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Outliers: The Story of Success by Malcolm Gladwell

Reviewed by Linda G. Mullen

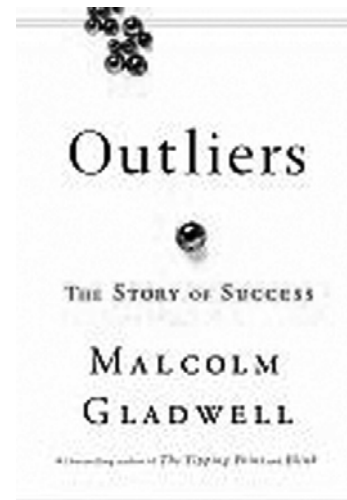
Biography: Linda G. Mullen, PhD, is assistant professor of marketing at Georgia Southern University's College of Business Administration. She teaches professional sales and sales management in the Management, Marketing, and Logistics Department. Dr. Mullen may be reached by email at lgmullen@georgiasouthern.edu.



Malcolm Gladwell's latest work, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, gives a somewhat different perspective to why certain people are successful and others are not. Gladwell contends that successful individuals are successful because of a combination of the opportunities, abilities, and advantages. In other words, they were born in the right time at the right place and they seized the opportunity. Gladwell's findings are a bit unsettling, and he sets up his rationale quite succinctly. We all want to believe that hard work and determination are the main components to success but that is certainly not, what Gladwell suggests. Throughout the book, he lays out the formula for success citing that ability, advantages, and opportunities are the formula for success.

Certainly hard work and ability is important. However, Gladwell suggests through his findings that anyone who spends the time needed (10,000 hours) will have the ability. His discussion on a study in the area of music notes the hours of practice will determine the difference. And that would seem true but I could not help thinking as I read this that after 10,000 hours of oil painting I would still not be an artist. Nevertheless, the author does not ignore innate talent but points out that many individuals have a natural talent but never get the chance to use them. Circumstances in life are such that not everyone is given equal opportunities to expand these talents.

Being born at the right time (and month) positions you for success. For example, your birth date determines whether you are ultimately given more attention and therefore have a greater opportunity to be a star in sports. Gladwell backs up this



argument through studies done on several Canadian hockey and soccer teams. It ultimately makes a good argument. Older more mature 5 year olds (born in January, February, or March) are going to probably do better than 5 year olds born towards the end of the year when trying out for sports. Further, being born during different times in history gives advantages to some that other generations do not have. For example, the software boom enabled Gates, Jobs and others to dominate the computer industry. Even Gladwell notes, discrimination gives way to success as the post-war Jews found when they were banned from Wall Street. These individuals rose up later to dominate capitalism. Individuals who are successful are those who have been given opportunities—and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.

“People don’t rise from nothing.” It makes a difference where and we grew up, we owe something to our parents and heritage. To unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who does not you need to know the individuals heritage and background. He cites several compelling examples and studies to support his theory. His argument essentially boils down to this: “The outliers in a particular field reached their lofty status through a combination of ability, opportunity, and utterly arbitrary advantage”.

Outliers are about each of us. Innate talent is not the only determining factor to success; other things come in to play. What we can do for our children (and students) is to sort out the everyday stuff and make sure that children born after the start of the academic year still are considered. We can try to reach children from poor families and teach them to navigate social situations, and, give them the chance to do enough studying to match the rich kids who are studying. I recommend to this book to those who like to examine social phenomena through perhaps a new lens.

The Cover Story

Title and author: *Outliers: The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell

Number of pages: 309

Area of Business: Business

Readability: Light

Time needed to read: 3 days
(vacation reading)

Why should I read this book?
This is a very different view on why people succeed and others don't.

Overall Rating: 4