

**Built To Last**  
**James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras**

**Chapter 1**  
**The Best of The Best**

The critical question is not “What’s common across a group of companies?” Rather, the critical issues are: “What’s essentially *different* about these companies?”

Selected a comparison company for each visionary company.

Compare gold medal teams to silver and bronze medal teams whenever possible to give real meaning to our findings.

History and Evolution

They reflect the accumulation of past events and the shaping force of underlying genetics that have roots in prior generations.

We believed our comparison analysis would be much more powerful from a historical perspective.

Looked at companies throughout their entire life spans and in direct comparison to other companies.

Employed a framework based on a technique called “Organization Stream Analysis for collecting and sorting information.”

**Chapter 2**  
**Clock Building, Not Time Telling**

Having a great idea or being a charismatic visionary leader is “time telling”; building a company that can prosper far beyond the presence of any single leader and through multiple product life cycles is “clock building.”

They concentrate primarily on building an organization-building a ticking clock- rather than on hitting a market just right with a visionary product idea and riding the growth curve on an attractive product life cycle. Their greatest creation is *the company itself* and what it stands for.

Our research punched holes in two widely held and deeply cherished myths: the myth of the great idea and the myth of the great and charismatic leader. We found that creating and building a visionary company absolutely does not require *either* a great idea or a great and

charismatic leader. In fact, we found evidence that great ideas brought forth by charismatic leaders might be *negatively correlated* with building a visionary company. These surprising findings forced us to look at corporate success from an entirely new angle and through a different lens than we had used before. They also have implications that are profoundly liberating for corporate managers and entrepreneurs alike.

Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard decided to first start a company and then figure out what they would make. They just started moving forward, trying anything that might get them out of the garage and pay the light bills.

Texas Instruments traces its roots to a highly successful initial concept. TI started with a “great idea.” HP did not. Neither did Sony. In fact, Ibuka and his seven initial employees had a brainstorming session *after* starting the company- to decide what products to make. In comparison, Kenwood’s founder appeared to have a specific category of products in mind.

Sam Walton also started without a great idea. Walton built incrementally, step by step, from that single store until the “great idea” of rural discount popped out as a natural evolutionary step almost two decades after he started his company. He wrote in *Made in America* “*And like most overnight successes, it was about twenty years in the making.*”

This mythology holds that those who launch highly successful companies usually begin first and foremost with a brilliant idea (technology, product, market potential) and then ride the growth curve of an attractive product life cycle. Yet this mythology-as compelling and pervasive as it is – does not show up as a general pattern in the founding of the visionary companies.

Few of the visionary companies in our study can trace their roots to a great idea or a fabulous product.

Some of our visionary companies began like Sony with outright failures. 3M started as failed corundum mine. Bill Boeing’s first airplane failed.

### **Waiting For “The Great Idea” Might Be A Bad Idea**

Henry Ford didn’t come up with the idea of the Model T and *then* decide to start a company around that idea. Just the opposite. Ford was able to take full advantage of the Model T concept because he already had a *company* in place as a launching pad.

The visionary companies were much less likely to begin life with a “great idea” than the comparison companies in our study. We found that the

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visionary companies were less likely to have early entrepreneurial success than the comparison companies.

We found a negative correlation between early entrepreneurial success and becoming a highly visionary company. The long race goes to the tortoise, not the hare.

The great-idea approach shifts your attention away from seeing the company as your ultimate creation.

### **The Company Itself Is The Ultimate Creation**

In case after case, the visionary companies actions flew in the face of the theories being taught at the business schools.

We had to shift from seeing the company as a vehicle for the products to seeing the products as a vehicle for the company.

But compare George Westinghouse to Charles Coffin, GE's first president. Coffin invented not a single product. But he sponsored an innovation of great significance: the establishment of the General Electric Research Lab, billed as "America's first industrial research laboratory. George Westinghouse told the time; Charles Coffin built a clock. Westinghouse's greatest creation was the AC power system; Coffin's greatest creation was the General Electric Company.

Luck favors the persistent. Never, never, never give up. But what to persist with? Their answer: The company. Be prepared to kill, revise, or evolve an idea, but never give up on the company.

