



TITLE:

"OUTLIERS: THE STORY OF
SUCCESS"

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Too much discussion has been made upon a book written by Malcolm Gladwell, a well-known, innovative author famous for his bestselling books entitled “The Tipping Point” and “Blink”.

Lately, I am curious about finding out the “gold formula” of success and that’s why I study biographies of very successful people over the centuries, self-development books, business development books and so on...

What was really caught me up with the “Outliers” is the different perspective the author presents. Its creativity and cleverness during the process of investigating the success factor is more than obvious. He really triggers the status quo in many different sciences such as psychology, business administration, aviation, even agriculture, as he uncover patterns which connect the dots among all these disciplines and come up with a “rule” of success.

Above all, one thing is decisively evident: Malcolm Gladwell is for sure an Outlier!!!

Many authors, bloggers, presenters, scientists use its 10.000 hours rule...probably you have already heard about it... But this book is more than that. It’s a deep investigation and at the same time explanation why Beatles, Bill Gates, top New York lawyers are successful and why pilots of Korean Airlines “happened” to take part in a series of aircraft crashes.

When I began my study of Outliers I was a little bit curious and concurrently I felt anxious about the information flow. I couldn’t find out the “pattern” of his writing habit and I felt that my head was plied with many unnecessary data. But the “puzzle” was solved after the ten first pages and then (believe it or not) I read this book of nearly 280 pages in one day.

If we really want to change our world and become leaders in every aspect of our lives, we definitely have to study (not read!!) Outliers and try to exploit every single information gained by it.

The author uses a certain framework for providing us with his success formula based on certain real life paradigms, based on studying certain people or/and tribes-communities.

What I will try to do is to sum up his findings and present them to you. For more details and for a more deep understanding you have to take the “journey” of studying it!!!

I will start by providing you with the definition of outlier:

Outlier:

- Something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body
- A statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of the sample.

And with a question:

Why people in Roseto village, located at Pennsylvania, immigrants of Roseto village located southeast of Rome didn't die young by heart attacks in 1950s as the other Americans?

Here is the answer:

Stefan Wolf, a physician investigated it and found out that the secret of Roseto wasn't diet or exercise or genes or location. It was Roseto itself! Rosetans had created a powerful, protective social structure capable of insulating them from the pressures of the modern world. They were healthy because of where they were from, because of the world they had created for themselves in their tiny little town in the hills. Wolf managed to think about health in terms of community, beyond the individual. That's what Malcolm Gladwell is trying to do with Outliers...understanding success in other terms!!!

And here is a "hint" about what follows:

Biologists often talk about the "ecology" of an organism: the tallest oak in the forest is the tallest not just because it grew from the hardest acorn; it is the tallest also 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 warmed them, the soil in which they put down the roots, and the rabbits and lumberjacks they were lucky enough to avoid?

This is not a book about trees. It's a book about forests!!!

PART ONE: OPPORTUNITY

The Matthew Effect

If we look at the most successful hockey players and also at the most successful students, in every level of education, we will observe that they were born in the first three months of each year. And this is because they have a small initial advantage as they born in the early part of the year. The arbitrary choice of cutoff dates is the cause of this phenomenon.

The successful hockey players who make it to the professional level are more talented than you or me. But they also got a big head start, an opportunity that they neither deserved nor earned. And that opportunity played a critical role in their success.

An economist, Elizabeth Dhuey said: "we do ability grouping early on in childhood. We have advanced reading groups and advanced math groups. So, early on, of we look at young kids, in kindergarten and first grade, the teachers are confusing maturity with ability. And they put the older kids in the advanced stream, where they learn better skills..

And here comes the so called "Matthew Effect" by the sociologist Robert Merton: "It is those who are successful 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".

The systems we set up to determine who gets ahead aren't particularly efficient.

Do you see the consequences of the way we have chosen to think about success? We so profoundly personalize success, we miss opportunities to lift 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. 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

Achievement is talent plus preparation. The problem with this view is that the closer psychologists look at the careers of the gifted, the smaller the role innate talent seems to play and the bigger the role preparation seems to play.

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.

Neurologist Daniel Levitin states that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert-in anything.

In study after study, of computers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery.

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.

The Beatles and Bill Gates spend ten thousand hours practicing but they had also extraordinary opportunities in the same way that hockey and soccer players born in January, February and March are given extraordinary opportunities. And of course they were talented and they had vision.

Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good.

We pretend that success is exclusively a matter of individual merit. But there's nothing in any of the histories we've looked at so far to suggest things are that simple. These are stories, instead, about people who were given a special opportunity to work really hard and

seized it, and who happened to come of age at a time when that extraordinary effort was rewarded by the rest of society. Their success was not just of their own making. It was a product of the world in which they grew up.

The Trouble with Geniuses, Part I

An enormous amount of research has been done in an attempt to determine how a person's performance in an IQ test translates to real life success.

In general, the higher your score, the more education you'll get, the more money you're likely to make, and-believe it or not-the longer you'll live.

But there is a catch. The relationship between success and IQ works only up to a point. Once someone has reached an IQ of somewhere around 120, having additional IQ points doesn't seem to translate into any measurable real-world advantage. **Intelligence has a threshold.**

Intellect and Achievement are far from perfectly correlated

The Trouble with Geniuses, Part 2

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 is about knowing how to do something without necessarily knowing why you know it or being able to explain it. It's practical in nature: that is, it's not knowledge for its own sake. It's knowledge that helps you read situations correctly and 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.

IQ is a measure, to some degree, of innate ability. But social savvy is knowledge. It's a set of skills that have to be learned. It has no come from somewhere, and the place where we seem to get these kinds of attitudes and skills is from our families.

Lareau calls the middle-class parenting style "concerted cultivation". It's an attempt to actively "foster and assess a child's talents, opinions and skills". Poor parents tend to follow, by contrast, a strategy of "accomplishment of natural growth". They see as their responsibility to care for their children but to let them grow and develop on their own.

Lareau stresses that one style isn't morally better than the other. But in practical terms, concerted cultivation has enormous advantages. The heavily scheduled middle-class child is exposed to a constantly shifting set of experiences. She learns teamwork and how to cope in highly structured settings. She is taught how to interact comfortably with adults, and to seek up when she needs to. In Lareau's words, the middle-class children learn a sense of "entitlement".

The Three Lessons of Joe Flom

Joe Flom is the last living “named” partner of the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom. He grew up in the Depression in Brooklyn’s Borough Park neighborhood. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and they were desperately poor.

Successful people don’t do it alone. Where they come from matters. They’re products of particular places and environments.

The sense of possibility so necessary for success comes not just from inside us or from our parents. It comes from our time: from the particular opportunities that our particular place in history presents us with.

- Lesson Number One: The importance of being Jewish
- Lesson Number Two: Demographic Luck
- Lesson Number Three: The Garment Industry and Meaningful Work

Stephen Steinberg, sociologists said: there is no doubt that those Jewish immigrants arrived at the perfect time, with the perfect skills. To exploit that opportunity, you had to have certain virtues, and those immigrants worked hard. They sacrificed. They scrimped and saved and invested wisely. But still, you have to remember that the garment industry in those years was growing by leaps and bounds. The economy was desperate for the skills that they possessed. They were given a golden opportunity. And so were their children and grandchildren, because the lessons those garment workers brought home with them in the evenings turned out to be critical for getting ahead in the world.

Autonomy, complexity and 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 fulfills us. Work that fulfills those three criteria is meaningful.

If you work hard enough and assert yourself, and use your mind and imagination, you can shape the world to your desires.

Success is not a random act. It arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances and opportunities.

What successful people have in common??? Their world-their culture and generation and family history-gave them the greatest of opportunities.

PART TWO: LEGACY

The “culture of honor” hypothesis says that it matters where your’ re from, not just in terms of where you grew up or where your parents grew up, but in terms of where your great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents grew up and even where your great-great-great grandparents grew up. That is a strange and powerful fact.

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 vanished, and they play such a role in directing attitudes and behavior that we cannot make sense of our world without them.

So far in *Outliers* 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.

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

The Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes

Plane crashes are much more likely to be the result of an accumulation of minor difficulties and seemingly trivial malfunctions.

The typical accident involves seven consecutive human errors. These errors are rarely problems of knowledge or flying skill. The kinds of errors that cause plane crashes are invariably errors of teamwork and communication.

Airplanes are very unforgiving if you don't do things right. And for a long time it's been clear that if you have two people operating the airplane cooperatively, you will have a safer operation than if you have a single pilot flying the plane and another person who is simply there to take over if the pilot is incapacitated.

