

Good to Great, at first glance, seems to address great companies solely from an economic perspective. In class discussions we have questioned why Collins' criteria for greatness did not include ethics or sustainability. A more careful reading of the text demonstrates that Collins provided an indirect stance on ethics in business through his definition of Level 5 Leaders and The Right Employees in a Great Company. The central tenant of Good to Great is the extensive discussion of characteristics of ideal leaders and employees. Collins explicitly expresses that Level 5 leaders "are resolved to do whatever it takes to make the company great, no matter how big or hard the decisions" (39). Furthermore, Collins indicates that a level five leader "acts with quiet, calm determination; relies principally on inspired standards, not inspiring charisma, to motivate" (36). Coupled with Collins' assertion that Level 5 Leaders plan for transitions, these statements indicate that good judgment must be used in perpetuity, relying on an objective standard (39). It would be unlikely that faced with an ethical dilemma, a humble leader attempting to meet "inspired standards" would choose an unethical outcome, forcing a successor to cope. Collins subtly continues his inclusion of ethics when he discusses keeping the right people on the bus. He indicates that the right people can be found by "asking them why they made decisions in their life. The answers to these questions give us insight into their core values" (Collins 51). Additionally, "the right people will do the right things and deliver the best results they're capable of, regardless of the incentive system" (Collins 50). From this stance, it appears that Collins felt that ethics was a personal concern, that when the right people were involved in the company would naturally follow for the company as a whole. As a result of the people within a great company, the company may naturally have a firm system of ethics.

As a sophomore student at Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering, I was placed in an ethical quandary. Having a personal friend on the student government executive board (E-Board), I was privy to some information that was not technical meant for my consumption. Several faculty members had emailed the E-Board indicating that only a senior student was suitable for the Strategic Planning Committee, as sophomores were unprepared and ill-equipped to make decisions for the future of college. The E-Board had decided not to ask the particular faculty members for elaboration on their opinions, or to defend the ability of a younger student to participate on such a committee. As a student, and a sophomore, I felt as though it would be right to communicate this concern to the student body. My ethical concern was because I was not supposed to have the information I felt I should not broach the subject. As a result, I only spoke of the matter with very close friends, behind closed doors. To this day I feel uncomfortable with the situation, and cannot gauge faculty views of younger students. From Collin's lessons on having a humble leadership perspective, I think I would have acted differently. While at the time I saw the solution as telling other students so they could complain, now I would address the specific individuals who sent the emails. This could help to resolve the problem and be best for the college, as there could simply have been a miscommunication. Additionally, if that were not the case, having had the presence to do so might have renewed faith in younger students. This action would have taken the ethical principles of a Level 5 Leader, and applied them to the situation. While I am just one individual in the system, I think that the right thing to do would've been to address the situation quietly and with concern. Although it might not have been in my best interest to confess knowledge of information I was not supposed to be able to access, it would have been in Olin's best interest to address the issue. Collins' work, while not about ethics at the surface level demonstrates several characteristics that leaders and followers can employ in order to make ethical decisions.