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# OUTLIERS

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*The* STORY *of* SUCCESS

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MALCOLM  
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Author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*



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# Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell

★★★★★ ON GOODREADS

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## Quick Synopsis:

Genius is over-rated. Success is not just about innate ability – it's a combination of several key factors like opportunity, hard work, and culture. Chance and luck, such as when and where you were born, can influence your opportunities.

Bestselling author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell, dives deep into this concept, exploring reasons why some succeed and others don't.

**In this summary of his top hit, *Outliers*, we explore it all.**

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(P.S. By downloading this guide, you get 30% off a ticket to [INBOUND 2014](#) where Malcolm will be speaking. Join 5,000+ professionals and register today with the code **OUTLIERS30**).



# Key Terms

**CULTURE OF HONOR:** A culture in which a man's reputation is at the center of his livelihood and self-worth.

**CULTURE LEGACY:** A type of social inheritance in which cultural norms are passed down from generation to generation, despite changing location or circumstances.

**MATTHEW EFFECT:** A term Robert Merton coined describing the phenomenon where those who have an edge over others are given opportunities that increase that edge. It's a term that describes "the rich get richer" phenomenon.

**MERITOCRACY:** A merit-based system of reward whereby rewards are given based on an individual's level of competence and ability.

**OUTLIER:** Something (or someone) classified differently from a main or related group. An outlier is a statistical term to describe an observation that is markedly different than others in a sample.

**POWER DISTANCE INDEX (PDFI):** A psychological measure created by Hofstede that is concerned with how much a particular culture values and respects authority.

# 6 Key Points In This Book

Before we jump into the main summary, I wanted to highlight six main points Gladwell focuses on throughout.

- 1 Not everyone is given an equal opportunity. Opportunity knocks for some (e.g. birth dates, in the right place etc.), but not for others.
- 2 Timing is a critical component of success and opportunity.
- 3 A child's upbringing matters – upbringing leads to opportunity. The quality of a child's upbringing has shown to be a key determinant in future success.
- 4 The infamous rule is work at something for 10,000 hours. That's how long it takes to master something.
- 5 Meaningful work helps drive mastery. If you feel like there's a purpose to your work, you're more likely to work hard, put in the hours, and become a master.
- 6 Legacy often drives our behavior. Our values are passed down from generation to generation.

# Part I: Opportunity

In this section, Gladwell covers the factors that provide some individuals exposure to opportunities, and the impact that early exposure has on one's later achievements. He examines five core examples, each of which we'll explore here.

## 1. THE SPIRAL EFFECT

The first example Gladwell focuses on the birthdates of professional Canadian hockey players. Gladwell found that:

- 40% of professional hockey players are born between January & March
- 30% between April and June
- 20% between July and September
- And only 10% between October and December

His explanation for this is simple: In Canada, the cut-off birth date is January 1. This means that children born shortly after that date are usually the oldest on their teams and have more experience playing than those born later in the year. They are the most likely, then, to be chosen for the more elite leagues and gain even more experience playing.

**Gladwell calls this the spiral effect.** The bigger kids will play better, and then be scouted by better coaches for more competitive teams. On those competitive teams, the bigger kids will be given better coaches, more chances to play and practice, and games against other more competitive teams.

From there, they're scouted into more elite teams, and it spirals upwards. Just by being born in a certain month, certain players are given an inherent advantage over those born in later months.

## 2. THE 10.000 HOURS RULE

Gladwell finds that there's a common thread among people who have "mastered" an area – ranging from computing to business, sports, and music. This common thread is the number of hours they put into their craft.

We have all come to know this rule as the **10,000 hour rule** – the amount of time it takes to become a master. Gladwell covers the stories of Bill Gates, The Beatles, and Mozart, illustrating how their opportunities to get 10,000 hours of practice early in their careers led to later successes.

