

Getting from good to great

Getting from good to great explains why and how to super-charge your career success.

Most of us will remember the story of the hedgehog and the fox as a metaphor for how to succeed in business. This post shares my experience in applying the secret of the hedgehog's success to your career.

While the origins of the story of the hedgehog and the fox – as in many things – lie in ancient Greece, the modern incarnation of the idea stems from *Good to Great*, a best-selling book by Jim Collins that has stood the test of time. The Greek poem held that 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing'.



The lithe, shrewd and hungry fox is hyper-active as she pursues multiple tactics to penetrate the hedgehog's defence. Because the fox's efforts are many, varied, and often not well thought through, they are limited in what they achieve. The hedgehog on the other hand has one over-arching approach that is steadfast and simple. It guides everything the hedgehog does – and helps the hedgehog succeed against the odds. The hedgehog survives the fox's attacks. And the fox retreats with a bloodied, spine-damaged nose.

The hedgehog and the fox symbolize contrasting approaches to a career. The first is a carefully constructed and single-minded, and therefore focused, path. Clearly envisioned and consistently acted upon, it leads from one successful milestone to the next. The second is series of changes, twists and turns that lacks coherence, saps energy, and leads

nowhere in particular.

Applying the hedgehog principle

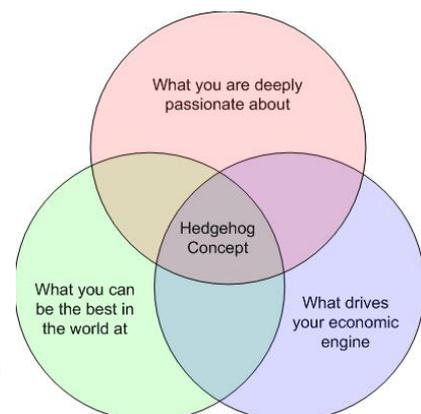
Identifying your career hedgehog helps you focus your thoughts, time, and effort on pursuit of your dream knowing it's your best chance for lasting success and fulfillment. Here's how you apply the hedgehog model, using Jim Collins' three over-lapping circles, which are understanding:

- [1] what you are passionate about,
- [2] what you can be best at, and
- [3] how to maximise the economic return on your effort.

What you are passionate about

True passion for your career flows from your core values and purpose in life. These are your intrinsic drivers. What's most important to you?

When you have made a very good big decisions, what's been the uppermost consideration? What does your answer say about your core values and purpose? My post *Steer your career decisions with no regrets* provides guidance on how to clarify your values.



Being values-driven and having an express purpose gets you up in the morning, keeps you going when it's tough, and motivates those around you. Passion, like *authenticity*, shines through!

What you can be best at

Knowing what you are best at requires you to reduce to the essence, i.e. your signature competence. There's a good reason we use the term 'signature competence'. The description of your core competence should be distinctive and elegant as your signature. It should reflect you exactly.

What do you do that is valuable, differentiating, and can be further developed to keep you in the 'best at' league in the very competitive world of work? Your answer must be convincing. Be honest.

Also, be clear what you'll never be best at, and don't want to try to be. This is as important as identifying what you are truly best at. In short, what's your personal brand? This [post](#) will help you think through your answer.

How to maximise the economic return on your effort

To enjoy healthy economic returns, you must understand how to generate income that is profitable to you. 'Profitable' means in excess of your daily living needs, allowing you to invest in those other aspects of your life that are important to you, including wealth creation.

Maximising your economic return as an individual requires identifying your options for monetizing what you are passionate about and best at doing. The way I think about your options is illustrated with four examples in this table.

Passionate about	Best at	Economic return	Examples
Job security with opportunities to progress	Hard working to meet the KPIs in a defined role and aligning with company's values	Well paid job and structured career path in a stable organisation	Middle-senior manager in a large organisation
Personal and professional autonomy to express yourself	Exploiting opportunities by finding and synthesizing information	Risk-taking for high income and/or capital returns	Self-employed entrepreneur
Intellectual mastery and personal growth by challenging norms	Deep specialisation at the leading edge of knowledge and/or skills	Demanding position in tertiary research and teaching	University professor
Positively exercising your power and influence	Making decisions and motivating others	Corporate CEO with a major incentive	Transforming leader of companies

The table shows how the three areas align, or overlap as circles, with each other. The greater the overlap, the more powerful the synergy and the greater the likelihood of career success.

Ask yourself, what is my hedgehog? How can I convert it into actions that will get me from good to great?

Related posts and further sources

You may want to delve into other aspects of this topic:

- + [If you keep on going the way you are, you will miss the road to your future](#)
- + Jim Collins précis of his book of the same name can be found in this highly readable article [Good to Great](#) published in 2001. There are many inspiring moments; in particular I love the section where Jim Collins writes about "the victory of steadfast discipline over the quick fix".