HP learned humility early in its life due to a string of failed and only moderately successful products. They quickly made the transition from designing products to designing an organization-creating an environment-conducive to creation of great products.

Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard's ultimate creation wasn't the audio oscilloscope or the pocket calculator. It was the Hewlett-Packard Company and the HP Way.

Similarly, Masaru Ibuma's greatest "product" was not the Walkman or the Trinitron; it was Sony the company and what it stand for. Walt Disney's greatest creation was not *Fantasia*, or *Snow White*, or even Disneyland; it was the Walt Disney Company and its uncanny ability to make people happy. Sam Walton's greatest creation wasn't the Wal-Mart concept; it was the Wal-Mart Corporation – an organization that could implement retailing concepts on a large scale better than any company in the world.

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Paul Galvin's genius lay not in being an engineer or inventor (he was actually a self-educated but twice-failed businessman with no formal technology training), but in his crafting and shaping of an innovative engineering organization that we've come to call the Motorola Company. William Procter and James Gamble's most significant contribution was not hog fat soap, lamp oils, or candles, for these would eventually become obsolete, their primary contribution was something that can never become obsolete: a highly adaptable organization with a "spiritual inheritance of deeply ingrained core values transferred to generation after generation of P&G people.

Critical shift in thinking-the shift of seeing the company itself as the ultimate creation.

Spend more of your time thinking about organization design. It means spending less of your time thinking like George Westinghouse, and spending more of your time thinking like Charles Coffin, David Packard, and Paul Galvin. It means spending less of your time being a time teller, and more of your time being a clock builder.

The continual stream of great products and services from highly visionary companies stems from them being outstanding organizations, not the other way around.

### **The Myth Of The Great and Charismatic Leader**

We found no evidence to support the hypothesis that great leadership is the distinguishing variable during the critical, formative stages of the visionary companies.

We had to reject the great-leader theory; it simply did not adequately explain the differences between the visionary and comparison companies.

A high-profile, charismatic style is absolutely not required to successfully shape a visionary company. 3M is famous, McKnight is not. We suspect he would have wanted it exactly that way. He was described as "a soft-spoken, gentle man".

"What if high-profile charismatic leadership is just not my style?" Our response: Trying to develop such a style might be wasted energy. Our research indicates that you don't need such a style anyway.

Please don't misunderstand our point here. We're not claiming that the architects of these visionary companies were poor leaders. Both sets of companies have had strong enough leaders at formative stages that great

leadership, be it charismatic or otherwise, cannot explain the superior trajectories of the visionary companies over the comparison companies.

We found that the visionary companies did a better job than the comparison companies at developing and promoting highly competent managerial talent from inside the company and they thereby attained greater continuity of excellence at the top through multiple generations. The continuity of superb individuals atop visionary companies stems from the companies being outstanding organizations, not the other way around.

### **An Architectural Approach: Clock Builders at Work**

Key people at formative stages of the visionary companies had a stronger organization orientation than in the comparison companies, regardless of their personal leadership style. We became increasingly uncomfortable with the term “leader” and began to embrace the term “architect” or “clock builder”.

Sam Walton was an architect. He valued change, experimentation, and constant improvement. But he didn’t just preach these values, he instituted concrete organization mechanisms to stimulate change and improvement. He knew that he would probably not live to the year 2000, yet shortly before he died in 1992, he set audacious goals for the company out to the year 2000, displaying a deep confidence in what the company could achieve independent of his presence.

Motorola’s founder, Paul Galvin did not fear his own demise. His concern was for the company. In contrast, Zenith’s founder, Commander Eugene F. McDonald Jr. had no succession plan, thus leaving a void of talent at the top after his unexpected death. McDonald was a tremendously charismatic leader.

Quick, stop and think: Disney. Walt was much more of a clock builder unlike Harry Cohn of Columbia Studio’s. Upon Cohn’s death, the company fell into listless disarray, had to be rescued in 1973, and was eventually sold to Coca-Cola.

Disney’s ability to make people happy, to bring joy to children, to create laughter and tears would not die. Walt, unlike Cohn, created an institution much bigger than himself, an institution that could still deliver the “Disney magic’ to kids at Disneyland decades after his death. Disney was a force shaping the imaginative life of children around the world. Its mission was to celebrate American values.

