



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

# Leading Ideas

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## Book Review

*Outliers: The Story of Success*

By Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown and Company, 2008

Reviewed by Rajkumar Dixit

Have you ever wondered why some people are extraordinarily successful? How do some people overcome insurmountable odds and reach an elite level in their fields? In *Outliers: The Story of Success*, bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell draws on sociology and economics to examine the traits of successful people. Gladwell uses the word “outliers”—a mathematical term describing a statistical abnormality that falls outside the range perceived to be normal or average—to describe successful people who go beyond the ordinary.

So what makes a person successful? Raw talent is important, but many other factors must be considered. Surprisingly, Gladwell asserts that greatness can be attributed to something as random as the era or even the date of a person’s birth. Family legacy can also play a large role, especially coming from a family where access to more technology, literature, music, etc., is more than for others. But no matter how fortunate and gifted a person is, much effort is required. Gladwell claims that to shift from good to great at a particular skill requires the investment of at least 10,000 hours.

But what about that part of the American dream that says anyone can become what they really want to be, regardless of origins? Is this really achievable? Gladwell examines such “self-made” stories. The most surprising attribute of these “self-made” individuals is their taking advantage of opportunity. Two friends grow up in the same disadvantaged neighborhood. One will stay in the neighborhood perpetuating patterns of chronic poverty, substance abuse, and criminal behavior. The other will find a way out to attend a fine college and become a successful professional. What makes the difference?

Seizing opportunities is what Gladwell found. Opportunity is offered to every person every day, in many forms. The outlier uses every skill he or she possesses to take advantage of every opportunity available. Christians seeking to become exemplary church leaders will do well to remember those ancient words from Colossians exemplified in this current research—“Make the most of every opportunity” (4:5, *The Message*).

Dr. Rajkumar Dixit (kumardixit@yahoo.com) is administrative pastor of New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland.