




# **Level 5 Leadership: *Humility + Will***

**Based on Jim Collins article, “Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve”, in Best Of HBR, HBR, July-August, 2005, p.136-146**



**The key to an organization becoming great is having a Level 5 leader**

**Someone who blends genuine personal humility with intense professional will**

# "Level 5"



- The highest level in a hierarchy of leadership capabilities
- Leaders at the other four levels in the hierarchy can produce high levels of success but not enough to elevate organizations from mediocrity to sustained excellence
- Good-to-great transformations don't happen without Level 5 leadership
- Level 5 is not the only requirement for transforming a good organization into a great one
- Other factors include getting the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and creating a culture of discipline



# The Level 5 Hierarchy



- Sits on top of a hierarchy of capabilities
- Four other layers lie beneath it
- Each one is appropriate in its own right, but none with the power of Level 5
- We do not need to move sequentially through each level of the hierarchy to reach the top
- But to be a fully-fledged Level 5, we need the capabilities of all the lower levels, plus the special characteristics of level 5



**Level 5  
Executive**

**Level 4  
Effective Leader**

**Level 3  
Competent Manager**

**Level 2  
Contributing Team Member**

**Level 1  
Highly Capable Individual**

## **The Level 5 Hierarchy**



# The Level 5 Hierarchy

<b>Level 5</b>	Executive	Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of personal humility plus professional will
<b>Level 4</b>	Effective Leader	Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision; stimulates the group to high performance standards
<b>Level 3</b>	Competent Manager	Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives
<b>Level 2</b>	Contributing Team Member	Contributes to the achievement of group objectives; works effectively with others in a group setting
<b>Level 1</b>	Highly Capable Individual	Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits



# Level 5 Leadership

- Counterintuitive
- Countercultural – people generally assume that transforming from good to great organizations requires charismatic, larger-than-life leaders

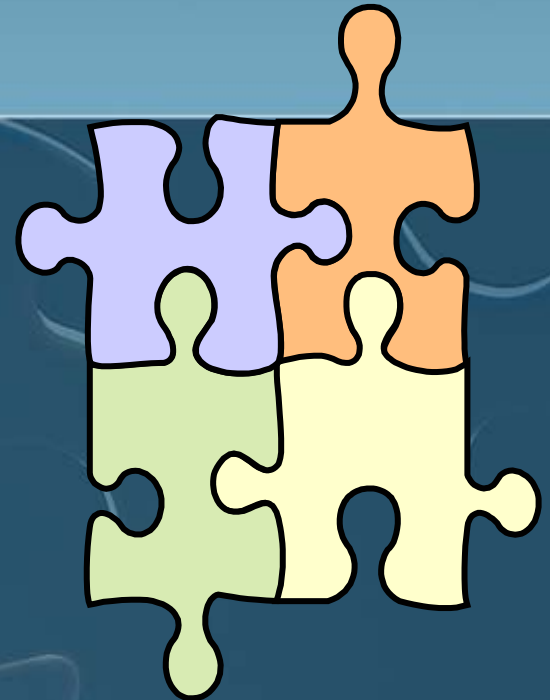


Napoleon



# Not by Level 5 Alone

- Level 5 leadership is an essential factor for taking an organization from good to great, but it's not the only one
- There are other "drivers", combined with Level 5 - the combined package which takes the organization beyond unremarkable
- The drivers are – First Who, Stockdale Paradox, the Flywheel, The Hedgehog Concept and A Culture of Discipline







# First Who



- Good-to-great leaders start with people first and then deal with vision and strategy second
- They get the right people on the bus,
- Move the wrong people off,
- Usher the right people to the right seats, and
- Determine where to drive it



# Stockdale Paradox

- Named after Admiral James Stockdale, winner of the Medal of Honour who survived for 7 years in a Viet Cong POW camp by hanging on to two contradictory beliefs
- *His life couldn't be worse at the moment, and his life would someday be better than ever*
- Good-to-great leaders confront the most brutal facts of their current reality, yet simultaneously maintained absolute faith that they will prevail in the end
- They held both disciplines – faith and facts – at the same time, all the time





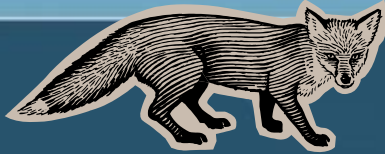
# Buildup-Breakthrough Flywheel

- Good-to-great transformations do not happen overnight or in one big leap
- Rather, it starts one movement at a time, gradually building up momentum, till there is a breakthrough
- Mediocre organizations never sustained the breakthrough momentum but instead lurch back and forth with radical change programmes, reactionary moves and restructuring





