

My favourite business read

Paul Deane, joint managing director of Shuttleworth, says that he found the advice and tips in a book by Jim Collins invaluable when plotting the continued success of the MIS provider

I have to confess I am not an avid reader of business books. This is not to suggest I think I know it all, far from it. My own insecurities lead me to seek advice from wherever and whoever I can get it!

One book though that does stand out is Good to Great: Why some companies make the leapand others don't by James Collins.

Sometime ago Shuttleworth undertook a major strategic review to ensure we were building a business that would last. During the process we were heavily influenced by Collins and the seven characteristics that he identified were key in building a great business. These were:-

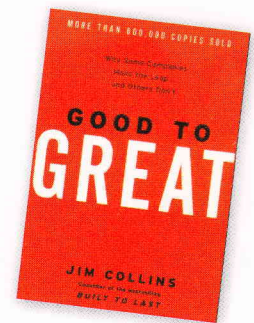
1. Driven but humble leaders
2. Who, then, what – identify the right people and get them on the 'bus'
3. Make the harsh decisions
4. Understand what you are good at, what makes money and most importantly, where is the passion?
5. Clearly defined rules for the organisation
6. Use technology wherever possible to accelerate growth
7. Develop many small initiatives that compound each other.

Obviously everyone has their own interpretation and indeed these are mine about his seven characteristics but I do find them useful to clarify thinking when the waters become a little muddled.

The one that resonates with me most is the 'who, then, what'. Getting the right people on the bus is absolutely critical to the success of any organisation and is the one area that probably causes most managers more stress than anything else. The process is obviously ongoing. Having high quality people who are motivated will ensure your business moves ahead as long as the bus is being driven in the right direction!!

When faced with such

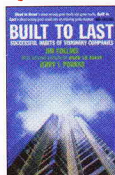
a challenging market we are all quite rightly dragged into the day to day of ensuring our businesses survive and prosper. However for those of us given the responsibility of ensuring the business has a sound strategy to move forward a few pointers on how best to do this are always very welcome.



Three other books about ongoing success

Built to Last

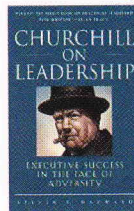
By Jim Collins and Jerry Porras



This continues the work of Good to Great looking at the reasons that some companies remain leaders and others followers in their industry. It examines and undermines 12 commonly held myths about the reasons for business success that the less successful use to explain the difference between them and the best. It took six years to conduct the research that underpins the book. It's the title that anybody wanting to develop and build a business that lasts beyond a generation should look at.

Churchill on Leadership

By Steven Hayward



This book, subtitled Executive success in the face of adversity, looks at the lessons Churchill's wartime record has for business executives in tough times. Nobody doubts Churchill's achievements, but few will have examined how his victories and not a few mistakes, can be applied in modern management. In short it's about the leadership qualities of a great leader, the decision making process (often without all relevant information being available) and his administrative abilities and way of challenging the accepted status quo to come up with better ways of doing things.

Leading Change

By John Kotter



The author looks at the attempts of 100 companies to reorganise and remake themselves into better organisations. He provides an eight-step process to overcome the inevitable obstacles and leads the reader through each of these based around his findings and 25 years of experience, emphasising the importance of leadership to effect change at the expense of management which is often more interest in operating with the existing parameters. The question that is left, is whether imminent disaster is the ideal moment or the best motivation to instigate the change that should be built into the culture of a modern business.