## The Message For CEOs, Managers, and Entrepreneurs

One of the most important steps you can take in building a visionary company is not an action, but a shift in perspective.

We 're asking you to see the success of visionary companies-at least in part-as coming from underlying processes and fundamental dynamics embedded in the organization and not primarily the result of a single great idea or some great, all-knowing, godlike visionary who made great decisions, had great charisma, and led with great authority. If you're involved in building and managing a company, we're asking you to think less in terms of being a brilliant product visionary or seeking the personality characteristics of charismatic leadership, and to think more in terms of being an organizational visionary and building the characteristics of a visionary company.

“What *process* can we create that will give us good presidents long after we're dead and gone? What type of enduring country do we want to build? On what principles? How should it operate? What guidelines and mechanisms should we construct that will give us the kind of country we envision?” Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and John Adams were not charismatic visionary leaders in the “it all depends on me” mode. They were organizational visionaries. They focused on building a country. They rejected the good-king model. They were clock builders! It's a clock build on human needs and aspirations. It's a clock with a *spirit*. It's building a *particular type of clock*.

Once you make the shift from time telling to clock building, most of what's required to build a visionary company can be learned. Once you learn the essentials, you and all those around you-can just get down to the hard work of making your company a visionary company.

### **Chapter 3** **More Than Profits**

We found that high ideals-a core ideology-often existed in the visionary companies not just when they were successful, but also when they were struggling just to survive.

Sony is a pioneer and never intends to follow others. Through progress, Sony wants to serve the whole world. It shall be always a seeker of the unknown...Sony has a principle of respecting and encouraging one's ability...and always tries to bring out the best in a person. This is the vital force of Sony. The ideals of the “Sony spirit” trace their roots to the very early days of the company, long before it became a profitable venture, and have remained largely intact as a guiding force for nearly half a century.

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Yes, Sony made crude heating pads and sweetened bean-paste soup to keep itself alive (pragmatism), but it always dreamed and pushed toward making pioneering contributions (idealism).

Yes, visionary companies pursue profits. And yes, they pursue broader, more meaningful ideals. Profit maximization does not rule, but the visionary companies pursue their aims profitably. They do both.

Profitability is a necessary condition for existence and a means to more important ends, but it is not the end in itself for many of the visionary companies. Profit is like oxygen, food, water and blood for the body; they are not the point of life, but without them, there is no life.

John Young, HP chief executive from 1976-1992 said “Yes, profit is a cornerstone of what we do-it is a measure of our contribution and a means of self-financed growth-but it has never been the point in and of itself. The point, in fact, is to win, and winning is judged in the eyes of the customer and by doing something you can be proud of. There is a symmetry of logic in this. If we provide real satisfaction to the real customers-we will be profitable.” For HP, bigger was better only with the context of making a contribution. HP explicitly chose not to go after the cheap end precisely because it offered no opportunity for technical contribution.

### **Is There A “Right” Ideology**

Is there a “right” core ideology for being a visionary company? No single item shows up consistently across all the visionary companies.

Some companies:

- Made their customers central to their ideology
- Made concern for their employees central to their ideologies
- Made their products of services central to their core ideologies
- Made audacious risk taking central to their ideology
- Made innovation central to their ideology

In short, we did not find any specific ideological content essential to being a visionary company. Our research indicates that the authenticity of the ideology and the extent to which a company attains consistent alignment with the ideology counts more than the content of the ideology.

### **Words or Deeds?**

Visionary companies also take steps to make the ideology pervasive throughout the organization and transcend any individual leader.

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The visionary companies

- More thoroughly indoctrinate employees into a core ideology-they are almost cult-like around the ideology
- More carefully nurture and select senior management based on fit with a core ideology than the comparison companies
- More consistent alignment with a core ideology

Visionary companies tend to have only a few core values, usually between three and six. In fact, we found none of the visionary companies to have more than six core values, and most have less. And indeed, we should expect this, for only a few values can be truly core-values so fundamental and deeply held that they will change or be compromised seldom, if ever.

