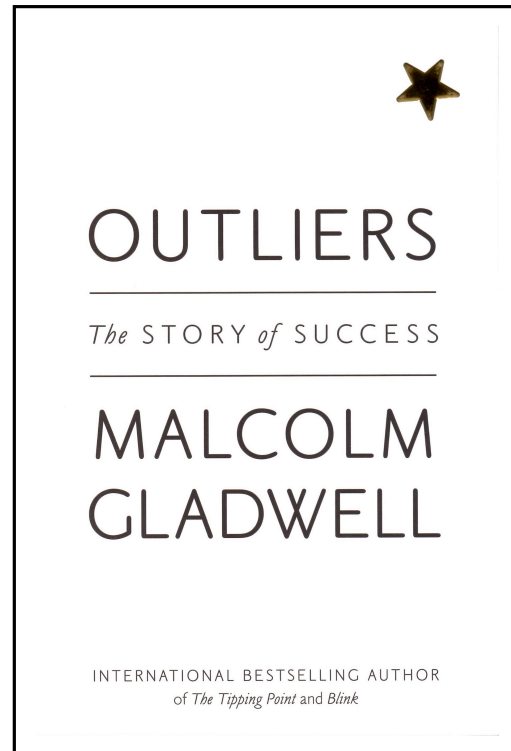

BOOK REVIEW

"Outliers: The Story of Success" by Malcolm Gladwell

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Do people we deem successful deserve the praise we give them?

That is the question Malcolm Gladwell poses in his book, "Outliers." Not to be contrary, nor to play devil's advocate, but he seriously gets us to decide if these people who are smart, rich, famous – "successful" – really achieved their success by their own merit. That is the question he asks throughout the book.

Simply written – as is Gladwell's trademark – "Outliers" talks about people who are generally acknowledged as successful. Cases in point: Bill Gates, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the Beatles, even a Canadian hockey team. Would they really be who they are, and would they have achieved what they have achieved, if the

circumstances surrounding them were different? Gladwell suggests that these people had a little something extra going for them that proved to be the key in their success.

For example, in many of the best hockey leagues all over the world, roughly 40 percent of the players were born in January, February or March, while only 10 percent were born in October, November or December. Why? The cutoff birth date for many youth hockey leagues is Jan 1st. So the children born in the first quarter of the year are just a little older, bigger and stronger than other children their age. So these older, bigger, stronger children have better opportunities to be drafted into all-star teams that get the best training and exposure. By the time they graduate from high school, their random advantage of being born during the first quarter of the year becomes a real advantage when it comes to getting hockey scholarships in college.

Bill Gates was a member of a computer club in his high school. Nowadays, there's nothing uncommon about that. But consider this: during that time, there was practically no other high school computer club in America. He also had the good fortune to have access to the use of computers at the University of Washington, where he logged in more than 10,000 hours as a programmer.

The Beatles weren't an overnight sensation in their native England. Long before they found success, they performed in Hamburg, Germany more than 1,200 times between 1960 and 1964. They spent more than 10,000 hours performing, and when they came back to England, they were perfectly honed, their sound different from what the Britons were used to, and that spelled the difference.

The 10,000 figure isn't plucked out of thin air either. Gladwell explains that reaching the 10,000-Hour Rule, which he considers the key to success in any field, is simply a matter of practicing a specific task that can be accomplished with 20 hours of work a week for 10 years.

Gladwell doesn't discount the "staples" of success: talent, determination, hard work. He wouldn't have espoused the 10,000 Hour Rule otherwise. What he is saying is that the aforementioned traits make up merely half of the equation. He reiterates throughout his book that success comes about because of factors that are often beyond a person's control and these factors create the opportunities to be extraordinarily successful. These factors include cultural legacies, social

class, race, even political climate...all random events. Does this tip the scale in nurture's favor in the perennial debate on nature vs. nurture?

Not many may agree with Gladwell, but one has to admit, his ideas get one to think and ponder. This gives us another angle on how to view success. One danger about this is that people may use this as an excuse for not succeeding or not even trying. They now have this handy excuse, a fall guy they can blame: their race, their socio-economic status, even their birthdates. To some extent, it's like condoning someone's non-performance by explaining it away, and not making the person accountable for his or her failure.

If this book does little else, then it should do at least this: make us take a stock of our own success, and how we define it.

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