

**Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck—
Why Some Thrive Despite Them All
Great by Choice**

Jim Collins

Summary by Mark R. Elliott*

Epilogue

Collins closes the book with comments that speak so well to our nation's need to re-establish some of the foundational principles of a Biblical World View that I have moved the epilogue to the front of the class!

It begins with this statement, "We sense a dangerous disease infecting our modern culture and eroding hope: an increasingly prevalent view that greatness owes more to circumstance, even luck, than to action and discipline—that what happens to us matters more than what we do." He asks a compelling question, "Do we want to build a society and culture that encourages us to believe that we aren't responsible for our choices and accountable for our performance?" He continues with the assertion that, "Greatness is not primarily a matter of circumstance; greatness is first and foremost a matter of conscious choice and discipline."

The book closes with the following paragraph: "We are not imprisoned by our circumstances. We are not imprisoned by the luck we get or the inherent unfairness of life. We are not imprisoned by crushing setbacks, self-inflicted mistakes or our past success. We are not imprisoned by the times in which we live, by the number of hours in a day or even the number of hours we're granted in our very short lives. In the end, we can control only a tiny sliver of what happens to us. But even so, we are free to choose, free to become great by choice." (pages 181-183)

The book provides quality empirical research that proves his points. It is a book that speaks well to dilemmas we wrestle with in ministry. Questions we have about faithfulness versus fruitfulness. Yes it is absolutely true, as Paul stated in I Corinthians 3:6, that "God gives the increase." However, there are bounteous scriptures that speak to our personal responsibility and inevitably our eternal accountability for all we think, do, and say. And as pastors and church leaders we are held to a higher standard and we have a greater impact on the health and vibrancy of the church.

It also speaks to the challenges we have on a day-to-day basis of serving in a chaotic and constantly changing environment. A pastor's calendar can be forced to take a radical shift because of a single text, e-mail, phone call, or conversation. The book speaks to the importance of maintaining a disciplined life even in the midst of such chaos. I would encourage you to patiently and prayerfully process the following information, but don't just add the insights to your list of wonderful things you know, but begin to process the ideas, take them before God, and then implement those that He can use to change your life and your ministry.

Q: Do you know people who say they aren't responsible for their choices and shouldn't be held accountable for not getting their work done? How do you respond to them?

Q: How to you define success for yourself and for your church?

Q: What are some of the things that are keeping you from achieving that success?

Chapter 1—Thriving in Uncertainty

1. We do not believe that chaos, uncertainty, and instability are good; companies, leaders, organizations, and societies do not thrive *on* chaos. But they can thrive *in* chaos. (pg 2)

Q: Think back to a time of chaos in your life or your ministry. How did you respond to the challenges, and how did you see God at work?

2. The authors became Myth Busters, and they bust the following entrenched myths:
 - Myth: Successful leaders in a turbulent world are bold, risk-seeking visionaries.
 - Contrary findings: The best leaders...observed what worked, figured out *why* it worked, and built upon proven foundations...They were more disciplined, more empirical, and more paranoid.
 - Myth: Innovation distinguishes high performing companies in a fast-moving, uncertain, and chaotic world.
 - Contrary finding: Innovation by itself turns out not to be the trump card we expected; more important is the ability to *scale* innovation, to blend creativity with discipline.
 - Myth: A threat-filled world favors the speedy; you're either the quick or the dead.
 - Contrary finding: Leaders of high performing companies figure out *when* to go fast, and when *not* to.
 - Myth: Radical change on the outside requires radical change on the inside.
 - Contrary finding: Just because your environment is rocked by dramatic change does not mean that you should inflict radical change upon yourself.
 - Entrenched myth: Enterprises that experience great success have a lot more good luck.
 - Contrary finding: The critical question is not whether you'll have luck, but what you *do* with the luck that you get. (pgs 9-10)

Q: In spite of what the authors said, which of the myths do you still think are probably true and why?

Q: Which myth will require the greatest level of proof before you let it go and why?