# The Hedgehog Concept



- The fox knows a little about many things
- A fox is complex

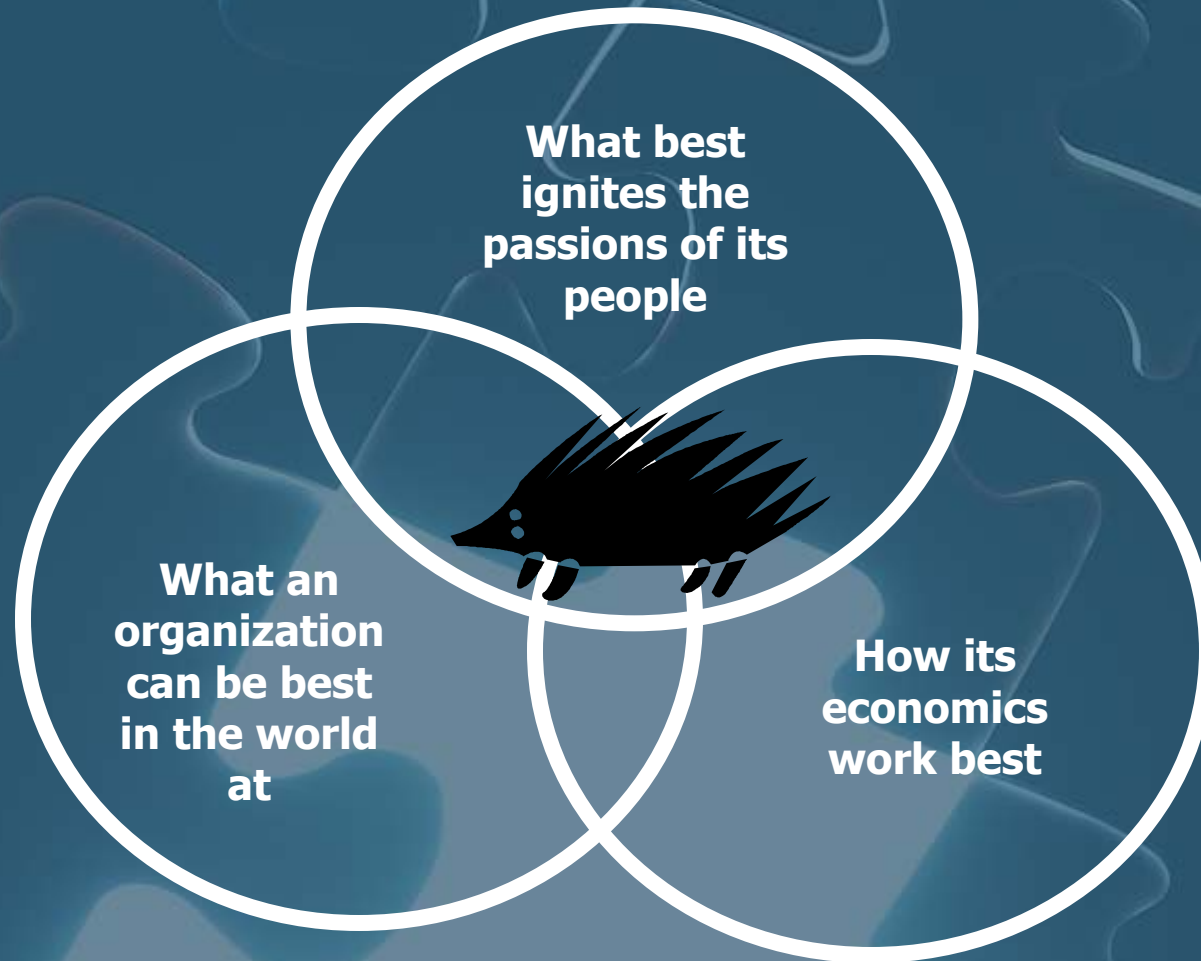
- A hedgehog knows only one big thing very well
- The hedgehog is simple



And the hedgehog wins!