Mitigation explains one of the great anomalies of plane crashes. Planes are safer when the least experienced pilot is flying, because it means the second pilot isn't going to be afraid to speak up.

Aviation experts will tell you that it is the success of this war on mitigation as much as anything else that accounts for the extraordinary decline in airline accidents in recent years.

Each of us has his or her own distinct personality. But overlaid on top of that are tendencies and assumptions and reflexes handed down to us by the history of the community we grew up in and those differences are extraordinarily specific.

Our ability to succeed at what we do is powerfully bound up with where we're from, and being a good pilot and coming from a high-power distance culture is a difficult mix.

When we understand how much culture and history and the world outside of the individual matter to professional success-then we don't have to throw up our hands in despair at an airline where pilots crash planes into the sides of mountains. We have to make successes out of the unsuccessful.

Who we are cannot be separated from where we're from-and when we ignore that fact, planes crash.

The solution???? Take pilots out of their culture and re-normed them

Rice Paddies and Math Tests

Year in, year out, as far back as history is recorded, farmers from across Asia have engaged in the same relentless, intricate pattern of agriculture.

In South China Rice is life. 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.

A typical rice pad is tiny. In addition, they cannot afford buying machinery so rice farmers improved their yields by becoming smarter, by being better managers of their own time and by making better choices. Francesca Bray, an anthropologists says that rice agriculture is "skill oriented". The people who grow rice have always worked harder than almost any other kind of farmer.

Working in a rice field is ten to twenty times more labor-intensive than working on an equivalent-size corn or wheat field. But this work is meaningful. It's complex and autonomous.

Asian children learn to count much faster than American children. By the age of five, in other words, American children are already a year behind their Asian counterparts in the most fundamental of math skills. And that's because of their language which allows them to fit a series of numbers into two seconds. When it comes to math, Asians have a built-in advantage.

Richard Lynn, a psychologist says: we assume that being good at things like calculus and algebra is a simple function of how smart someone is. But the differences between the number systems in the East and the West suggest something very different-that being good at math may also be rooted in a group's culture.

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 endeavors but rarely so perfectly as in the case of mathematics.

We sometimes think of being good at mathematics as an innate ability. You either have "it" or you don't. But it's not so much ability as attitude. You master mathematics if you are willing to try. Success is a function of persistence and doggedness and the willingness to work hard for twenty-two minutes to make sense of something that most people would give up on after thirty seconds.

The Educational Researcher Erling Boe points out: we could predict precisely the order in which every country would finish in the Math Olympics without asking a single math question. All we would have to do is give them some task measuring how hard they were willing to work. In fact, we wouldn't even have to give them a task. We should be able to predict which countries are best at math simply by looking at which national cultures place the highest emphasis on effort and hard work.

So, which places are at the top of the list???? Singapore, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Japan. What those five have in common, of course, is that they are all cultures shaped by the tradition of wet-rice agriculture and meaningful work. They are the kinds of places where, for hundreds of years, penniless peasants, slaving away in the rice paddies three thousand hours a year, said things to one another like “No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty days a year fails to make his family rich”

KIPP School Program

KIPP program represents one of the most promising new educational philosophies in the United States. But its success is best understood not in terms of its curriculum, its teachers, its resources, or some kind of institutional innovation, KIPP is, rather, an organization that has succeeded by taking the idea of cultural legacies seriously.

Virtually all of the advantage that wealthy students have over poor students is the result of differences in the way privileged kids learn while they are not in school (concerted cultivation).

The only problem with school, for the kids who aren’t achieving, is that there isn’t enough of it.

Cultures that believe that the route to success lies in rising before dawn 360 days a year are scarcely going to give their children three straight months off in the summer.

The value of going to school 243 days a year is that you have the time to learn everything that needs to be learned-and you have less time to unlearn it. For its poorest students, America doesn’t have a school problem. It has a summer vacation problem, and that’s the problem the KIPP schools set out to solve. They decided to bring the lessons of the rice paddy to the American inner city.

To conclude:

We do own something to parentage and patronage. The people who stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a difference where and when we grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forbears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to imagine.

Everything we have learned in Outliers says that success follows a predictable course. It is not the brightest who succeed. Nor is success simply the sum of the decisions and efforts we make on our own behalf. It is rather a gift. Outliers are those who have been given opportunities-and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.

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.

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

Superstar lawyers and math whizzes and software entrepreneurs 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 end, is not an outlier at all.