Chapter 2—10Xers

1. The book uses the analogy of the Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott's polar expeditions in 1911 to compare and contrast leadership styles in an unstable and harsh

environment. Amundsen led his team to victory and safety. Scott led his team to defeat and death. In his book *The South Pole*, Amundsen stated the obvious when he reflected on the difference between the two teams: "Victory awaits him who has everything in order—luck people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take the necessary precautions in time; this is called bad luck." (pgs 13-14)

Amundsen's philosophy was, "You prepare with intensity, all the time, so that when conditions turn against you, you can draw from a deep reservoir of strength. And equally, you prepare so that when conditions turn in your favor, you can strike hard."

A single detail aptly highlights the difference in their approaches: Scott brought one thermometer for a key altitude-measurement device, and he exploded in "an outburst of wrath and consequence" when it broke; Amundsen brought four such thermometers to cover for accidents. (pgs 15-16)

In your ministry role, you deal daily with people who are wrestling with eternal life and death issues. Amundsen's team survived to tell their story. Scott's story is known only by the journals they left behind.

Q: How often do you have "everything in order", how do you "prepare with intensity", and how do you "prepare for the unexpected things" that are part of the day-to-day ministry experience?

Q: In other words, what could you do to be better prepared for the unforeseen things that will disrupt your church?

2. The authors use the term "10Xer" to describe the executives who led their companies to perform at least 10X better than the industry index. Their research discovered not only what was different (which is the core of the book), but also the things that were *NOT* different than the executives of comparable companies. 10xers are...
- *Not* more creative.
 - *Not* more ambitious.
 - *Not* more heroic.
 - *Not* more visionary.
 - *Not* more blessed by luck.
 - *Not* more prone to making big, bold moves.
 - *Not* more charismatic.
 - *Not* more risk seeking.

To be clear, they are not saying that 10Xers lacked creative intensity, ferocious ambition, or the courage to bet big. They displayed all these traits, but *so did their less successful comparisons*. (pg 18)

Q: Which of the above qualities would you have expected to find on a list of things that would help you survive chaos and uncertainty (day-to-day ministry)?

Q: Which of the above limitations have you used as an excuse for a lack of success?

3. As Collins lays the foundation for the balance of the book, he begins with the reality that "10Xers embrace a paradox of control and non-control. On the one hand, 10Xers understand that they face continuous uncertainty and that they cannot control, and cannot accurately predict, significant aspects of the world around them. On the other

hand, 10Xers reject the idea that forces outside their control or chance events will determine their results; they accept full responsibility for their own fate.” (pg 19)

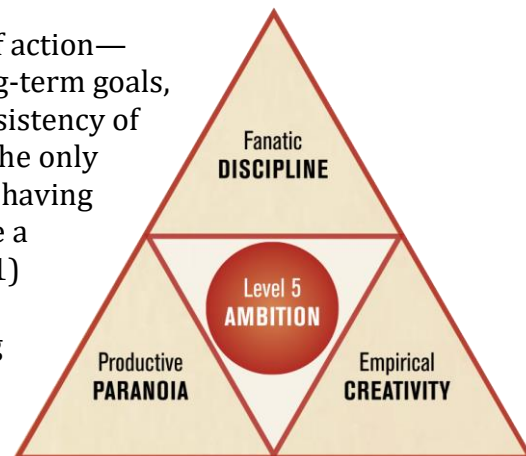
Q: What percentage of your daily schedule would you say you control?

Q: To what extent do you use “things out of your control” or “our situation is so different we can’t have that kind of success” as reason for not having success?

4. Building on the control/non-control paradox, he states, “10Xers then bring this idea to life by a triad of core behaviors: *fanatic discipline*, *empirical creativity*, and *productive paranoia*. Animating these three core behaviors is a central motivating force, *Level 5 ambition*.” The book uses the following graphic to depict these four concepts:

Fanatic Discipline is defined as “consistency of action—consistency with values, consistency with long-term goals, consistency with performance standards, consistency of method, consistency over time...For a 10xer, the only legitimate form of discipline is self-discipline, having the inner will to do whatever it takes to create a great outcome no matter how difficult.” (pg 21)

Empirical Creativity for 10xers means “relying upon direct observation conducting practical experiments, and/or engaging directly with evidence rather than relying upon opinion, whim, conventional wisdom, authority, or untested ideas...10Xers don’t favor analysis over action; they favor *empiricism as the foundation* for decisive action.” (pgs 25-27)



Productive Paranoia for a 10Xer differs from their less successful comparisons in how they maintain hyper-vigilance in good times as well as bad...Like Amundsen, they succeed in an uncertain and unforgiving environment through deliberate, methodical, and systematic preparation always asking, “What if? What if? What if?” (pgs 28-29)

Level 5 Ambition means that “10Xers channel their ego and intensity into something larger and more enduring than themselves. They’re ambitious, to be sure, but for a purpose beyond themselves...Every 10Xer we studied aimed for much more than just ‘becoming successful...They defined themselves by impact and contribution and purpose.” (pgs 31-33)

Q: Describe a time in your life when you have used each of these four concepts to help you succeed.

