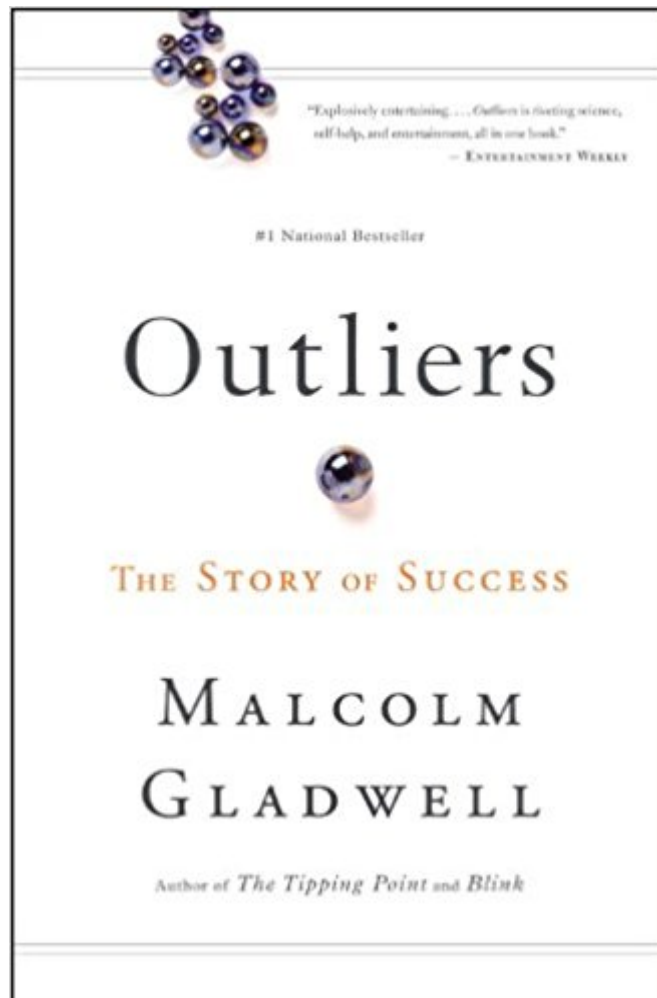


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Outliers: The Story Of Success



Synopsis

In this stunning new book, Malcolm Gladwell takes us on an intellectual journey through the world of "outliers"--the best and the brightest, the most famous and the most successful. He asks the question: what makes high-achievers different? His answer is that we pay too much attention to what successful people are like, and too little attention to where they are from: that is, their culture, their family, their generation, and the idiosyncratic experiences of their upbringing. Along the way he explains the secrets of software billionaires, what it takes to be a great soccer player, why Asians are good at math, and what made the Beatles the greatest rock band. Brilliant and entertaining, *Outliers* is a landmark work that will simultaneously delight and illuminate.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The main tenet of *Outliers* is that there is a logic behind why some people become successful, and it has more to do with legacy and opportunity than high IQ. In his latest book, New Yorker contributor Gladwell casts his inquisitive eye on those who have risen meteorically to the top of their fields, analyzing developmental patterns and searching for a common thread. The author asserts that there is no such thing as a self-made man, that "the true origins of high achievement" lie instead in the circumstances and influences of one's upbringing, combined with excellent timing. The Beatles had Hamburg in 1960-62; Bill Gates had access to an ASR-33 Teletype in 1968. Both put in thousands of hours-Gladwell posits that 10,000 is the magic number-on their craft at a young age, resulting in an above-average head start. Gladwell makes sure to note that to begin with, these individuals possessed once-in-a-generation talent in their fields. He simply makes the point that both

encountered the kind of "right place at the right time" opportunity that allowed them to capitalize on their talent, a delineation that often separates moderate from extraordinary success. This is also why Asians excel at mathematics-their culture demands it. If other countries schooled their children as rigorously, the author argues, scores would even out. Gladwell also looks at "demographic luck," the effect of one's birth date. He demonstrates how being born in the decades of the 1830s or 1930s proved an enormous advantage for any future entrepreneur, as both saw economic booms and demographic troughs, meaning that class sizes were small, teachers were overqualified, universities were looking to enroll and companies were looking for employees. In short, possibility comes "from the particular opportunities that our particular place in history presents us with." This theme appears throughout the varied anecdotes, but is it groundbreaking information? At times it seems an exercise in repackaged *carpe diem*, especially from a mind as attuned as Gladwell's. Nonetheless, the author's lively storytelling and infectious enthusiasm make it an engaging, perhaps even inspiring, read. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* is another of my favorites in this genre. I recommend it strongly because, unlike Gladwell's book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* shows you how to become an outlier...

In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell seeks to disabuse us of the notion that genius and greatness are predominantly a function of innate ability and IQ. He rightly notes that while IQ is certainly a contributor, it reaches a "point of diminishing returns" after a while: once people score about 130, IQ becomes less important and "intangibles" (my term) become more important. The book, then, focuses on what these "intangibles" are. Gladwell suggests that things like what income level, culture, and time of a child's birth are important contributors to success, as well as a person's tenacity and agility. As the last of these is the least conventional, think of it this way: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and many other computer masterminds would likely not have distinguished themselves were they born 10 years earlier (as they would not have been exposed to computers in high-school/college, and would have been in their mid-thirties by the time computers really took hold, likely already in other careers by that point in their lives.) How does culture matter? Think about the discrepancy between how many days per year American children spend in school (180) versus Asian students (280), and how many more social expectations Asian students are borne into? Certainly this will affect academic and other achievement. Now, I should point out that Gladwell is quite adept at anecdotal story telling and is much less adept at statistical analysis. As such, he could be justly accused of overstating his case (and maybe even finding patterns where he wants to see them, rather than where they exist.) Gladwell is definitely writing for the popular market so

anyone wanting good "back up" of his arguments may find themselves disappointed by his cherry-picking of examples. That said, Gladwell's book contains some interesting and provocative ideas, especially for educators and those concerned with education. His last chapter - about the KIPP schools - is a fascinating plea for American schools to infuse more rigor (and quantity) to the educational school year. As a main part of Gladwell's thesis is that how hard one works (and is willing to work) is endemic to one's likelihood of success, we set students up for failure by not expecting them to work as hard as other countries expect of their students. For a fun read which introduces some interesting ideas, Gladwell's "Outliers" is a decent book. Those who want a little more scholarly meat may come away disappointed.

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