



THE POWER OF SELF KNOWLEDGE

ENCODING, THE UNIQUE BLEND OF TALENTS, PASSIONS, VALUES, AND NATURAL INCLINATIONS THAT, ONCE UNDERSTOOD, PROVIDE A ROADMAP FOR A LIFE OF MEANING, EFFECTIVENESS, AND FULFILLMENT

After twelve years leading Clemson University as president, **Jim Clements** has earned the right to reflect on life's biggest questions. During a conversation this morning at Baltimore's Marriott Waterfront, he shared an observation that immediately reminded me of Jim Collins's [\[1\]](#) concept of "encodings" and the challenge of discovering what we are uniquely designed to do.



While the concept of encodings is not necessarily the focus of this writing, they matter because they are the raw material of self-knowledge. By understanding the abilities, interests, and motivations that are deeply rooted within us, we are better able to choose meaningful work, endure life's transitions, and continuously reinvent ourselves without losing our sense of purpose.

Jim Collins spent ten years exploring what the ancient Greeks expressed in just two words: "Know thyself." As I listened to Jim Clements, I was reminded that self-knowledge is not merely an intellectual exercise. His remarkable success over twelve years as Clemson's president reflects a deep understanding of his own encodings, strengths, and passions, coupled with the wisdom to apply them in service to others.

If there is a lesson to be drawn from both Jim Collins and Jim Clements, it is not that we should try to live their lives. Rather, we should undertake the harder task of understanding our own. Collins spent a decade studying the ancient imperative to "know thyself," while Clements demonstrated through twelve years of leadership what can happen when self-knowledge is paired with discipline, purpose, and service.

The challenge before each of us is deceptively simple. Pause long enough to identify the abilities that come naturally, the work that ignites our inner fire, and the values we refuse to compromise. Then have the courage to build a life around those discoveries. Titles will change. Circumstances will shift. Success and failure will visit us in turn. But those who know themselves, to paraphrase Collins, are better prepared to navigate every cliff, every fog, and every new beginning.

In the end, the most important question is not whether we can achieve the specific success enjoyed by Collins or Clements. It is whether we can become the fullest expression of who we are uniquely designed to be. The journey begins, as it has for centuries, with two simple words: **Know thyself.**

MORE LATER, HEC

[\[1\]](#) Jim Collins, *What to Make of a Life: Cliffs, Fog, Fire and the Self-Knowledge Imperative* (New York: HarperOne, 2026), xx.

Honor with Respect. Act with Responsibility. Stand in Rectitude.

GROUNDING IN MANY YEARS OF LIVED EXPERIENCE AND INFORMED BY FORMAL STUDY, REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS, AND EXPERT COUNSEL, MY WRITING IS CLARIFIED THROUGH THE MEASURED CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.
HEC

halchappelear.com