Q: Using the brief descriptions above, list the four behaviors from your strongest to your weakest.

Q: What is one thing you could do to strengthen one of your weaker behaviors?

Chapter 3—20 Mile March [Fanatic Discipline]

1. “The 20 Mile March is more than a philosophy. It’s about having concrete, clear, intelligent, and rigorously pursued performance goals that keep you on track. The 20 Mile March creates two types of self-imposed discomfort: (1) the discomfort of unwavering commitment to high performance in difficult conditions, and (2) the discomfort of holding back in good conditions...Some people believe that a world characterized by radical change and disruptive forces no longer favors those who engage in consistent 20 Mile Marching. Yet the great irony is that when we examined just this type of out-of-control, fast-paced environment, we found that **every** 10X company exemplified the 20 Mile March principle during the era we studied.”

Elements of a Good 20 Mile March (pgs 48-49)

- (1) A good 20 Mile March uses *performance markers* that delineate a lower bound of acceptable achievement. These create productive discomfort, much like hard physical training or rigorous mental development, and must be challenging (but not impossible) to achieve in difficult times.

Q: Do you have specific, measurable, minimum standards—no matter how bad the week gets? For example you spend (you fill in the blank) ___ hours in one-on-one discipling, ___ hours on sermon prep, ___ hours on evangelistic visitation, ___ hours for member care, ___ hours on administrative details, ___ with family, ___ personal devotional time, or thinking in terms of goals you will make ___ evangelistic visits a week, baptize ___ per year, increase small group/Sunday School attendance by ___ this year, etc.

- (2) A good 20 Mile March has *self-imposed constraints*. This creates an upper bound for how far you’ll march when facing robust opportunity and exceptionally good conditions. These constraints should also produce discomfort in the face of pressures and fears that you should be going faster and doing more.

Q: When you are having a GREAT week, do you set personal limits, so that you won’t end up emotionally and physically exhausted the following week?

Q: Some of us have been blessed by being part of a church or ministry that has experienced exceptional growth. What were the problems when you grew too fast?

- (3) A good 20 Mile March is *tailored to the enterprise and its environment*. There’s no all-purpose 20 Mile March for all enterprises.

Q: Have you set the above goals and standards based upon your personal giftedness and experience and on your current church dynamics and not on what you did in a previous

church? Your goals could be higher or lower and very different in a new church setting and as we age our wisdom and energy levels change.

(4) A good 20 Mile March *lies largely within your control to achieve.* You shouldn't need luck to achieve your march.

Q: Are your performance markers/goals challenging but at the same time realistic and attainable? This is an area where a mentor/coach or a close friend can help you evaluate your standards.

(5) A good 20 Mile March has a *Goldilocks time frame*, not too short and not too long but just right.

Q: Do you set realistic monthly, annual, and long term goals?

Q: Do you stay with your goals long enough to accomplish them or do you bounce from one project to another and from one goal to another without completing them?

(6) A good 20 Mile March is *designed and self-imposed by the enterprise*, not imposed from the outside or blindly copied from others.

Q: Have you set the above goals and standards based upon your personal giftedness and on your church's current dynamics and not on what someone else says they can do in their church?

*Q: Do you choose ministries and programs based on your needs or because another church had success with them? **Principles are transferrable but specific actions and goals are not.***

(7) A good 20 Mile March must be *achieved with great consistency.* Good intentions do not count.

Q: Since the road to hell is paved with good intentions, which road are you usually paving—the road of self-discipline which leads to success or the road of good intentions which leads to failure?

Q: Do people describe you as someone who always gets the job done or as someone who always means well?

