Executive Leadership: Essential Books
Recommended by Hospice Leaders

NHPCO’s Executive Leadership Committee and other hospice leaders have identified their most important and favored books for professional development.

These essential resources have helped leaders advance in their hospice careers and have stood the “test of time;” leaders continue to utilize the concepts, ideas and strategies that are included in these books.

Do you have an addition to include that is not listed here? Please send the title, author, publishing information, website and a brief description. Your quote about how the book applies to your leadership role is welcomed! Submit to education@nhpco.org.

**Beyond the Wall of Resistance** by Rick Maurer. 1996, Bard Press.  
[www.beyondresistance.com](http://www.beyondresistance.com)

New ideas often fail not on their relative merits, but on how well we are able to handle resistance. Since change is intensifying in all organizations every day, that rate of failure will continue to grow. The author identifies resistance as a natural and expected reaction to change. He provides a fresh approach that:

- Shows why the conventional ways of dealing with resistance—using power, deal making, force of reason, ignoring it—actually increase opposition
- Tells frustrated managers at all levels how to transform the power of resistance into a positive force
- Gives practical strategies that build support for change
- Includes assessment tools that encourage immediate application.

In brief, his approach is based on the belief that successful change requires vision, persistence, courage, an ability to thrive on ambiguity and a willingness to engage those who have a stake in the outcome.

[www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)

This book provides a framework for engaging in crucial conversations, e.g., those high stake situations where it is essential to remain in dialogue with the other individual. It moves you from understanding the power of dialogue, to clarifying what you really want to have happen and focusing on what actually is happening, to creating conditions of safety, to using self-awareness and self-knowledge. In short, you move from creating the right
mind- and heart-set to developing and utilizing the right skill-set. The authors illustrate with techniques, skills and tools to demonstrate planning for, and holding, these important conversations.

This book offers valuable guidance and practical suggestions on how to be more effective when holding 'tough' conversations; I recommend it as a very useful resource!

Claire Tehan, MA, NHPCO Senior Fellow and Leadership Coach


This easy to use resource book outlines over 67 leadership competencies and 19 career stallers and offers very specific information on each to help leaders coach and develop others. It cross references behaviors and skills and offers additional resources for each competency. Each chapter includes:

- A clear definition of the behaviors that demonstrate skilled, unskilled and even over-use of a competency
- Key tips and recommendations for significant and immediate payoff
- Suggestions for improvement that don’t assume you are practiced or proficient in an area
- Possible cause of a development need so you can select approaches that suit the cause.

This is an especially useful tool when conducting performance appraisals.


Using tough benchmarks, Collins identified a set of elite companies that made the leap to great results and sustained those results for at least 15 years. At the heart of these truly great companies was a selfless leader, a rigorous focus and a corporate culture that found and promoted disciplined people to think and act in a disciplined manner. Central to success was the Hedgehog Concept, conceptualized as three intersecting circles:

- What you can be the best in the world at
- What drives your economic engine
- What you are deeply passionate about.

Numerous examples and case studies are used to describe a road map to excellence well worth following.
“Good to Great” both validates and challenges leaders to look at their styles, struggles and potential. The reader has the opportunity to examine the success and failure of other leaders who have faced the demands of a changing industry and have succeeded at adapting their organization to accommodate that change.

J. Donald Schumacher, President and CEO, NHPCO, Alexandria, VA


All of the fundamental principles discussed in Good to Great apply to the social sector with some slight modification or emphasis. The social sector has one compelling advantage, and that is the desperate craving for meaning in our lives. The priority of mission has the power to ignite passion and commitment. Whether they are Board members, paid staff, or volunteers, the #1 resource for a great social sector organization is having enough of the right people willing to commit themselves to the organization’s mission. Using the framework advanced in Good to Great, Collins compares and contrasts the business and social sector.


The authors outline common sense elements of high performing teams and use case examples to illustrate examples of effective teams. Based on research of 30 companies, their findings include:

- Formal hierarchy is actually good for teams
- Successful team leaders fit no ideal profile
- Commitment to performance goals were more important than commitment to team building goals
- Team “endings” can be as important to manage as team beginnings
- A disciplined approach is essential if a team is going to achieve its potential.


Author Marshall Goldsmith is considered by many to be America’s preeminent leadership coach. In his book, he challenges already successful leaders to identify
and overcome those behaviors that may be holding them back from even greater success.

As CEO's and high level managers in hospice, who is going to help us identify our interpersonal flaws? Our boards see us infrequently and our staff would rarely take such a risk. While there are many helpful books on the market about the how-to's and must-do's of leadership, Marshall takes a refreshing departure from this approached by outlining those habits and behaviors common to successful leaders that are actually getting in the way of further growth and advancement. Laid out in a logical and readable format, Goldsmith outlines the "Twenty Habits That Hold You Back from the Top". A great and enjoyable read.

Janet Fortner, MSW, President and CEO, Hospice and Palliative Care Charlotte Region, Charlotte, NC and Leadership Coach