**At 40 hours a week, 10,000 hours is roughly 5 years of work – or in other words, 40 hours per week, every week, for 5 years.**

Bill Gates was born into a wealthy family, went to one of the few colleges that offered coding programs, and (better yet) was able to code for free. Because of these advantages, by the time he was in college he had hit the 10,000 hour mark. Microsoft was the by product of his mastery of programming. He was presented the opportunity and he took it.

Gladwell shares two phases to mastery:

1. Take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to you
2. Practice, practice, practice until you hit the 10,000 hour mark

The Beatles were also given a unique set of circumstances that allowed them to accrue many hours of practice in a few short years. They were discovered by Bruno, a Hamburg native who needed some entertainment besides girls for his strip clubs. He offered to let the Beatles play there for free. They played non-stop, wrote music, tested different styles of music, and all this practicing allowed them to hone in on their unique and winning sound.

So why were they good? Because they had practice. About 10,000 hours worth.

### 3. TIMING

Gladwell also concludes that the time and place you were born can influence your luck and opportunity.

In the list of the richest people in history, 14/75 are American's born in the 1860s and 1870s. This was when the industrial revolution was taking off – railways were being built across America and Wall Street started up. The same happened in Silicon Valley. All the top IT entrepreneurs were born between 1953 and 1956.

Meanwhile, those born in the 1890s to the early 1900s were less fortunate than those born after 1913. These people faced the great flu epidemic, the First World war, the Great Depression, and then were still young enough to be recruited into the Second world war (assuming they survived the previous events).

Yet in 1935, there were 600,000 fewer babies born than the average, which meant smaller class sizes and a greater chance to get a spot on the top sports teams or colleges. Therefore, people born in 1935 had a greater chance of getting a good job at one of the better firms.

Overall, Gladwell shows us that some people have an innate advantage simply because they were born at the right times. That's not to say that being born at the right time guarantees success. But this is where one of the key points of the book comes into play – **when opportunity presents itself, seize it.**



## 4. UPBRINGING LEADS TO OPPORTUNITY

Sociologist Annette Lareau studied third graders in a long-term ethnographic study, and concluded that involved parents vs. non-involved parents was the key difference that led to an individual's success in life.

From her analysis, Involved parents talk to their kids more and critically provided more opportunity for them – by taking them to museums, putting them into summer school, helping them with their homework etc.

Poorer families typically have child who grow and develop much more independently, and with fewer opportunities.

Gladwell covers the cases of Robert Oppenheimer and Chris Langan.

### 1. Robert Oppenheimer

Oppenheimer grew up in a very wealthy family that supported him and put him through the best private schools. This led him to Harvard University and later on Cambridge University. After that, his success is well documented with him helping to develop the nuclear bomb in World War II.

### 2. Chris Langan

Compare this to Chris Langan, who has an IQ 195 and is considered the smartest man in America. He was brought up dirt poor with a working mother and a drunken father. His father left the family at an early age and left his mother as a single mom.

After graduating high school, he was given a full ride to both Reed College and the University of Chicago. Chris chose Reed and a couple months later lost his scholarship due to the fact this his mother didn't update the necessary information to retain it.

After this, he went back to his hometown to do blue collar work (factory jobs, construction worker, fireman) and never pursued college again. Chris has the intelligence to do more, but his upbringing didn't give him the opportunity to pursue it. He now leads a quiet life with his wife while working on a horse farm.

## 5. MEANINGFUL WORK

When you find meaning in your work, it motivates you to put in the hours.

One study in Gladwell's book followed immigrants and their offspring, discovering that the offspring became professionals due to emphasis being put on the value and practice of hard work.

Louise Farkas, the leader in the study, attributed their success to:

1. Their humble origins
2. Values instilled in them by their immigrant parents
3. The environment they grew up in that required hard work and determination

Gladwell brings us the story of Joe Flom, the son of Jewish immigrants during the depression. He went to high school, two years of night school, joined the army, and then sweet talked his way into Harvard Law (even though he didn't have a college degree).