2. Consistent disciplined action turned the odds in the favor of 10xers for three reasons:
 - (1) It builds confidence in their ability to perform well in adverse circumstances. Grasping for the next 'silver bullet', lurching from one program to the next, and jumping from this year's fad to next year's fad destroys motivation...If you always search for the Next Big Thing, that's largely what you'll end up doing—always

searching for the Next Big Thing. The 10X cases did not generally have better opportunities than the comparisons, but they made more of their opportunities by 20 Mile Marching to the extreme. (pgs 55-62)

Q: How many new ideas/programs/ministries have you tried to implement in the last two years?

Q: When you implement new ideas, do you hear people say things like, "How is this going to be any better than the other things we've tried in the past?" Or, "Why is this better than what we are doing now?" Or, "We tried that a few years back and it didn't work!" What might they be saying about their confidence in the latest silver bullet?

Q: Have you ever had longtime church members willingly let YOU implement new ideas just as long as you didn't expect them to get involved? What might this be saying about how well you communicated the need for change?

(2) It reduces the likelihood of catastrophe when they are hit by turbulent disruptions. If you deplete your resources, run yourself to exhaustion, and then get caught at the wrong moment by an external shock, you can be in serious trouble. By sticking with your 20 Mile March, you reduce the chances of getting crippled by a big, unexpected shock.

Q: Describe the last time you got caught unprepared for Sunday morning because of unforeseen events.

Q: Or describe the last time you planned a major event only to have frustration and anxiety because something happened last minute to mess it up.

Q: How would you be able to minimize the impact of unforeseen events in your life and in your ministry if you applied 20 Mile March principles?

(3) It helps them exert self-control in an out-of-control environment. Back to the Amundsen-Scott comparison, Collins notes that "throughout the journey, Amundsen adhered to a regimen of constant progress, never going too far in good weather, careful to stay far away from the red line of exhaustion that could leave his team exposed, yet pressing ahead in nasty weather to stay on pace. Amundsen throttled back his well-tuned team to travel between 15 and 20 miles per day, in a relentless march for 90 degrees south. When a member of Amundsen's team suggested they could go faster, up to 25 miles a day, Amundsen said no. They needed to rest and sleep so as to continually replenish their energy.

Q: How would your life and your ministry be better off in the long run if you were to develop your own 20 Mile March principles and then follow them?

*Q: Take time to prayerfully develop **YOUR** own 20 Mile March performance markers? As you do, make sure that they achieve balance between being realistic and being challenging. Make sure they also meet the following criteria:*

- 1. Self-imposed constraints*
- 2. Appropriate to who you are and to your unique church setting*
- 3. Largely within your church's control*
- 4. Within a realistic timeframe*
- 5. Being achieved with high consistency*

Chapter 4—Fire Bullets, Then Cannonballs [Empirical Creativity]

1. The mantra of one of the 10Xer executives interviewed for the book is, “It’s best to be one fad behind, never first to market, but never last.” The author then points to research reported in the book *Will and Vision* stating “that only 9 percent of pioneers end up as the final winners in the market.” And “that 64 percent of pioneers failed outright.” It seems that pioneering innovation is good for society but statistically lethal for the individual pioneer.

On the other hand, if you just sit still and never do anything bold or new, the world WILL pass you by, and you’ll die from that instead. The solution to this dilemma lies in replacing the simplistic mantra “innovate or die” with a much more useful idea: *fire bullets, then fire cannonballs.*” What Collins is suggesting is that before you try something new, try it out on a small scale (fire a bullet) to see if it will work or not BEFORE you make a major investment of time, energy, and money (fire a cannonball) only to find out too late that it doesn’t work in your context (pgs 73-74).

Q: If you love to be creative and innovative, what do the above facts say to you?

Q: If you tend to make changes at the pace of a glacier, what do the above realities tell you?

Q: How can you apply the idea of firing bullets, then firing cannonballs as you try your next new initiative?

2. A bullet is an empirical test aimed at learning what works and that meets three criteria:
 - A. A bullet is low cost relative to your church.
 - B. A bullet is low risk—there are minimal consequences if it fails.
 - C. A bullet is low distraction—involving a relatively small group in your church. (81)

In other words, for a church a bullet is a new idea, new ministry, new program, etc. The idea of an empirical test means that before you try it out you set specific measurable criteria to define what success will look like if it happens.

