

Unwavering Faith Amid The Brutal Facts, 'Good To Great' (extract) - Jim Collins (2001)

"This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose - with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

- Jim Stockdale

Throughout our research, we were continually reminded of the "hardiness" research studies done by the International Committee for the Study of Victimization. These studies looked at people who had suffered serious **adversity** - cancer patients, prisoners of war, accident victims, and so forth - and survived. They found that people fell generally into three categories: those who were permanently dispirited by the event, those who got their life back to normal, and **those who used the experience as a defining event that made them even stronger**. The (best) companies are like those in the third group, with the "hardiness factor."

In every case, the management team (demonstrated) a powerful psychological duality. On the one hand, they stoically **accepted the brutal facts of reality**. On the other had, they **maintained unwavering faith** in the endgame, and a commitment to prevail as a great company despite the brutal facts. We came to call this duality **the Stockdale Paradox**.

The name refers to Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. Tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 - 1973, Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoner's rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again...

How on earth did he deal with it?

"I never lost faith in the end of the story," he said, when I asked him. "I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade..."

"Who didn't make it out?", Collins asked:

"Oh that's easy," he said. "The Optimists... They were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

“In wrestling with life’s challenges, the Stockdale Paradox (you must retain faith that you will prevail in the end, and you must also confront the most brutal facts of your current reality) has proved powerful for coming back from difficulties not weakened, but stronger - not just for me, but for all those who’ve learned the lesson and tried to apply it.

How are you doing at:

- Keeping faith that you will prevail in the end?
- Confronting the most brutal facts of your current reality?