The key step is to capture what is authentically believed, not what other companies set as their values or what the outside world thinks the ideology should be.

In visionary company, the core values need no rational or external justification.

We've found that most companies benefit from articulating both core values and purpose in the their core ideology.

#### **Chapter 4** **Preserve The Core/Stimulate Progress**

Sam Walton pointed out "To succeed, you have to stay out in front of that change".

The only scared cow in an organization should be its basic philosophy of doing business.

IBM should have much more vigorously changed every thing about itself except its core values. Instead, it stuck too long to strategic and operating practices and cultural manifestations of the core values.

A visionary company carefully preserves and protects its core ideology, yet all the specific *manifestations* of its core ideology must be open for change and evolution.

Ultimately, the only thing a company should not change over time is its core ideology-that is, if it wants to be a visionary company.

Core ideology in a visionary company works hand in hand with a relentless drive for progress that impels change and forward movement in all that is not part of the core ideology. The drive for progress is not a

sterile, intellectual recognition that “progress is healthy in a changing world” or that “healthy organizations should change and improve” or that “we should have goals”; rather, it’s a deep, inner, compulsive-almost primal-drive. Indeed, the drive for progress is never satisfied with the status quo, even when the status quo is working well. You have got to keep doing and going.

Like core ideology, the drive for progress is an internal force.

Through the drive for progress, a highly visionary company displays powerful mix of self-confidence combined with self-criticism.

Self-criticism pushes for self-induced change and improvement before the outside world imposes the need for change and improvement; a visionary company thereby becomes its own harshest critic.

There’s not ultimate finish line where we can say “we’ve arrived”. I never want us to be satisfied with our success, for that’s when we’ll begin to decline. –HP marketing manager.

Create tangible mechanism aligned to preserve the core and stimulate progress. This is the essence of clock building.

## **Chapter 5** **Big Hairy Audacious Goals**

Boeing has a long and consistent history of committing itself to big audacious challenges. Boeing’s engineers made a significant breakthrough -the 727- largely because they were given no other choice.

All companies have goals. But there is a difference between merely having a goal and becoming committed to a huge, daunting challenge-like a big mountain to climb. Think of the moon mission in the 1960s. President Kennedy and his advisers could have gone off into a conference room and drafted something like “Let’s beef up our space program,” or some other such vacuous statement. The most optimistic scientific assessment of the moon mission’s chances for success in 1961 was fifty-fifty and most experts were, in fact more pessimistic. Yet, nonetheless, Congress agreed (to the tune of an immediate \$549 million and billions more in the following five years) with Kennedy’s proclamation on May 25, 1961, “that this Nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth. Given the odds, such a bold commitment was, at the time, outrageous. But that’s part of what made it such a powerful mechanism for getting the United States, still groggy from the 1950s and the Eisenhower era, moving vigorously forward.

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A BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious goals) engages people-it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused. People “get it” right away; it takes little or no explanation.

Whether a company has the right BHAG or whether the BHAG gets people going in the right direction are not irrelevant questions, but they miss the essential point. Indeed, the essential point of a BHAG is better captured in such questions as: Does it stimulate forward progress? Does it create momentum? Does it get people going? Does it get people’s juices flowing? Do they find it stimulating, exciting, adventurous? Are they willing to throw their creative talents and human energies into it?” (NOTE: This doesn’t mean that a visionary company pursues any random BHAG that occurs to it. An equally important question is, “Does it fit with our core ideology?”)

In 1961 Philip Morris was in sixth place with less than 10% of the market share. Philip Morris set the audacious goal for itself of becoming the General Motors of the tobacco industry. It had something to shoot for. PM committed itself to this goal rose until it blasted longtime leader R.J. Reynolds out of first place. During this same time, R.J. Reynolds displayed a stodgy, good-old-boy atmosphere and no clear, driving ambition for itself other than to attain a good return for shareholders.

As in the Philip Morris case, BHAG are bold, falling in the gray area where reason and prudence might say, “This is unreasonable,” but the drive for progress says, “We believe we can do it nonetheless.” Again, these aren’t just goals; these are Big Hairy Audacious Goals.

