Super size me questions answers

This credit union updates its online banking website, so a trial fish with accounts there updates all her family's accounts. The new feature was safety questions, says Vis. I didn't like the three that were given, so I did the drop-down to see more questions. I chose my three new questions and wrote down the answers so the husband knew what they were. But the first time he tries, he blows the password. Fish must go through the whole process of re-creating the account setup. The next time he tries, fish has to go through the whole process again -- but this time she prints screen shots of the questions she chose, and writes the answers to them. To make sure it doesn't happen a third time, fish runs it through the process of logging in. But when they get to the safety question, the one who shows up isn't one of the new questions That Vis has selected. I deliberately chose questions that I knew he could answer, Fish says. I sidestepped the question about which high school I had graduated, but there it was, waiting for an answer. At my last attempt of the three-tries-or-you-locked-out scenario, I remembered that was the first question of their three original choices. So I gave the answer I had used for the first question: Where were you born? Bingo, I was inside. This is ridiculous, says Fish. She calls the same customer service representative who has already reset the account password twice. The representative tells fish that a lot of people get locked up on safety questions. Can I talk to the programmer? fish asks. I can't transfer you, Rep. Says. Tell them that while they let users choose new questions, they include the answers, but present the original default questions first. I also asked where to send my account for problem-solving advice, but never heard from them, says Vis. But now we have a way to make the security questions unanswerable by hackers. For example, for the question 'Where were you born?' we key in the year of the account holder's birth as the answer. Answer Sharky's call for true stories about IT life! Send me your stories on sharky@computerworld.com. You'll grab a snazzy shark shirt every time I use one. Respond to today's story in Sharky's Google+ community and read thousands of great old stories in the Sharkives.Get your daily dose of out-takes from the Absurd IT theater delivered directly to your Inbox. Sign up for the Daily Shark Newsletter now. In an in-depth interview, we asked Collins about the implications of his and ideas for the economy, the stock market and the nature of executive leadership. The good-to-great companies you wrote about all the remarkable stock market results achieved over a 15-year period. But today the stock market has fallen. Does that Won't we see good to big companies today? First, I want to correct a major misconception. The stock market isn't down. What does the stock market look like compared to 1985? The stock market isn't down. What does it look like compared to 1990? The stock market isn't down. The market was irrational from whack - we had no stock market; We had a speculative casino. The tech bubble was not the new economy - there is a new economy that has been on a deeper level for years. But the brutal fact is that the companies that are at the top of the tech bubble don't have results. You don't make zero profit and claim that you have results. In the case of companies that had great results before the bubble burst, they are now in a down period, but so what? The bottom line on a company like Cisco is, we don't know the answer yet. It could be that these companies are simply in a very difficult period of 6 to 12 months. Let me use an analogy. Let's say you have a big basketball dynasty like the UCLA Bruins under John Wooden. This is a team that's going to win 10 NCAA championships in 12 years. It's a team that went from good to great. But in 1970, they lost three games. Does that mean we write them off and say they're not a great team? We have to look over a longer period of time. The same goes for companies that got caught up in the bubble. It was too short a period. It's going to take more time to tell which companies that are now in trouble are just going through a short-lived period and will have the resilience to come back. But for many businesspeople, the current slowdown is a sign of the demise of the new economy. This is one of the most beautiful times in history. Two or three years ago, what was the main complaint we heard? It's so hard to get good people! Whining, whining, whining! Today we have the greatest opportunity we are going to have for decades to snag a bootload - not a busload, but a boatload - of great people. And big companies always start with who, not what. We can finally get on the right side of Packard's law. Packard's Law is like a law of physics for big corporations. It says that no company can become or remain large if it allows its growth rate in revenue to outpace its growth in getting the right people in a sustainable way. It's one of those timeless truths that transcend technology and economics. Instead of raising capital, we can gather people. If I were running a business today, I would have one priority over all others: acquiring as many of the best people as I could. I'd put everything else off