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Outliers

The Story of Success

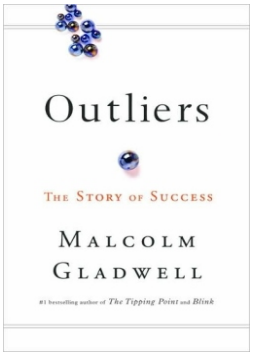
By Malcolm Gladwell, Little, Brown and Company, 2008

Why do some people succeed far more than others?

There is a story that is usually told about extremely successful people, a story that focuses on intelligence and ambition. In Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell claims that the true story of success is very different, and that if we want to understand how some people thrive, we should spend more time looking around them - at such things as their family, their birthplace, or even their birth date. The story of success is more complex and a lot more interesting than it initially appears.

Outliers explains what the Beatles and Bill Gates have in common, the extraordinary success of Asians at math, the hidden advantages of star athletes, why all top New York lawyers have the same resume, and the reason you've never heard of the world's smartest man – all in terms of generation, family, culture, and class. It matters what year you were born if you want to be a Silicon Valley billionaire, Gladwell argues, and it matters where you were born if you want to be a successful pilot. In addition to all these, the lives of outliers or those people whose achievements fall outside normal experience follow a peculiar and unexpected logic, and in making that logic plain Gladwell presents a fascinating and provocative blueprint for making the most of human potential.

In the tipping point, Malcolm Gladwell aims to change the way we understand the world. In a blink he changed the way we think about thinking. Outliers will transform the way we understand success.



About Malcolm Gladwell

Malcolm Gladwell has been a staff writer with The New Yorker magazine since 1996. His 1999 profile of Ron Popeil won a National Magazine Award, and in 2005 he was named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People. He is the author of three books, "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference," (2000) , "Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking" (2005), and "Outliers: The Story of Success" (2008) all of which were number one New York Times bestsellers.

From 1987 to 1996, he was a reporter with the Washington Post, where he covered business, science, and then served as the newspaper's New York City bureau chief. He graduated from the University of Toronto, Trinity College, with a degree in history. He was born in England, grew up in rural Ontario, and now lives in New York City.

Inside This Book Summary

Why You Need this Book

This book is an interesting and easy read with information applicable to numerous fields and disciplines. It provides new and interesting points on why others just plainly make it big.

PART ONE: OPPORTUNITY

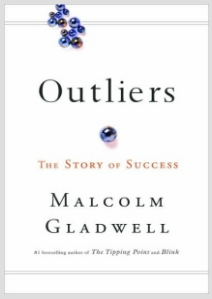
What is an Outlier?

"Outlier" is a scientific term to describe things or phenomena that lie outside normal experience.

> In the summer, in Paris, we expect most days to be somewhere between warm and very hot. But imagine if you had a day in the middle of August where the temperature fell below the freezing point. That day would be outlier. And while we have a very good understanding of why summer days in Paris are warm or hot, we know a good deal less about why a summer day in Paris might be freezing cold.

> In this book, the author discusses interesting people who are outliers - men and women who, for one reason or another, are so accomplished, so extraordinary and so outside of ordinary experience that they are as puzzling to the rest of us as a cold day in August.

About the Book



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The Matthew Effect

What is the question we always ask about the successful?

We want to know what they're like – what kind of personalities they have, how intelligent they are, what kind of lifestyles they have, or what special talents they might have been born with. It's simply because we assume that it is those personal qualities are the vital factors that these individuals have that helped pave the way for them to reach the top.

Biologists often talk about **"ecology" of an organism:** the tallest oak in the forest is the tallest not only because it grew from the hardiest acorn but also, it is the tallest because no other trees blocked its sunlight, the soil around it was deep and rich, no rabbit chewed through its bark as a sapling, and no lumberjack cut it down before it matured.

We all know that successful people come from hardy seeds. But do we know enough about the sunlight that warned them, the soil in which they put down the roots, the rabbits and lumberjacks they were lucky enough to avoid? This is not a book about tall trees. It's a book about forests.

The sociologist Robert Merton famously called this phenomenon the **"Matthew Effect"** after the New Testament verse in the Gospel of Matthew:

> "For unto everything that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. But from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

It is those who are successful, in other words, who are most likely to be given the kinds of special opportunities that lead to further success.

It's the rich who get the biggest tax breaks. It's the best students who get the best teaching and most attention. And it's the biggest nine- and ten-year-olds who get the most coaching and practice.