We should emphasize that a BHAG only helps an organization as long as it has not yet been achieved.

A goal cannot be classified as a BHAG without a high level of commitment to the goal.

Boeing laid off a total of eighty six thousand people, roughly 60 percent of its workforce. During those difficult days, someone placed a billboard near Interstate 5 in Seattle which read: Will the last person leaving Seattle please turn out the lights?

We all know not that the 747 became the flagship jumbo jet of the airline industry, but the decision looks much different from the perspective of the late 1960’s. yet-and this is the key point-Boeing was willing to make the bold move in the face of the risks. As in Boeing’s case, the risks do not always come without pain. Staying in the comfort zone does little to stimulate progress.

## **The “Hubris Factor”**

Hubris – “overbearing pride, confidence, or arrogance

One of our research assistants observed that highly visionary companies seem to have self-confidence bordering on hubris. In mythological terms, you might think of it as taunting the gods.

The BHAGs looked more audacious to outsiders than to insiders. The visionary companies didn’t see their audacity as taunting the gods. It simply never occurred to them that they couldn’t do what they set out to do.

The goal itself became the motivating mechanism. The goal transcended the leader.

The main difference in visionary companies lies in the establishment of mission-oriented research and proper targets.

A BHAG should be so clear and compelling that it requires little or no explanation. Remember, a BHAG is a goal-like climbing a mountain or going to moon-not a “statement.” If it doesn’t get people’s juices going, then it’s just not a BHAG.

A company should be careful to preserve its core while pursuing BHAGs.

## **Chapter 6** **Cult-like Cultures**

We found no universally accepted definition of cult in the literature; the most common definition is that a cult is a body of persons characterized by great or excessive devotion to some person, idea, or thing (which certainly describes many of the visionary companies).

We found four common characteristics of cults that the visionary companies display to a greater degree than the comparison companies.

- Fervently held ideology
- Indoctrination
- Tightness of fit
- Elitism

IBM attained its greatest success-and displayed its greatest ability to adapt to a changing world-during the same era that it displayed its strongest cult-like culture.

Cultism around an individual personality is time telling; creating an environment that reinforces dedication to an enduring core ideology is clock building. The point is to build an organization that fervently preserves its core ideology in specific, concrete ways.

Cult-like cultures, which preserve the core, must be counterweighted with a huge dose of stimulating progress. In a visionary company, they go hand in hand, each side reinforcing the other.

## **Chapter 7** **Try A Lot Of Stuff and Keep What Works**

These provocative examples led us to a second type of progress (the first was BHAG(s) stimulated by the visionary companies to a greater degree than the comparison companies: evolutionary progress. The evolutionary progress involves ambiguity. “By trying lots of different approaches, we’re bound to stumble onto something that works. Second, whereas, BHASG progress involves bold discontinuous leaps, evolutionary progress usually begins with small incremental steps or mutations, often in the form of quickly seizing unexpected opportunities that eventually grow into major and often unanticipated-strategic shifts.

Evolutionary progress is unplanned progress.

We like to describe the evolutionary process as “branching and pruning.” The idea is simple: If you add enough branches to a tree (variation) and intelligently prune the deadwood (selection). Then you’ll likely evolve into a collection of healthy branches well positioned to prosper in an ever-changing environment.

The visionary companies have harnessed the power of evolution to a greater degree than the comparison companies in fifteen out of eighteen comparative cases.

McKinight of 3M wanted to create an organization that would continually self-mutate from within, impelled forward by employees exercising their individual initiative. Scotch tape wasn’t planned. Scotch was a natural outgrowth of the organizational climate McKnight created.

3M had two key criteria for evaluating and selecting ideas- criteria based on 3M’s core ideology. First, for an idea to be selected, it had to be basically new; 3M only wanted to select innovative ideas. Second, it had to meet a demonstrable human need-to solve a real problem.

With mottoes like “Make a little, sell a little” and “Take small steps, 3M understood that big things often evolve from little things, but since you can’t tell ahead of time which little things will turn into big things, you have to try lots of little things, keep the ones that work and discard the ones that don’t.