if I could afford it - buildings, new projects, R&D - to fill my bus. Because things are coming back. My spin. And the biggest constraint on the growth and success of my mine is not markets, is not technology, is not a chance, is not the stock market. If you want a big company, the biggest limit on your ability to grow is the ability to get and hold on to enough of the right people. This is also a great time to force yourself to look back. When you broke Packard's law, you probably left a lot of the wrong people on the bus. This is a good time to take them off. In fact, it's a little easier to do that now. We can blame the circumstances. What else would you do to take advantage of this period of revaluation? This is also a great time to ask yourself some really tough questions. In an age of irrational prosperity, where the market would give you money whether you delivered or not, many companies had not answered any of the questions in the three circles (What can we be the best in the world at? What is the economic denominator that drives our economic engine best? And what are our core people deeply passionate about?). They had no idea what they could do better than any other company in the world that was sustainable, they had no profit, and the only thing they were passionate about was turning the business around. Now we can't live in that fantasy land anymore. We need to look at all the things we do and put them all on the three-circle test. All things that are not the test we have to stop doing - today. I see a lot of companies that were with a lot of capital. So they walked into all kinds of acquisitions or new ventures or new directions, simply because they could. But they didn't necessarily fit within the three circles. Today it is their job to prune away. Those who clarify their three circles will come out of this just fine. Those who don't deserve to die. CEOs today find themselves with little time to prove their worth. What advice would you give to a CEO on the hot seat? If I were a CEO on the hot seat taking over a company I wanted to move from good to great, here's what I would do. I'd take that good to big stock card, and I'd put it in front of my directors. I'd say we're on the left side of this curve. We want to be on the right side of the bend. Right? If that's what we all want, we know what it takes to get it. You don't keep swinging from CEO to CEO. If you do that, you'll end up in the Doom Loop - and then we'll end up as one of the comparison companies, not one of the big companies. I don't think all directors are stupid. Most of them are intelligent, but they work out of ignorance rather than a lack of good intentions. We have to hit them on the head with the empirical results. Our task is to beat the market in a sustainable way over time. the share price over a five-year period. And we need to start doing everything it's going to do. Do. to spin that flywheel. Finally, if I'm the CEO, I want the board to give me the following assurance: No matter how long or short my tenure as CEO may be, whoever you choose as my successor should pick up that flywheel halfway and keep pushing in a consistent direction. I can only run the flywheel on 16 RPMs, but my successor should take it to 100 RPMs. His successor should bring it to 500 RPMs, and his successor to 1,000 RPMs. It's not about me as CEO - it's about a commitment to a consistent program. We're not going to do a Doom Loop.The CEOs who took their businesses from good to great were largely anonymous – a far cry from the celebrity CEOs we read about. Is that an accident? Or is it cause and effect? I think it's more a matter of cause and effect than an accident. There is something directly related between the absence of celebrity and the presence of good-to-great results. Why? First, if you have a celebrity, the company turns into the only genius with 1,000 helpers. It creates a sense that the whole thing is really about the CEO. And that leads to all sorts of problems – if the person goes away or if the person turns out not to be a genius after all. On a deeper level, we found that for leaders to make something big, their ambition should be for the greatness of the work and the company rather than for themselves. That doesn't mean they don't have ego. It doesn't mean they don't have self-needs. It means that at decision point after decision point - at the critical moments when Choice A would favor their ego and Choice B would favor the company and its work - time and time again those leaders choosing Choice B. Celebrity CEOs, at those same decision points, are more likely to favor themselves and ego over company and work. Like the anonymous CEOs, most of the companies that are transforming from good to big are unadacted. What does that tell us? The truth is, most people don't work in the most glamorous things in the world. They do real work - which means most of the time they do a heck of a lot of grind with just a few points of excitement. Some people put baked bread. Some build shops. The real work of the economy is done by people who make cars, who sell real estate, who run supermarkets and banks. One of the great findings of this study is that you are in a great business and doing it in steel, in drugstores, in supermarkets. It's just not the case that if