

A Culture of Discipline

Arguably the greatest business book to appear in the last quarter century is Jim Collins' *Good to Great, Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*. In preparation for the book the author and his research team identified and examined 11 publicly traded companies that significantly outperformed their competitors for a period of 15 or more years to find out what made them so successful. The findings were sometimes surprising, often at odds with conventional wisdom, but definitive in that they were based on empirical evidence, not business theory.

One of the findings is that all Good to Great companies had a culture of discipline. Quoting from the book:

"Much of the answer to the question of 'good to great' lies in the discipline to do whatever it takes to become the best within carefully selected arenas and then seek continual improvement in these. It's really just that simple."

Collins also says,

"A culture of discipline is not just about action. It is about getting disciplined people who engage in disciplined thought and who then take disciplined action."

Most of us recognize that our business is not rocket science. The basics of what we do are well-known to any hospitality professional. What makes our jobs so challenging is the sheer volume of things that must be attended to daily in a detail and people-intensive business.

Unless an operation is well-organized and its managers highly disciplined, it operates in a state of barely-controlled chaos interspersed with periods of downtime. The challenge for all is to transition quickly from storm to calm back to storm while remaining focused on long term goals, ongoing projects, and continual process improvement. The solution is to organize the operation so that most things happen routinely and that managers at all levels be highly disciplined in approaching their duties and efforts to improve the operation.

Ed Rehkopf, Hospitality Resources International