Q: Think about the last new thing you implemented. Did it meet the above definition for a bullet or was it more like a cannon ball—a large all or nothing effort?

Q: How did the new idea work out for you?

Q: With the concept of firing bullets before cannonballs in mind, what would you have done differently?

3. There are two types of cannonballs, calibrated and uncalibrated. A calibrated cannonball has confirmation based on actual experience—empirical validation—that a big bet will likely prove successful. Launching an uncalibrated cannonball means placing a big bet without empirical validation. Ironically, firing an uncalibrated cannonball that succeeds can be even *more* dangerous than a failed cannonball. That means you have achieved good results from a bad process. It would be like going back to Vegas to bet ALL your net worth on a single spin of the roulette wheel just because you won last time you were there when you bet half of your net worth on a single spin.

Q: Have you ever successfully fired an uncalibrated cannonball?

Q: How could successfully implementing a major new ministry without giving it a “test run” actually hurt a church in the long run?

4. Their research also concluded that each industry has a minimum threshold level of innovation required for success, and once you are above that threshold being more innovative doesn't seem to matter very much. For instance the innovation threshold for technology and biomedical companies is high while the airline and insurance industry thresholds are low.

Q: Do you think a church in a college campus setting would have to be more innovative than one in a rural setting?

Q: How would the innovation threshold differ for churches in a suburban, inner city, or multi-ethnic setting be?

Q: Think about the last three innovations you implemented in your church and when they took place? In light of your church's setting and your response to the previous two questions, where were you in relationship to your church's innovation threshold.

5. In summary the author found that more important than being first or the most creative is figuring out what works in practice before you make wholesale changes. Then learning to do it better than anyone else, and beyond that making the very most of it using a 20 Mile March strategy.

Q: Think of how you discovered, evaluated, and implemented your last innovation (see previous question)—based on the research reported in the book, what did you do well, what could you have done differently?

Q: If you are in the process of implementing something new in your church, how would you change your process in light of the knowledge you now have?

Chapter 5—Leading Above the Death Line [Productive Paranoia]

1. The 10X winners in our research always assumed that conditions can—and often do—unexpectedly change, violently and fast. They understood deeply: *the only mistakes you can learn from are the ones you survive*. The authors define “Hitting the Death Line” as an event of such significance that the enterprise dies outright or becomes so damaged that it can no longer continue with the quest to become an enduring great company. The idea is simple: If you ever hit the Death Line, you end the journey—game over! (pg 102)

Q: Have you ever been part of a church or ministry that closed? As you reflect back on the experience and think about what happened, can you identify one or two major events that could be described as Death Line events?

2. The authors identified three disciplines/practices that helped the 10X companies to avoid Death Line encounters.
 - A. Build buffers and shock absorbers to prepare your church for unexpected events.
 - B. Bound or limit your risk.
 - C. Remain hyper-vigilant to sense changing conditions and be prepared to respond quickly and effectively. They describe this as *Zoom out, then Zoom in* strategy.

As they discuss *building buffers* and shock absorbers, they use the term “Black Swan” event to describe a low-probability disruption—just like the genetic probability of hatching a black swan is low. A Black Swan event is something almost no one can foresee and almost no one can predict—not even a 10Xer. But it is possible to predict that *there will be some* Black Swan events. Put another way, the probability of any particular Black Swan event might be less than 1%, but the probability that *some* Black Swan event will happen is close to 100 percent. (103-105)

Q: Anyone who has been in ministry for very long has experienced as well as watched other pastors experience a Black Swan event—an unexpected and extremely disruptive experience. What are some of the things you would include on a Black Swan events list?

Q: In the business world, the buffer for a Black Swan event consists of maintaining a financial cushion. 10X companies carried 3 to 10 times the ratio of cash to assets as did the average company. A rule of thumb for a church is to have at least 3-4 months of cash reserves—that is if your church spends \$4,000/month you should have \$12-16,000 in savings. Does your church have a Black Swan event financial buffer?

Q: Often churches experience conflict at budget development time when one side says, we just need enough faith to raise our budget by 50% and the other side says that’s totally unrealistic. What might be some buffers a church could use that will be both challenging for the faith group and realistic for the pragmatic group?