you're not in Silicon Valley, you're not cool. It doesn't matter where you are. So no one has the right to whine about their business, their industry, or the kind of company they're confessing to - ever again. Were the 11 companies that made the transformation benefited by their anonymity? of the great benefits these companies had, no one was Kroger began his transition; Nucor began his transition; No one expected much. They could underpromise and overdeliver. In fact, if I were to take over a company and let it go from good to big, I would tell my vice president of communications that his job was to make the whole world think we were constantly on the brink of ruin. In the course of our study, we printed out the transcripts of the CEO presentations by the well-to-large companies and the comparison companies to analysts. We've read them all. And it's striking. The good-at-behind people always talk about the challenges they face, the programs they build, the things they worry about. You go to the comparison companies, they hypnotize themselves all the time, they sell the future - but they never deliver results. If I'm not a CEO, how do the good-to-great lessons apply to me? The well-to-great concepts apply to any situation – as long as you choose the people around you. That's the most important thing. But fundamentally, we really do - we have a lot of discretion about the people in our lives, the people we decide to leave on our bus, whether it's in our department at work or in our personal lives. But the basic message is this: Build your own flywheel. You do it. You start building momentum in something you have responsibility for. You build a great department. You build a large church community. You each of the good-to-great ideas and apply them to your own work or your own life. What has your study taught you about change in business in general? Is it essentially a message to get back to basics? Very rarely do important changes ever lead to results in a sustainable way. That's one of the really important findings of the book. We started with 1,435 companies. And 11 companies did it. Let's take a look at that. The fact is, it doesn't happen very often. Why not? Because we don't know what the hell we're doing! And because we don't know what we're doing, we launch all sorts of things that don't yield results. We end up like a bunch of primitives dancing around the campfire and singing on the moon. What I feel strongly is that we need some science to understand what it really takes to change things. Is it back to basics? No, it's progressive to understanding. Why is it back to basics to say that CEOs should be ambitious for their companies and not for themselves? Why is it back to basics to question the who and the people first and the what and where to question second? Since when has it returned to basics for a company to start with a question like: Why have we sucked 100 years, and what are the brutal facts we have to confront? Why is it back to basics to say that stop-doing lists are more important than to-do lists? And since is it back to basics to say that technology is just an accelerator and not a creator of something? I don't think those concepts are back to basics. Because if so, we should be able to go back in time and find that people are using those ideas. People don't - that's why there are only 11 out of 1,435. So, no, it's not back to basics. It's moving forward to understanding. What is your assessment of the new economy? We've seen a lot of change, and we've seen a lot of backlash against change. How do you make it all clear? The huge changes that are taking place around us make it the most exciting time in history to live. It's really fun. All these changes - changes in technology, globalization - they are brutal facts that need to be integrated into what decisions we make. The people at Walgreens didn't ignore the internet because they were only focused on the base. They confronted the brutal fact of the Internet and then asked, How does it fit into our three circles, and how can we use it to spin our flywheel faster? You never ignore changes - you strike them head-on as brutal facts, or you come to them with a great sense of joy and excitement. This change, this new technology opens up a way for you to prevail, to be even better as a company. All of the good-to-large companies took changes and used them to their advantage, often with great joy. When new pianos came, Mozart didn't hang up his music. He didn't say, There are these new pianos! The harpsichord is out of the way, so I'm washed up as a composer! He thought, This is so cool! I can do it loud with piano forte! This is really neat! He loved the discipline of writing great music and, at the same time, embraced with great joy and excitement the invention of pianos. With all the changes around us, we have to be like Mozart. We have a great discipline about our music, but at the same time we embrace things that allow us to make even more music. Alan M. Webber (awebber@fastcompany.com) is a fast company founder. Jim Collins (jimcollins@aol.com) wrote the essay Built to Flip in the March 2000 issue of Fast Company. His new book, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Are Making the Leap... And others do not, will be available in October. October.