumphed over your fears.

Stimulate your creative self by doing something completely different — or doing something ordinary in a new way. Take a new route to work. Brush your teeth using your non-dominant hand. Practice walking backwards, standing on your head, or dancing to a new song. Doing just one small thing differently each day keeps your brain alive and opens you to the gifts of the universe.

laughter alert

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ON THE AIR



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Don't let your job overwhelm your life. Take breaks at work to re-energize and shift perspective. Use your lunch hour to take a walk, do some exercises, or meditate. Take time to reflect on what you're doing, why you're doing it, and why it matters.

Answer these questions on paper: What does "success" mean to you? Do you feel you've succeeded in your life? If not, when will you believe yourself to be a success? Realize that if you measure success in terms of money, status, or possessions, you're unlikely to ever accumulate enough to be happy. If you look for success within yourself, you're much more likely to have a successful life. How could you change your definition of success so that it includes true happiness and fulfillment? External markers like money can be part of a happy life, but they don't guarantee happiness the way a sense of purpose does.


For more exercises to enhance your life and your organization, see *Waking Up Happy: A Handbook of Change* by Jill Muehrcke (WakingUpHappy.com). 

A New View of Governance

The global financial crisis and changes in the relationship between nonprofit organizations and government have led to increased calls for accountability of nonprofits, including scrutiny of how organizations are governed. Almost all examinations of nonprofit governance have been limited to the board of directors — how they perform as a group and how the individuals within them perform. Theories about strengthening governance most commonly rely on "best practices" (which may not apply to the complexities of a specific organization's circumstances) and on a scarcity mentality (which might work well for for-profit businesses chasing scarce dollars, but not so well for nonprofits tending the commons). These theories tend to compartmentalize organizations.

Looking at nonprofit governance from a systems view changes how organizations are effectively governed. Instead of making compromises and trade-offs for "scarce resources," we learn the value of trust, open communications, and shared power

Nonprofit Governance (Routledge, www.routledge.com) describes current approaches, then explores emerging, innovative ways to view governance. The authors (a variety of experts in the field) examine board processes, the impact of board chairs, and the roles of the CEO and other stakeholders. They compare popular theories, which focus on control, to emerging, holistic theories that involve change.

This is a groundbreaking book. It will certainly be exciting to researchers of nonprofits because it establishes a turning point in theoretical perspectives from compartmentalization to systems thinking. At the same time, it can help practitioners break out of self-limiting perspectives of how to govern. It will remind nonprofit leaders that taking a systems view expands capabilities and offers boundless possibilities. 

— reviewed by Terrence Fernsler