Success is the result of what sociologists like to call **"accumulative advantage."**

Do you see the consequences of the way we have chosen to think about success?
Because we so profoundly personalize success, we miss opportunities to life others onto the top rung. We make rules that frustrate achievement. We prematurely write off people as failures.

We are too much in awe of those who succeed and far too dismissive of those who fail. And, most of all, we become much too passive. We overlook just how large a role we all play – and by "we", I mean society – in determining who makes it and who doesn't.

The 10,000-Hour Rule

The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a critical minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours.

Even Mozart, the greatest musical prodigy of all time, couldn't hit his stride until he had his ten thousand hours in. Practice isn't the thing that you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good.

The other interesting thing about those ten thousand hours, of course, is that ten thousand is an enormous amount of time.

It's all but impossible to reach that number all by yourself by the time you're a young adult. You have to have parents who encourage, guide and support you.

You can't be poor, because if you have to hold down a part-time job on the side to help make ends meet, there won't be time left in the day to practice enough. In fact, most people can reach that number only if they get into some kind of special program, or if they get some kind of extraordinary opportunity that gives them a chance to put in those hours.

Is the ten-thousand-hour rule a general rule of success?
If we scratch below the surface of every great achiever, do we always find the equivalent of the Michigan Computer Center or the hockey all-star team – some sort of special opportunity for success?

Let's see the idea with two examples:

1. The Beatles, one of the most famous rock band ever and

2. **Bill Gates**, one of the world's richest men.

What truly distinguish their histories are not their extraordinary opportunities. The Beatles, for the most random of reasons, got invited to go to Hamburg. Without Hamburg, the Beatles might well have taken a different path. "I was very lucky," Bill Gates said at the beginning of an interview. That doesn't mean he isn't brilliant or an extraordinary entrepreneur. It just means that he understands what incredible good fortune it was to be at Lakeside in 1968.

These outliers were the beneficiaries of some kind of unusual opportunity. Lucky breaks don't seem like the exception with software billionaires, rock bands and star athletes. They seem to be like the rule.

The Trouble with Geniuses-Part 1

The idea that IQ has a threshold goes against our intuition. We think that, say, Nobel Prize winners in science must have the highest IQ scores imaginable; that they must be the kinds of people who got perfect scores on their entrance examinations to college, won every scholarship available, and had such stellar academic records in high school that they were scooped up by the top universities in the country.

Let's take the threshold idea one step further. If intelligence matters only up to a point, then past that point, other things – things that have nothing to do with intelligence – must start to matter more.

It's like basketball again: once someone is tall enough, then we start to care about speed, court sense and agility, ball handling skills, and shooting touch.

The Trouble with Geniuses-Part 2

The particular skill that allows you to talk your way out of a murder rap, or convince your professor to move you from the morning to the afternoon section, is what the psychologist Robert Sternberg calls **"practical intelligence."**

To Sternberg, practical intelligence includes things like **"knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect."**

>It is procedural: it's about knowing how to do something without necessarily knowing why you know it or are able to explain it.

>It's practical in nature: that is, it's not knowledge for its own sake. It is knowledge that helps you read situations correctly in order to get what you want.

>And, critically, it is a kind of intelligence separate from the sort of analytical ability measured by IQ.

To use the technical term, **general intelligence** and **practical intelligence** are "orthogonal": the presence of one doesn't imply the presence of the other. behaviour that we cannot make sense of our world without them.

So far we've seen that success arises out of the steady accumulation of advantages:

- when and where you are born
- what your parents did for a living
- and what the circumstances of your upbringing were,

all make a significant difference in how well you do in the world.

You can have lots analytical intelligence and very little practical intelligence, or lots of practical intelligence and not much analytical intelligence, or in a few lucky cases, one can have lots of both.

There were things that others, with lesser minds, could master easily. But that's because those others had help along the way.

No one, not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses – ever makes it alone.

The Three Lessons of Joe Flom

Joe Flom is the last living "named" partner of the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom. In 1954, Flom took over as Skadden's managing partner, and the firm began to grow by leaps and bounds.

Today, Skadden, Arps has nearly two thousand attorneys in twenty-three offices around the world and earns well over $1 billion a year, making it one of the largest and most powerful law firms in the world.

For a period of almost thirty years, if you were a Fortune 500 company about to be taken over or trying to take over someone else, or merely a big shot in some kind of fix, Joseph Flom has been your attorney and Skadden, Arps has been your law firm – and of they weren't, you probably wished they were.

