



Outliers: The Story of Success

by Malcolm Gladwell

- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Little Brown: New York, NY.
- Summary by Douglas W. Green EdD
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What is an outlier?

- 1: Something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body
- 2: A statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of the sample
- Gladwell's main point is that human outliers often depend on their time and location to help them become so special.

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The secret of Roseto

- Roseto is a town in Pennsylvania populated by immigrants from a village in Italy. Although the residents do not have a healthy diet or lifestyle, they do have a very low incidence of heart disease. The entire town is an outlier in this respect. After a great deal of study, it was determined that it was the supportive town culture that helps keep the residents so healthy.

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Hockey stars and birthdays

- A study of birthdays for stars in hockey, baseball, and soccer shows that players born earlier in the year are more likely to stand out and qualify for better coaching and more playing time. At a young age there is a significant advantage to being born earlier in the year of eligibility. In preadolescence, a twelve-month gap in age represents an enormous difference in physical and mental maturity.

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Birthdays and education

- The birth order effect also operates in schools where the older students in a grade level tend to do better and get placed in higher ability groups. Older children scored up to 12 percentile points higher on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Teachers seem to sometimes confuse maturity with ability.

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What could schools do?

- They could put all the students born in the first quarter of the year in the same class and do the same with children born in other parts of the year of eligibility. As it is, many educated parents hold their kids back to insure that they will be older than their classmates which gives them a better chance in education and school sports that are based on grade level rather than age.

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Time trumps talent

- Psychological studies have demonstrated that all great artists and people with great expertise got there only after putting in at least 10,000 hours of effort or practice. Even Mozart didn't make great music until he hit this number at the age of 21. It takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery.

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Why were the Beatles so good?

- A club owner from Hamburg went to London looking for bands to play in this club. By pure chance he met an agent from Liverpool who booked the Beatles in his club. Unlike English gigs which seldom lasted more than an hour, the club had the Beatles play for five hours or more a night. All told they performed 270 nights in just over a year and a half. By 1964 they had performed about 1200 times. They were no good on stage when they went to Hamburg and they were very good when they came back.

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Why was Bill Gates so good?

- Bill was bored with school so his parents sent him to a private school that had a computer club and an online terminal funded by mothers doing rummage sales. Real-time computing was invented in 1965 and Bill was doing it as an 8th grader in 1968. Several other opportunities allowed Bill to spend nights and weekends programming and by the time he dropped out of Harvard after his sophomore year he was way past 10,000 hours.

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It's opportunities more than talent!

- Lucky breaks like working in Hamburg and the Mother's computer club don't seem to be the exception with software billionaires, rock bands, and star athletes. Time is also important. Fourteen of the richest men of all time were born between 1831 and 1840 when railroads and Wall Street were just taking off. For Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and other winners in the microcomputer boom it helped if you were born in 1954 or 1955 so you could be twenty or twenty-one in 1975.

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The threshold effect

- In order to accomplish great things intellectually, you need to be smart but you don't need to be extremely smart. A study of California students in the top one percentile of IQ (Terman) showed that they accomplished no more in life than a random group of students from the same neighborhoods. In basketball, once you get to a certain point, height stops mattering. Michael Jordan was only 6' 6". Nobel prize winners come from Harvard and Holy

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Family background is key!

- When Terman looked at the adult records of 730 geniuses he studied, he found a wide range from doctors to postal workers. When he tried to figure out what made the difference he came up with family background. The top performers came from middle class homes filled with books and educated parents who pushed them into after-school activities, questioned them about their school work, and encouraged them to negotiate for what they wanted.

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The criteria for meaningful work

- Work needs to be reasonably complex and not routine.
- You need a level of autonomy.
- There should be direct relationship between effort and reward.
- Most people will settle for less money if they can meet these criteria.

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The advantage of being Jewish in the 1930's

- In the 1930's, Jewish lawyers were not welcomed to New York law firms so many took whatever work walked in the door. As the nature of legal work changed, the Jewish firms prospered and grew. They were not afraid to engage in law suits that were settled in court and were in the right place when mergers and acquisitions became lucrative. They didn't triumph over adversity. Adversity ended up being an opportunity.

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Cultural legacies

- These are powerful forces that have deep roots and long lives. They persist, generation after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and demographic conditions that spawned them have vanished. They play roles in directing attitudes and behavior that we cannot make sense of without them. The question for the next part of the book is to look at their role in the success of people and how to use them to one's advantage.

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The cultural legacy of Korean Air

- In some cultures, the speech of subordinates is mitigated. This refers to any attempt to downplay or sugarcoat the meaning of what is being said. This is typical in countries like Korea. While the captain will give commands (Turn thirty degrees right) the copilot may only give hints (That return at 25 miles looks mean.) This is why historically, crashes have been far more likely when the captain is in the “flying seat.” Planes are safer when the least experienced pilot is flying, because it means that the second pilot isn’t going to be afraid to speak up. Korean Air had an accident rate 17 times higher than United Airlines until they figured this out. In the US, people are less

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The Asian math advantage

- Asian languages have simple number names that make numbers easier to learn and manipulate. If you ask an English speaking child to add $37+22$ they have to convert the words to numbers. Asian children hear add three tens seven and two tens two and the necessary equation is right there.

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The Asian farming advantage

- Rice farming requires meticulous attention to detail and continuous hard work compared to western farming. This is why Asian farmers are autonomous as overlords can't control servants when they have to care so much and work so hard. This helps explain why Asian cultures work so hard and do so well in school. Cultures that succeed are the ones that value hard work more than others.

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Asian and KIPP schools

- Like Asian schools, charter schools run by KIPP feature longer days, longer school years, and lots of homework. They are similar to Asian rice farms in that the work is constant with no long period of rest like summer vacation which mimics the fact that western farmers work less in the summer than during planting and harvesting seasons.

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Why poor kids under perform

- During the school year, poor students gain at about the same rate as students who are not poor. The difference is due to the fact that when kids are not in school, wealthier parents see to it that their children are involved in some kind of learning experiences. Poor kids scores drop over the summer which creates a persistent learning gap.

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Mom's story

- In the final chapter, Gladwell tells his mother's story. She was born in Jamaica to an educated mother who had lighter skin as her mother was the daughter of a white plantation owner and a black slave. The lighter skin was a big advantage in Jamaican culture with its lighter is better mindset. Like the other outliers in this book she was lucky in an important respect.

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There are no outliers.

- It is impossible for any outlier to look down from their lofty perch and say with truthfulness, “I did this, all by myself.” All superstars appear at first blush to lie outside ordinary experience. But they don’t. They are products of history and community, of opportunity and legacy. Their success is not exceptional or mysterious. It is grounded in a web of advantages and inheritances, some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky - but all critical to making them who they are. The outlier in the

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Dr. Doug's suggestions

- Consider grouping students in kindergarten classes by birth month.
- Help parents understand that it is what they do after school ends that makes the most difference.
- Look for opportunities to engage students for longer days and more days per year. Design summer programs that keep them academically engaged.
- Lessons should have an appropriate degree

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