



Leading with Focus

Elevating the Essentials for School and District Improvement
Mike Schmoker

Mike Schmoker uses some quotes from the book “Good to Great” by Jim Collins at the beginning of the book.

“Jim Collin’s book Good to Great (2001) is the best-selling organizational improvement book of the last generation. Collin’s found that the “essence of profound insight into generational improvement is simplicity” (p.91)

“Social-sector organizations must overcome addiction to doing too many things. To succeed, they must *attain piercing clarity* about what is truly effective and then exercise the relentless discipline to say *no thank you* to opportunities that fail the **Hedgehog Test**”

What is the “Hedgehog Test/Concept?”

The Hedgehog Concept
Using the Power of Simplicity to Succeed



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Be a hedgehog in business, and embrace simplicity.

If you could choose to be a fox or a hedgehog, which would you rather be?

Many people would choose to be a fox. After all, foxes are beautiful, sleek and cunning. Hedgehogs, which are small, prickly creatures found in Europe, Asia and Africa, are quite the opposite: slow, quiet and plodding.

So, what do foxes and hedgehogs have to do with your organization's success? In short, everything! It's all about learning the art of simplicity, like a hedgehog, and creating a clear focus for your organization.

In this article, we'll look at the Hedgehog Concept, and discuss why, in business, it pays to be a hedgehog rather than a fox.

What Is the Hedgehog Concept?

The Hedgehog Concept is based on an ancient Greek parable that states, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."

In the parable, the fox uses many strategies to try to catch the hedgehog. It sneaks, pounces, races, and plays dead. And yet, every time, it walks away defeated, its tender nose pricked by spines. The fox never learns that the hedgehog knows how to do one big thing perfectly: defend itself.

Philosopher Isaiah Berlin took this parable and applied it to the modern world in his 1953 essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox." Berlin divided people into two groups: foxes and hedgehogs. [1]

He argued that the foxes pursue many goals and interests at the same time. As a result, their thinking is scattered and unfocused, and ultimately they achieve very little. Hedgehogs, however, simplify the world and focus on a single, overarching vision, which they then achieve.

Business researcher and consultant, Jim Collins, developed the idea in his classic 2001 book, "Good to Great." Collins argued that organizations will more likely succeed if they can identify the one thing that they do best – their "Hedgehog Concept." [2]

When an organization has identified its Hedgehog Concept, its leaders should devote all of their energy and resources to pursuing it. Collins argues that when the going gets tough, it's the organizations that focus on what they're good at that survive and thrive.

“Simplicity, clarity, and priority are intimately linked. For an organization to maintain a focus on its highest priorities, it must routinely clarify them so that everyone in the organization knows implicitly what to do and what not to do.” *Schmoker*

“An Ironclad law is at work here: we will never maser or implement what is most important to kids if we continue to pursue new initiatives before we implement our highest priority strategies and structures.” *Schmoker*

Highest Priorities:

1. Coherent Curriculum
2. Authentic Literacy
3. Effective Instruction

Curriculum:

- Coherent, content rich curriculum
- Guaranteed and Viable
- Reduce and simplify, too many standards

Authentic Literacy:

- Purposeful reading, writing and discussion as the primary modes of learning content and thinking skills.
- Across all classes including electives
- 90-120 minutes a day

Effective Instruction:

- Clearly written objective
- Focus lesson
- Modeling
- Guided practice
- Checks for understanding & adjustments to instruction
- Independent practice
- Assessment