

## World Knowledge Forum 2012

### Seoul, South Korea\_October 9, 2012 Malcolm Gladwell, "The Law of David: The Underdog Advantage"

At the 13th World Knowledge Forum on Tuesday, October 9th, 2012, the best-selling author and New Yorker journalist, Malcolm Gladwell, presented a lecture on the importance of how being second or third is more advantageous than being first.

"We usually reward first. However, we take it for granted. Is it truly better to be first or second?" Mr. Gladwell asked.

He began his lecture by discussing the basic idea that being first is not always the most advantageous in business and in life. He started with the example of Israel and their 1982 war with Syrian targets in Lebanon.

"Why is it that people that appear to be weak and powerless succeed a surprising amount of time?" he asked as he began his discussion on Israel.

The initial battles in the brief war between Israel and Lebanon were called the "Bekaa Valley Turkey Shoot." He explained that Israel, a very small country, was able to devastate a superior army by utilizing three important strategies: drone airplanes, AWACS air control, and precision guided missiles. The combination of these strategies helped Israel to not only win the war, but also show a highly sophisticated approach to warfare. It was an innovative use of "Revolution in Military Affairs," or RMA.

However, Gladwell noted, "They were not the first to use these technologies."

He then illustrated how the drones, AWACS and precision missiles were all invented and developed in the USA, and the application of RMA was devised by the Soviet Union. However, the Israelis were the first to combine all of these factors into a successful and cohesive battle strategy that enabled them to defeat a larger opponent.

"Israel took someone else's ideas, technologies and combined them in a war to devastating effects," he concluded.

Mr. Gladwell stated the reason for this was the unique culture within the USA, USSR and Israel. The U.S.'s military and entrepreneurial structure enabled the branches of the military to innovate and work with technology in the private sector to develop weapons. In the USSR, the highly centralized government had the discipline to structure working groups to formulate successful RMAs. However, Israel's ability to look at the those two powers and combine their work enabled it to win on the battlefield.

"Their desperation forced them to be nimble, adaptive, and use what they had at their hands," Mr. Gladwell observed.

He then focused on a second example of how not being first can be of great advantage.

"There is a real cost to being first. It comes from the kind of culture that stands in the way of bringing ideas to markets," he said as he began to tell the story of Xerox park.

He talked about how some of the smartest minds in the 1970s were assembled in Silicon Valley, and were given a large amount of money, intellectual autonomy, and plenty of time to invent new products for the Xerox company. As a result, almost every major invention related to computers in the last two decades came out of this group. However, they were not able to leverage their ability to bring the ideas to market for Xerox.

Instead, smaller entrepreneurs, such as Steve Jobs, were able to look at what had been developed and then found ways to improve their inventions. As a result, companies like Microsoft and Apple benefited directly, yet did very little to innovate what eventually made them very famous and successful.

He emphasized how being a "tweaker" and having a lack of resources can make underdogs successful. Using the English Industrial Revolution as an example, he said, "England had an Industrial Revolution because it had more tweekers than anyone else." These "tweekers" were people that improved upon others' original inventions.

"This reminds us that innovation is a mass strategy and not an elite strategy," Mr. Gladwell said, concluding his remarks with some discussion of Korea's place in the world and how the country has undergone massive growth in the past 50 years.

Mr. Gladwell ended his speech on a note of one of Korea's great underdog stories. He spoke of the 2002 World Cup team that defied all odds and was able to make the semifinals, although some may have called the team 'below-average.' The team hired a new coach and tweaked their strategy, exemplifying Mr. Gladwell's points that desperation and circumstances can produce highly unexpected outcomes that are more advantageous than being at the top.