# The Hedgehog-like understanding of three intersecting circles





# Technology Accelerators

- Good-to-great organizations have a paradoxical relationship with technology
- On the one hand they avoid jumping on new technology bandwagons
- On the other they pioneer the application of carefully selected technologies, making bold farsighted investments directly linked to their hedgehog concept
- Like turbochargers, these technology accelerators create an explosion in flywheel momentum





# A Culture of Discipline

- Good-to-great organizations have three forms of discipline
  1. Disciplined people – *you don't need hierarchy,*
  2. Disciplined thought – *you don't need bureaucracy,* and
  3. Disciplined action – *you don't need excessive controls*
- Combining a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship results in great performance





# Level 5 Leaders

- A study in duality
- Modest and wilful,
- Shy and fearless



*Lincoln*





# A Compelling Modesty

- Level 5 leaders are extremely modest
- They don't talk about themselves
- They would talk about the organization, about the contribution of others and instinctively deflect discussion about their own role
- Unlike big personalities like Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch



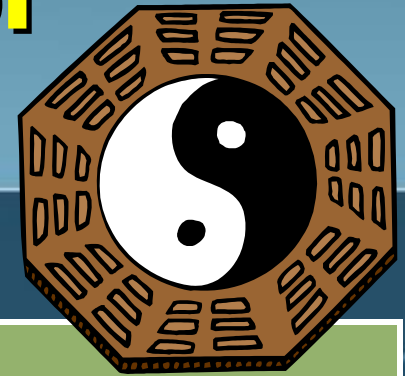


# The Yin and Yang of Level 5





# The Yin and Yang of Level 5



<b>Personal Humility</b>	<b>Professional Will</b>
Demonstrates a compelling modesty, shunning public adulation; never boastful	Creates superb results, a clear catalyst in the transition from good to great
Acts with quiet, calm determination; relies principally on inspired standards, not inspiring charisma, to motivate	Demonstrates an unwavering resolve to do whatever must be done to produce the best long-term results, no matter how difficult
Channels ambition into the organization, not the self; sets up successors for even more greatness in the next generation	Sets the standard of building an enduring great organization; will settle for nothing else
Looks in the mirror, not out the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results, never blaming other people, external factors, or bad luck	Looks out the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for the success of the organization – t other people, external factors, and good luck



# An Unwavering Resolve

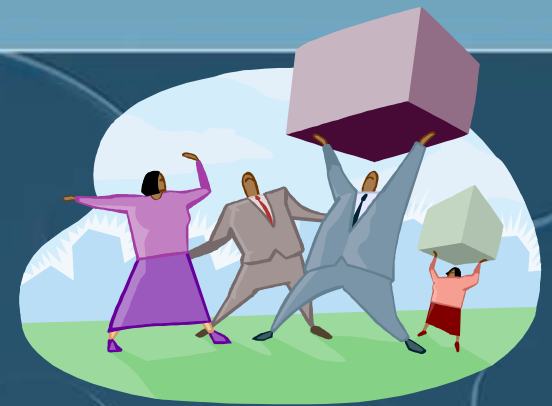
- Besides extreme humility, Level 5 leaders also display tremendous professional will
- They possess inspired standards, cannot stand mediocrity in any form, and utterly intolerant of anyone who accept the idea that good is good enough





# Succession Planning

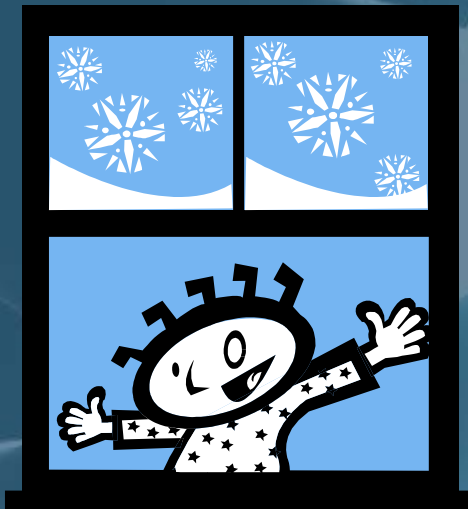
- Level 5 leaders have ambition not for themselves but for their organizations
- They routinely select superb successors
- They want to see their organizations become even more successful in the next generation
- Comfortable with the idea that most people won't even know that the roots of that success trace back to them
- Level 4 leaders often fail to set up the organization for enduring success – what better way to demonstrate your personal greatness than that the place falls apart after you leave





# The Window and the Mirror

- Level 5 leaders, inherently humble, look out the **window** to apportion credit – even undue credit – to factors outside themselves
- If they cannot find a specific event or person to give credit to, they credit good luck



- At the same time, they look in the **mirror** to assign responsibility, never citing bad luck for external factors when things go poorly
- Compare this with leaders who look out the **window** for factors to blame but preened in the **mirror** to credit themselves when things go well



