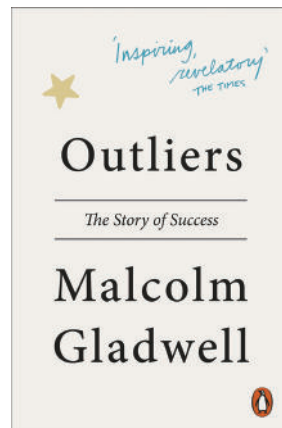




OUTLIERS



THE BOOK


Outliers
by Malcolm Gladwell


INTRODUCTION

An outlier is the sort of high achiever who has become the best in their field. Bill Gates and the Beatles are just two examples best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell uses in this colourful and intriguing book. Outliers is a look behind the curtains at the ultra-successful and how they reach their heights.

So, is an outlier born or created? While we tend to believe that genius is born, Gladwell turns the tables on this with a series of observations that make it clear that there is a more complicated story behind every outlier.

Told with wit and charm, Outliers is an eye-opening look at genius and how it is formed. It also shows how things need to change if we want everyone to experience the same opportunities to become great.

Follow Gladwell through history as he makes it clear that genius and success have predictors that you may never have expected.



5 BEST QUOTES

“Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don't have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.”

“For, in the end, it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work.”

“Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline.”

“Great vision without great people is irrelevant.”

“The moment you feel the need to tightly manage someone, you've made a hiring mistake. The best people don't need to be managed. Guided, taught, led—yes. But not tightly managed.”



7 BIG IDEAS

1. THE MATTHEW EFFECT

“For unto everyone 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.” – Matthew 25:29

This bible verse is the basis for the Matthew effect. To understand it, we can look at young hockey players.

In Canadian junior league hockey, an interesting fact became evident; the majority of the players who went on to greater success were born in the first three months of the year. Is this coincidence or actually because the recruitment age starts on January first?

This means that kids born in the first three months of the year are naturally a bit bigger and older, and more developed and so get more opportunities to play, and practice and then be better players.

This is our first look at how outliers are not born but made. There is a distinct advantage for hockey players in Canada to have been born at the start of the year, and this is only one example of the Matthew Effect in action.

2. THE 10,000-HOUR RULE

If there is one thing that Outliers is famous for, it's the 10,000-hour rule.

It's really a very simple rule of thumb; to master any field, you need to spend 10,000 hours practising and honing your skills.

Gladwell points out that The Beatles spent easily 10,000 hours playing in German nightclubs before they made it big. Bill Gates spent every possible moment in front of a computer from the time he was 13.

In short, again, geniuses aren't born. They are made, through hard, hard work.

3. THE TROUBLE WITH GENIUSES

Gladwell presents two very different geniuses, Christopher Langan and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Both had IQs off the charts, but both led very different lives. Langan never finished college and, despite having a remarkable scientific mind, has never been published.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, on the other hand, was one of the most successful and revered scientists of the 20th century.

So what made them so different?



7 BIG IDEAS

According to Gladwell, it's very simple; their upbringing. Langan came from a poor background that did not support him or teach him the tools he needed to communicate well with authority.

Oppenheimer, on the other hand, came from wealth. The sense of entitlement that his wealthier upbringing gave him provided him with better skills at handling superiors and getting his way.

Both men were born with huge IQs, but circumstances gave only one the opportunity to become great.

4. THE TYRANNY OF BIRTH DATES

One very significant point in *Outliers* is that when and where you are born is a massive factor in the opportunities you are presented with.

On a list of the seventy-five richest people throughout history, fourteen of them were born in America within nine years of each other in the mid-19th century. This was an optimal time to be born if you were to go on to become an American entrepreneur; any earlier and the US was not financially strong enough. Any later and the ship had sailed.

5. YOU ARE YOUR CULTURE

The first half of *Outliers* deals with birth circumstances and practice as determiners of greatness. In the second half, the book takes a look at culture.

Take the Appalachian Mountains in the late nineteenth century. At that time, murder was extremely common, and deadly family feuds seemed to be rife in every second small town. And yet, the rest of the country was not suffering from murderous shootouts every few days.

What was the difference?

Gladwell puts it down to the folks who settled in the Appalachians, the Scots-Irish. The Scots-Irish began in the harsh highlands of Scotland, moved to Ireland, and eventually, many of their number settled in the Appalachians.

Part of the culture that they brought with them was something called a 'culture of honour'. This is a fierce sense of personal honour and a need to protect it. With this ideology ingrained in their culture, it was a natural step to shoot at anyone who insulted someone's honour.

In fact, outside of feuding and fights over honour, the Appalachians were actually very safe and crime-free.



7 BIG IDEAS

So a cultural history going back several generations still had a significant impact on the people of the Appalachians. In fact, it still does to this day (although the family feuding has eased more than a little).

6. SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Cultures are not only geographic but can also be socioeconomic. Gladwell points out that in the US, poorer children tend to enjoy far less support in their learning and other endeavours compared to wealthier kids. We saw how poorer kids can lose opportunities like Chris Langan compared to Oppenheimer, but this cultural difference means they have a tendency to fall behind.

In the US, school kids get a full three months off over the summer. While this can be magical, it leaves poorer kids three months behind when they come back to school in the autumn. Wealthier kids have been going to summer classes and camps, reading books from the plentiful supply at home and doing any number of other beneficial activities, all actively encouraged by their parents. Poor kids are less likely to have the means or the encouragement to enjoy this luxury.

Once again, intelligence and talent struggle to gain ground against opportunity and culture.

7. BECOMING OUTLIERS

The bottom line is that people need to give up on the myth of the natural genius. Geniuses are created and do not simply spring from the earth.

Geniuses come from the right opportunities at the right time, with the right culture to back them up.

From as simple a change as adding more leagues to the Canadian junior hockey circuit or implementing bigger changes such as educational reform, society as a whole needs to recognise how some circumstances lead to talent being squandered and stifled, then find ways to give more people better opportunities to become outliers.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. UNDERSTAND THAT GENIUSES AREN'T BORN**

Everyone loves the myth of the natural genius. However, it is just that, a myth.

Whenever you find someone who seems to be naturally gifted in the extreme, dig a little deeper. There is bound to be more to the story.

2. LOOK AT WHAT IS CAUSING THE LUCKY BREAKS

Taking note that the majority of successful team sports players are born in the same month is a good start.

Once you see the patterns that are setting up one group to succeed above others, you can start to break it down.

3. CREATE THE 'SECOND HOCKEY LEAGUE'

While it isn't always going to be a hockey league, whatever steps can be taken to even the playing field and ensure that all young people are given the same opportunities should be taken

Replace lucky breaks with a society that provides opportunities for all.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway of the book *Outliers* is that people tend to get too caught up in the myth of the best and brightest and the self-made and tend to think that outliers spring from the ground without the need to be nurtured or coached.

The fact is that outliers always get there through fortune and circumstances, along with their abilities for hard work and skill.

By seeing reality, society needs to change and start to ensure that the breaks that allowed the enormous success of many outliers of the past are available to everyone in society.



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