Upon graduating, he was one of the few students who didn't get a job, so he started his own firm. Within a few years Flom had developed a specialty: proxy contests, the 1950s equivalent of what became known as takeover battles.

"White shoe" Wall Street firms considered such work beneath their dignity, which gave Flom and his growing cadre of lawyers time to perfect their craft. In the 1970s, when things changed and every firm wanted to handle hostile takeovers, there was one firm that had been doing that for 20 years – and that was Flom and Skadden.

The work that the white shoes saw as beneath them, Flom saw as meaningful. He developed his specialty (proxy contests) which later became a big hit in the 1970s. And when it come, Flom was the only one ready for change. His humble thinking and drive to succeed by believing in his work ultimately helped him succeed.

## Part II: Legacy

In the Opportunity section, Gladwell looked at the different factors that contributed to an individual's success – timing of their birth, upbringing, and access to resources at an early age. In this section, Legacy, Gladwell examines the impact of cultural values and history on one's success.

### THE IMPACT OF GENERATIONAL LEGACY

**Our values are often unconsciously handed down to us from generation to generation, which casts long shadows over our current behavior.**

Dutch Psychologist, Geert Hofstede analyzed different country's cultural tendencies. He identified a number of different dimensions, such as:

- **Individualism-Collectivism:** How much a country expects you to look after yourself
- **Uncertainty Avoidance:** How well a country tolerate ambiguity)
- **Power-Distance Index:** Attitudes towards hierarchy).

Top of that list (i.e. those countries most deferential to power/authority) are Brazil, Korea, Morocco, Mexico and Philippines, with the US, Ireland and South Africa the least in awe of power.

## AN EXAMPLE OF GENERATIONAL LEGACY

To illustrate his point, Gladwell points to the cultural legacy of several Asian countries where rice was a dominant crop. Tending rice paddies is a complicated project that requires hard work and grit. To have a successful rice paddy, you have to wake up at dawn and work all day, every day. The success of your rice paddy depends on the amount of hard work and diligence you put into it. This creates an “effort and reward” relationship between the worker and the rice paddy. **This has created a “cultural legacy” of hard work.**

Gladwell posits that this cultural legacy of hard work is one reason why Asians are (statistically) better at math compared to other students of different nationalities. He believes the other reason is the Asian number system.

When it comes to math, Asians have a built-in advantage because the language used to describe their number system is much simpler. For example, “seventeen” in English translates to “ten seven” in most Asian languages, which makes for simpler addition. Hence, Asian children learn to count much faster than American children.

## POWERING YOUR OWN SUCCESS

Gladwell's book focuses on how certain opportunities and generational legacies contribute to success. His research backs his opinions strongly.

**But that doesn't mean we can't try to better control and power our own success.** For example, our team focuses on increasing the likelihood that a business relationship succeeds by providing a free email tracking tool.

- We want sales reps to succeed by knowing when their prospects are clicking the proposal links they sent over email to better predict who will close.
- We want marketers to succeed by knowing when a potential co-marketing partner is repeatedly opening their introduction email, indicating their potential interest.
- We want job seekers to succeed by seeing when a potential employer is checking out their email or looking at their resume look.

We can't control when we were born or what generation or culture we fall into, but we can at least control our email communication and succeed in that arena. You can get email tracking **for free here** to start succeeding today.

# Quotes Worth Sharing

“Who we are cannot be separated from where we're from.”



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



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



“Achievement is talent plus preparation.”



“Hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning. Once it does, it becomes the kind of thing that makes you grab your wife around the waist and dance a jig



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



“Success is a function of persistence and doggedness and the willingness to work hard for 22 minutes to make sense of something that most people would give up on after 30 seconds.”



# Acknowledgements

Hopefully this Cliff Notes version of Outliers proved helpful.

I for one am excited to hear Malcolm speak at [INBOUND 2014](#). If you enjoyed this summary and want to hear him live, use the code **OUTLIERS30** to receive 30% off your ticket.



Enjoy reading,

Justin Mares

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