## **Born or Bred? : *Can Level 5 be developed?***

- There are two categories of people
- Those who don't have the Level 5 seed within them,
- And those who do





# The first category

- Will never bring themselves to subjugate their own needs to the greater ambition of something larger and more lasting than themselves
- Work will always be first and foremost of what they get – fame, fortune, power, adulation, etc.
- Work will never be about what they build, create and contribute
- The great irony is that the animus and personal ambition that often drives people to become a Level 4 leader stands at odds with the humility required to rise to Level 5







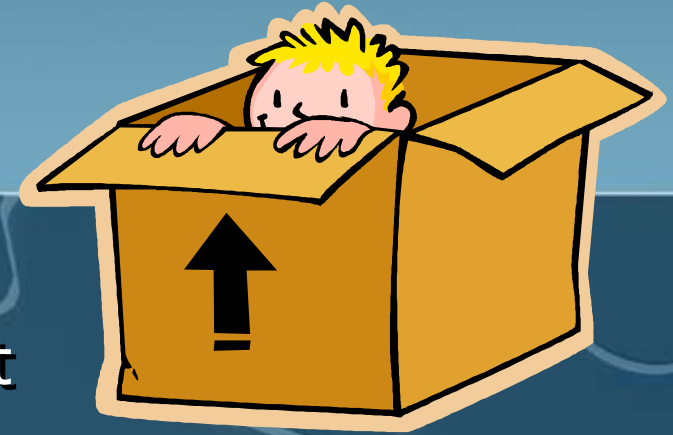
# The second category

- Could evolve to level 5
- Capability resides in them, perhaps buried or ignored or simply nascent
- Under the right circumstances – with self-reflection, a mentor, a significant life experience, loving parents, or other factors – the seed can begin to develop