## **Chapter 9** **Good Enough Never Is**

Managers at visionary companies simply do not accept the proposition that they must choose between short-term performance or long-term success. They build first and foremost for the long term while simultaneously holding themselves to highly demanding short-term standard.

We found that the visionary companies consistently invested more heavily in new property, plants, and equipment as a percentage of annual sales than the comparison companies. They tended to have more elaborate and extensive recruiting and interviewing processes.

## **Chapter 10** **The End Of The Beginning**

Four Key Concepts:

1. Be a clock builder-an architect- not a time teller.
2. Embrace the “Genius of the AND.”
3. Preserve the core/stimulate progress.
4. Seek consistent alignment.

We discovered that those who build visionary companies are not necessarily more brilliant, more charismatic, more creative, more complex thinkers, more adept at coming up with great ideas than the rest of us. What they’ve done is within the conceptual grasp of every manager, CEO, and entrepreneur in the world.

It means life will probably be more difficult for you from here on. It means helping those around you to understand the lessons of this book. It means accepting the frightening truth that you are probably as qualified as anyone else to help your organization become visionary.

## **Chapter 11** **Building the Vision**

The fundamental distinguishing characteristic of the most enduring and successful corporation is they preserve a cherished core ideology while

simultaneously stimulating progress and change in everything that is not part of their core ideology.

A well-conceived vision consists of two major components-core ideology and an envisioned future. Notice the direct parallel to the fundamental “preserve the core/stimulate progress’ dynamic. A good vision builds on the interplay between these two complementary yin-and-yang forces: it defines “what we stand for and why we exist” that does not change (the core ideology) and sets forth “what we aspire to become, to achieve, to create” that will require significant change and progress to attain (the envisioned future).

It is far more important to know who you are than where you are going, for where you are going will certainly change as the world about you changes. But core ideology in a great company endures as a source of guidance and inspiration. Core ideology provided the bonding glue.

Core values are the organization’s essential and enduring tenets-a small set of timeless guiding principles; they have intrinsic value.

An enduring great company decides for itself what values it holds to be core. The key is not what core values an organization has, but that it has core values. A company should not change its core values in response to market changes; rather, it should change markets-if necessary-in order to remain true to its core values.

### **Core Purpose**

3M doesn’t define its purpose in terms of adhesives and abrasives, but as the perpetual quest to solve unsolved problems innovatively –a purpose that leads 3M continually into a vast array of new fields.

One powerful method for getting at purpose is the “Five Whys”. Start with the descriptive statement, “We make X products” or “we deliver X services,” and then ask “why is that important? Five times. After a few whys, you’ll find that you’re getting down to the fundamental purpose of the organization.

### **A Few key Points on Core Ideology**

A very important point: You do not “create” or “set” core ideology. You discover core ideology. It is not derived by looking to the external environment; you get at it by looking inside. It has to be authentic. Values you think the organization “ought” to have, but that you cannot honestly say that it does have, should not be mixed into the authentic core values.

Core ideology need only be meaningful and inspirational to people inside the organization; it need not be exciting to all outsiders.

You cannot “install” new core values or purpose into people. Core values purpose are not something people “buy in” to. People must already have a predisposition to holding them. Executives often ask, “How do we get people to share our core ideology? You don’t. You can’t! Instead, the task is to find people who already have a predisposition to share your core values and purpose, attract and retain these people, and let those who aren’t disposed to share your core values go elsewhere.

A company can have a very strong core ideology without a formal statement.

Identifying core values and purpose is therefore not a wordsmithing exercise. Focus on getting the content right-on capturing the essence of the core values and purpose-not on wordsmithing the perfect statement to be etched in stone. The point is to gain a deep understanding of your organization’s core values and purpose which can then be expressed in a multitude of ways.

Finally, don’t confuse “core ideology” with the concept of “core competence.” Here’s the difference: Core competence is a strategic concept that captures your organization’s capabilities-what you are particularly good at-whereas core ideology captures what you stand for and why you exist. Core competencies should be well aligned with a company’s core ideology-and are often rooted in its core ideology-but are not the same as its ideology.

Simple rule: If it’s not core, it’s up for change. Or, the strong version of this rule: If it’s not core, change it.