Autonomy, Complexity, and **a connection between effort and reward** – are, most people agree, the three qualities that work has to have if it is to be satisfying.

It is not how much money we make that ultimately makes us happy between nine and five. It's whether our work fulfils us.

If you be offered a choice between being an architect for $75,000 a year and working in a tollbooth every day for the rest of your life for $100,000 a year, which would you take? I'm guessing the former, because there is complexity, autonomy, and a relationship between effort and reward in doing creative work, and that's worth more to most of us than money.

Work that fulfils those three criteria is meaningful.

PART TWO: LEGACY

Harlan, Kentucky

It's one thing to conclude that groups of people living in circumstances pretty similar to their ancestors' act a lot like their ancestors.

Cultural legacies are powerful forces. They have deep roots and long lives. They persist, generation after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and social and demographic conditions that spawned them have finished, and they play such a role in directing attitudes and behaviour that we cannot make sense of our world without them.

So far we've seen that success arises out of the steady accumulation of advantages: when and where you are born, what your parents did for a living, and what the circumstances of your upbringing were, all make a significant difference in how well you do in the world.

The question is whether the traditions and attitudes we inherit from our forebears can play the same role.

Can we learn something about why people succeed and how to make people better at what they do by taking cultural legacies seriously? I think we can.

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Rice Paddies and Math Tests

"Rice is life," says the anthropologist Goncalo Santos, who has studied a traditional South Chinese village. "Without rice, you don't survive. If you want to be anyone in this part of China, you would have to have rice. It made the world go around."

The most striking fact about a rice paddy – which can never quite be grasped until you actually stand in the middle of one – is its size. It's tiny.

>The typical rice paddy is about as big as a hotel room.

>A typical Asian rice farm might be composed of two or three paddies.

>A village in China of fifteen hundred people might support itself entirely with 450 acres of land, which, in the American Midwest, would be the size of a typical family farm.

>At that scale, with families of five and six people living off a farm the size of a typical family farm.

>At that scale, with families of five and six people living off a farm the size of two hotel rooms, agriculture changes dramatically.

Here are some of the things that penniless peasants would say to one another as they worked three thousand hours a year in the baking heat and humidity of Chinese rice paddies:

"No food without blood and sweat."

"Farmers are busy; farmers are busy; if farmers weren't busy, where would grain to get through the winter come from?"

"In winter, the lazy man freezes to death."

"Don't depend on heaven for food, but on your own two hands carrying the load."

"Useless to ask about the crops, it all depends on hard work and fertilizer."

"If a man works hard, the land will not be lazy."

And most telling of all, "No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty five days a year fails to make his family rich."

For anyone else living in something other than the world of rice cultivation, that proverb would be unthinkable. This is not of course, an unfamiliar observation about Asian culture. Go to any Western college campus and you'll find that Asian students have a reputation for being in the library long after everyone else has left.

Sometimes people of Asian background get offended when their culture is described this way, because they think that the stereotype is being used as a form of disparagement. But a belief in work ought to be a thing of beauty.

Virtually every success story here so far involves someone or some group working harder than their peers.

Bill Gates was addicted to his computer as a child. So was Bill Joy. The Beatles put in thousands of hours of practice in Hamburg. Joe Flom ground away for years, perfecting the art of takeovers, before he got his chance.

Working really hard is what successful people do, and the genius of the culture formed in the rice paddies is that hard work gave those in the fields a way to find meaning in the midst of great uncertainty and poverty.

That lesson has served Asians well in many endeavours but rarely as perfectly as in the case of mathematics.

Marita's Bargain

The lesson here is very simple. But it is striking how often it is overlooked.

We are so caught in the myths of the best and the brightest and the self-made that we think outliers spring naturally from the earth.

We look at the young Bill Gates and marvel that our world allowed that thirteen-year-old to become a fabulously successful entrepreneur. But that's the wrong lesson.

Our world only allowed one thirteen-year-old unlimited access to a time-sharing terminal in 1968. If a million teenagers had been given the same opportunity, how many more Microsofts would we have today?

To build a better world we need to replace the patchwork of lucky breaks and arbitrary advantages that today determine success – the fortunate birthdates and the happy accidents of history – with a society that provides opportunities for all.

If Canada had a second hockey league for those children born in the last half of the year, it would today have twice as many adult hockey stars. Now multiply that sudden flowering of talent by every field and profession.

The world could be so much richer than the world we have settled for.

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