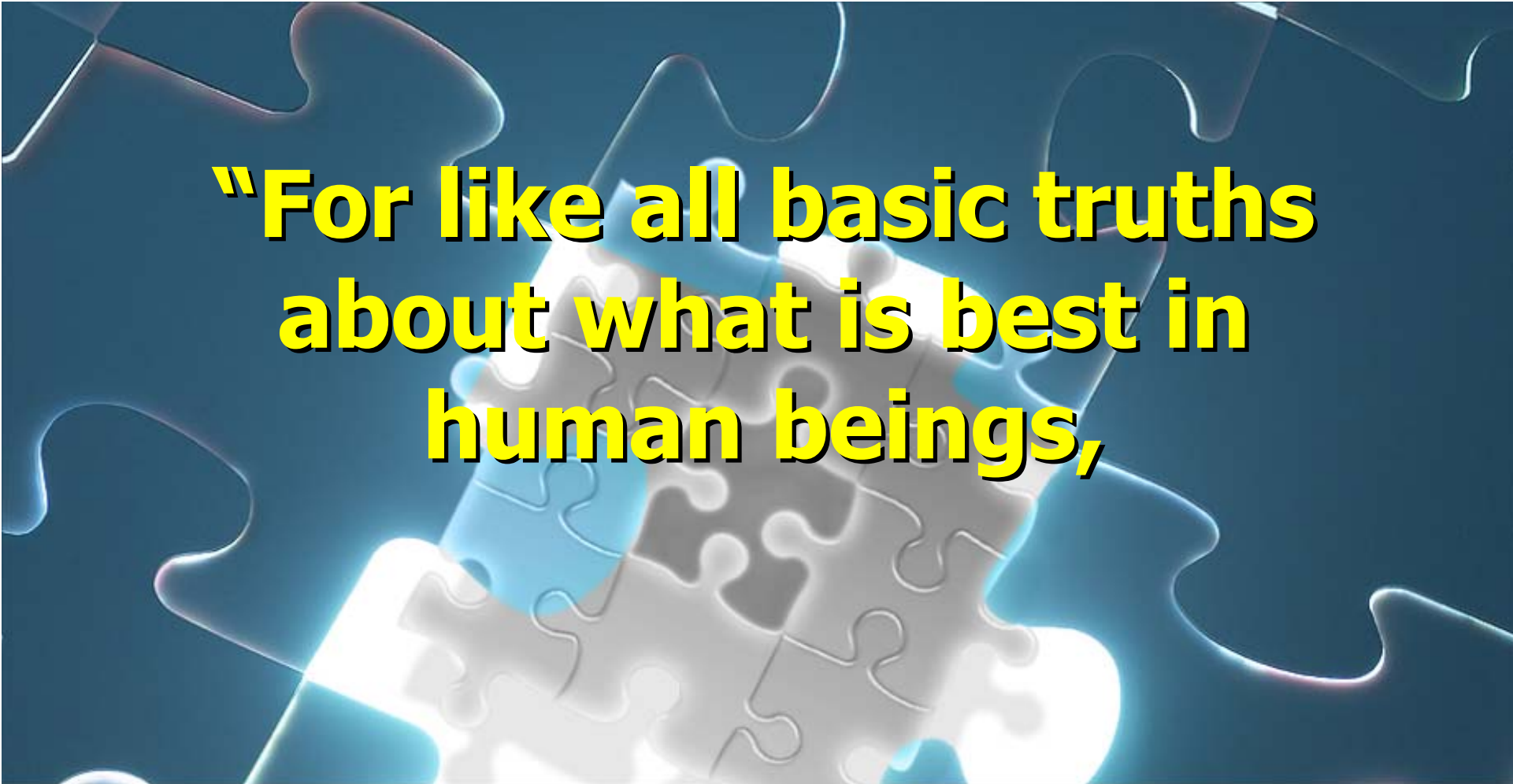




# Level 5



- A key component inside the black box of what it takes to shift an organization from good to great
- Inside this black box is another – the inner development of a person to Level 5 leadership
- A very satisfying idea, a truthful idea, a powerful idea, and to make the move from good to great, very likely an essential idea

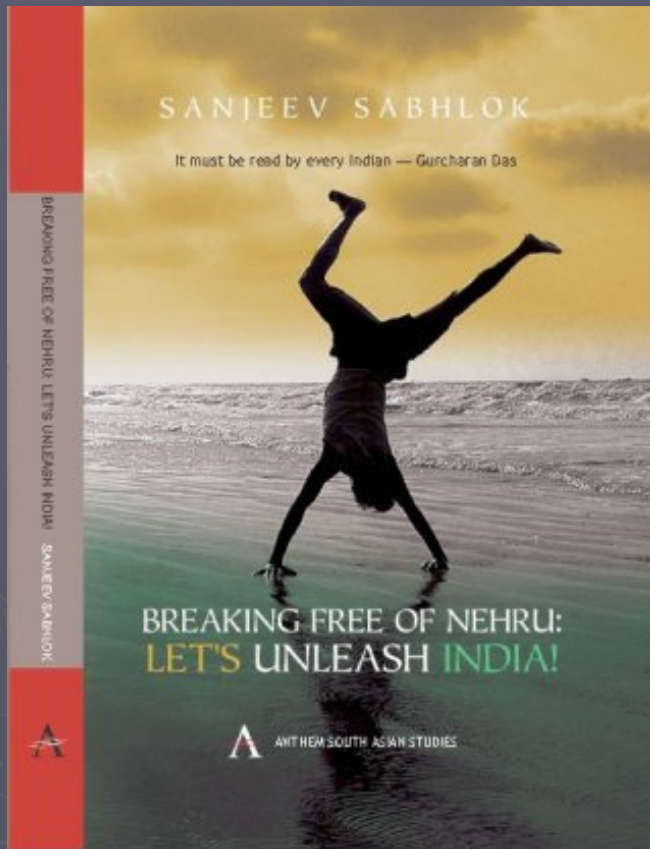
A puzzle with a glowing human silhouette. The puzzle pieces are white and blue, set against a dark blue background. The human silhouette is formed by the puzzle pieces and glows with a bright blue light. The text is overlaid on the puzzle.

**“For like all basic truths  
about what is best in  
human beings,**

*when we catch a glimpse of that truth, we know that  
our own lives and all that we touch will be better for  
making the effort to get there.”*

# My commitment to Jim Collins's leadership framework

Note: I copied these slides from a UN website years ago onto my own website so I can find them when I need them. While I am not the author of these slides, I strongly believe in this framework and I thoroughly commend it to you!



- ▶ Breaking Free of Nehru, my book published by Anthem Press in 2008, aims to find level 4 and level 5 leaders from India and bring them together on a common platform.

- ▶ I believe that Jim Collins's leadership framework, which I came across in 2006, is operationally insightful.
- ▶ I use it my book (now a free e-book) as a framework for India's leadership needs.
- ▶ Since December 2007 I have used it *actively* to look for leaders for the Freedom Team of India.
- ▶ This framework inspires. It works.

Sanjeev Sabhlok

Read my posts on leadership at my blog.

Join me on Facebook.