Q: Since a church is a non-profit organization whose capital is primarily relationships and whose product is maturing disciples of Jesus Christ, can you think of buffers that should be in place besides having a financial cushion? (For example do you have a child care policy in place in case someone brings sexual abuse charges against a volunteer? Do you have clearly defined ethical and moral standards for church leaders in case someone is accused of a major moral failure? Do you have clear accounting practices in place to avoid embezzlement charges?)

3. As they did their research they asked, “Did the 10X cases take more risk or less risk than the comparison companies?” The answer was that 10Xers found ways to bound or limit their risks. They define risk in terms of both level (high, medium, or low), and kind by defining the following four kinds of risk:
 - (1) Death Line Risk—an activity that could kill or severely damage the church if the venture fails.
 - (2) Asymmetric Risks—those where the risk far outweighs the potential return.
 - (3) Uncontrollable Risk—those that expose the church to forces and events that you have little ability to manage.
 - (4) Time-based Risk—those where the degree of risk is tied to the pace of events, and the speed of decisions and actions.

In the case of the first three kinds of risk the 10X companies took *less risk*, abhorring death line risk, shunning asymmetric risk, and steering away from uncontrollable risks. Related to time-based risk, 10Xers let events unfold, when the risk profile was changing slowly; yet equally, they prepared to act blindingly fast in the event that the risk profile began to change rapidly. One of the most dangerous false beliefs is that faster is always better, that the fast always beat the slow, and that you are either the quick or the dead. Sometimes the quick *are* the dead. (pgs 107-113)

Q: As you reflect on the major decisions you made last year, and evaluate them based on the both the level and type of risk involved, what types of risk did you take?

Q: As you evaluate your choices with the advantage of hindsight, how wise were your actions?

Q: Think about one major project, activity, decision, or new innovation you are planning or considering. Evaluate it based on the type and level of risk it involves. How will your decision be impacted by what you now know?

4. The third principle 10Xers used as they maintained a “productive paranoia” was to be hyper-vigilant as they tried to sense changing conditions and to be prepared to respond quickly and effectively. Collins calls this practice “zooming out, then zooming in”. He defines zooming out as stepping back and taking a big picture view of your world to sense changes in conditions are taking place, assess the time frame of that change, and assess the rigor/aggressiveness of the response needed. Then with that information in hand, you zoom in to focus on supreme execution of your plans and objectives. (pg 114)

Q: Do you regularly step away from your daily and weekly grind to look at the BIG PICTURE of what's happening in your immediate community, in your city, in your region, etc.?

Q: What is currently changing in your environment that you need to take time to assess the impact it will have on your church? (for example—economic changes, demographic changes, changes related to views on social issues, etc.)

5. The chapter wraps up with an excellent reminder that every life includes some very critical moments, and that the decisions we make at those points have a greater impact on our lives and ministry than do the average moments in time. Collins states, “Not all time in life is equal. Life serves up some moments that count much more than other moments...We will all face moments when the quality of our performance matters much more than other moments, moments that we can seize or squander. 10Xers...respond to unequal times with unequal intensity, when it matters most.” (120)

Q: Take a few moments to reflect on your life and identify two or three “critical moments” when a decision you made or an action you took had significant consequences—for good or for bad.

Q: Would these actions/decisions have been different if you would have taken more time to prayerfully evaluate the risks and rewards of the various options, or if you would have used greater discipline in executing your choice?

Q: Are there circumstances occurring in your life or ministry right now that have the potential of becoming a “critical moment”? How might the insights from this book help you to improve the quality of the outcome?

Q: If your not experiencing a “critical moment”, are you living in such a manner that you will be ready for the next “critical moment”?

Chapter 6—SMaC [Level 5 Ambition]

1. They created the word SMaC from the phrase ***Specific, Methodical, and Consistent*** and then use it as a noun, verb, and an adjective. They describe a SMaC recipe as the operating practices that turn strategic concepts into reality. They become a set of practices more enduring than mere tactics, which will change from situation to situation. They use an example of a SMaC principle used by Southwest Airlines: SW only flies Boeing 737s. That reality cannot be described as a core value, a critical purpose, a high-level strategy, a part of their culture, or even a tactic. It's just one of the smart things they consistently do that has made them the most successful airline in the industry. (128)

Q: Churches also have SMaC recipes. For example one that's been around a very long time is Flake's Five Step Formula:

1. *Know the possibilities—who out there needs Christ and needs to be disciplined?*
2. *Enlarge the organization—expand your structure in anticipation of growth; not just in response to it.*
3. *Enlist and train leaders—a growing organization will need new leaders who are properly enlisted and adequately trained.*
4. *Provide space—you've got to have a place to meet. In New Testament times and very often today it is in a home rather than a church building.*
5. *GO after the people!*

What are some other SMaC recipes churches have used?

2. He illustrates a SMaC recipe from the sports world when he talks about legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden. One player is quoted as saying, “you could have taken UCLA athletes who played in '55, '65, '70, and '75; put them on the same team; and they would have been able to play with each other instantly!” Wooden translated his “Pyramid of Success (a philosophy of life and competition) into a detailed recipe, right down to how players should tie their shoes.”

In a summary statement, Collins wrote, “We’ve found in all our research studies that the *signature of mediocrity is not an unwillingness to change; the signature of mediocrity is chronic inconsistency.*” No human enterprise can succeed at the highest levels without consistency; if you bring no coherent unifying concept and disciplined methodology to your endeavors, you’ll be whipsawed by changes in your environment and cede your fate to forces outside your control. Equally true, however, no human enterprise can succeed at the highest levels without productive evolution.

Changes to a solid and proven SMaC recipe are like amendments to the constitution; if you get the recipe right, based on practical insight and empirical validation, it should serve you well for a very long time; equally important, fundamental changes must be possible. Continually question and challenge your recipe, but change it rarely. (pgs 137-146)

Q: Take time to list all the things that are changing in your world.

Q: In the midst of that long list of changes, there is a key area where you and your church have control—that is in being SMaC. How SMaC are you on a week-to-week basis?

3. Collins states, “The more unforgiving your world, the more SMaC you need to be. A SMaC recipe forces order amidst chaos. It imposes consistency when you’re slammed by disruption...the existence of a recipe per se did *not* systematically distinguish the 10X companies from the comparison companies. Rather, the principal finding is how the 10X companies *adhered* to their recipes with fanatic discipline to a far greater degree than the comparisons.” (pg 131)

Here Collins is speaking right into our wheelhouse and to biblical concepts—personal discipline and the pursuit of doing the right things. He also acknowledges that whether

it is in the spiritual realm or in the business world, maintaining disciplined action is hard.

Q: Does your church have a SMaC recipe? If so, list the major components of it.

Q: How well does your church follow its time proven SMaC?

3. He noted that, *the comparisons changed their recipes to a much greater degree* than did the 10Xers. In fact the comparisons changed *four times more*. Conventional wisdom says that change is hard. But if change is so difficult, why do we see more evidence of radical change in the less successful comparison cases? Because change is *not* the most difficult part. Far more difficult than implementing change is figuring out what works, understanding why it works, grasping when to change, and knowing when not to make changes. (pg 132)

Many in the younger generation are questioning why we do the things the way we do them, and too often folks in the older generation's answer is, "Because we've always done it that way." Then they change things only to find out there WAS a reason we did things that way—we just didn't know what that reason was.

Q: Has your church "figured out what works" and "doesn't work" in your context?

Q: If you know what works and what doesn't work, do you know "why" one thing works and the other doesn't?

Q: If you have a SMaC recipe, do you make sure you understand why you have been doing what you do BEFORE you change it?

Q: Do you have a process for explaining the why of your SMaC recipe to new members?

Chapter 7—Return on Luck

1. If you are questioning the thoroughness of the research done by the Collins team, this chapter will dispel all doubts—they even researched the impact of luck! To do that they had to start by actually defining luck. They call a "luck event" an occurrence that meets three tests:
 - (1) Some significant aspect of the event occurs largely or entirely independent of the actions of key leaders,
 - (2) The event has a potentially significant consequence (good or bad), AND
 - (3) The event has some element of unpredictability.

Q: In church life we would probably call it divine providence or a divine coincidence. As you look at your church's history, can you identify some specific "luck events?"

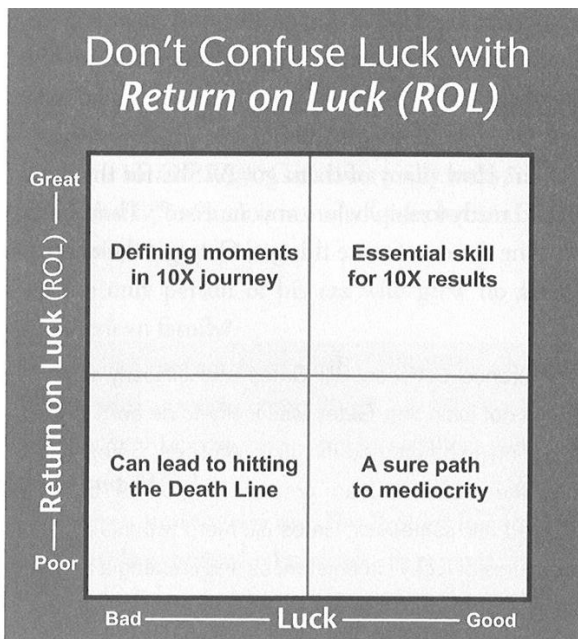
Q: Do the same thing for your own life.

2. Then as they did their research they asked three basic questions about luck events:
 - (1) Is luck a common or rare element?
 - (2) What role, if any does luck play in explaining the divergent trajectories of the 10X and comparison cases?
 - (3) What can leaders do about luck to help them build great companies on a 10X journey?

What they discovered was that “luck happens a lot”, so then their question became does luck play a differentiating role—does the existence of luck explain why one company does better than another? This led to four additional questions:

- (1) Did the successful companies have more good luck than their comparison—the answer was NO!
- (2) Did the comparison cases get more bad luck than the 10X companies—the answer was NO!
- (3) Were there single GREAT luck events or a luck spike that explained the difference—the answer was NO!
- (4) Was there an advantageous timing of the luck that made the difference—the answer was NO!

They concluded that, “Across all the research we’ve conducted for this book and our previous books regarding what makes companies great...we’ve never found a single



instance of sustained performance due simply to pure luck.” Ultimately what they found was the real difference between the companies was what *they did* with the luck they got—using a business term they referred to this as “return on luck” (ROL)—similar to the concept of a return on investment.

To picture their ROL findings they developed the quadrant on your left. They describe what the different quadrants look like and give some business illustrations for each. A Nietzsche quote relates to the upper left quadrant: “What does not kill me, makes me stronger” The key to using bad luck is to use it to make us stronger, turning it into “one of the best things that ever

happened to me” kind of events.

They point out an interesting asymmetry between good luck and bad luck. A single stroke of good luck, no matter how big the break, cannot by itself make a great company. But a single stroke of extremely bad luck that slams you into the Death Line, or an extended sequence of bad-luck events that creates a catastrophic outcome, can terminate your quest.

Q: Take a few minutes to grasp the meaning of the quadrant. Now, place the “luck events” you identified in question one into their appropriate quadrant based on how your church and how you responded to them. Which quadrant has the most events? What does that tell you about your church and/or yourself?

Q: Talk about the most recent “luck event” you have experienced in light of the above quadrant. What can you learn from that experience?

3. In the chapter summary, Collins makes the bold statement that ROL (return on luck) might be even more important than ROA (return on assets), ROE (return on equity), ROS (return on sales), or ROI (return on investment).

Q: If that is true for a business, than how should be respond to every divine encounter (positive or negative) we experience?

4. Luck is not a strategy, but getting a positive return on luck is. They suggest four things that we can do to better manage the “luck events” we encounter:
 - (1) Learn to zoom out to recognize luck when it happens—in other words, don’t miss seeing the forest because of all the trees.
 - (2) Be wise enough to know when and when not to let “luck” disrupt your plans—this is where we have an advantage over companies, we have the Holy Spirit and prayer.
 - (3) Be prepared to endure an inevitable spate of bad luck—remember the strategies for dealing with black swan events?
 - (4) Learn to create a positive return on luck—both bad and good. Learn to make lemonade out of lemons and learn to take FULL advantage of divine encounters.

Q: As you think about this whole idea of “luck events” / divine encounters as it relates to thriving in times of chaos and change, consider the life of the following individuals. How did they respond to “luck events”?

- *Joseph the son of Jacob*
- *Moses*
- *Sampson*
- *Paul*
- *You*

*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written

discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.