



DODReads Executive Summary

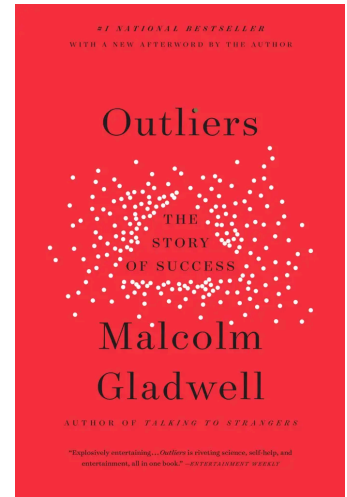
Outliers

The Story of Success

Thesis: Success is not determined solely by talent and effort but by a combination of factors such as opportunity, cultural background, and meaningful practice, all of which shape extraordinary achievement.

- **Malcolm Gladwell:** Malcolm Gladwell is the author of seven books, five of which are New York Times bestsellers, and the co-founder of [Pushkin Industries](#), an audiobook and podcast production company. He was born in England, grew up in rural Ontario, and now lives in New York where he has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1996. Gladwell has been included in the TIME 100 Most Influential People list and touted as one of Foreign Policy's Top Global Thinkers.

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[Outliers](#)

Why this book is important for the Military Professional: By examining the roles of opportunity, cultural background, and deliberate practice, you can gain a better understanding of what it takes to excel. The emphasis on continuous learning and deliberate practice underscores the importance of ongoing training and professional development in enhancing military effectiveness. Military professionals can better navigate the complexities of their roles, optimize team dynamics, and cultivate a culture of excellence and adaptability within their units by incorporating the lessons from "Outliers."

Outlier / (ˈaʊt-,lɪ(-ə)r) noun. 3b. A person or thing that is atypical within a group or category: [anomaly](#)

Note: Malcolm Gladwell is a phenomenal storyteller and the lessons from this book are extracted from the stories and case studies he presents. This Executive Summary captures those lessons without telling the stories the author has so carefully written. To fully understand these lessons, you must read the book.

Part One: Opportunity

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

The Matthew Effect

- Derived from the biblical verse "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. But for him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."
 - Successful people are given greater attention and special opportunities to further success.

- Individuals who have early advantages, whether earned or arbitrary, such as access to resources or opportunities, are more likely to accumulate further advantages over time, while those who lack such early advantages may fall further behind.
- A study found a disproportionate number of professional hockey players were born in the first few months of the year highlighting the role of birth date in providing early advantages, such as being older and more physically developed in youth hockey leagues where cutoffs are based on the calendar year.
 - Being born at the “right time” (onset of industrial or technology revolutions) disproportionately leads to success/wealth in different periods throughout history.
 - Likewise, because of the advantages of birthdays to arbitrary cutoff dates for schools, athletics, etc. we are squandering the development of a large percentage of our population.
- **How to Improve** – Encourage diverse hiring practices and create inclusive environments that value individuals based on their skills and contributions rather than factors like birthdate or timing.

The 10,000-Hour Rule

- The idea that mastery in any field requires roughly 10,000 hours of dedicated practice.
- Studies of elite performers in various domains, such as music, sports, and even coding conclude that 10,000 hours is the “magic number” of exposure to something you need to become truly extraordinary.
- The opportunity to gain 10,000 hours of practice is largely influenced by external factors. Merely being willing to put in 10,000 hours of work doesn’t mean you will have the opportunity to do so.
 - Everyone has different natural aptitudes. If you do not have a certain skill or talent, even 10,000 hours may not make you above average.
 - It is much easier to put in practice for something you love. Find what you are passionate about and work tirelessly to perfect it.
- **How to Improve** – Create structured training and development programs within your organization, emphasizing deliberate practice and continuous learning to cultivate expertise among team members.

The Trouble with Geniuses

- High intelligence alone isn’t a guarantee of success. Social intelligence and interpersonal skills are key components of achieving success.
- A longitudinal study of gifted children with high IQs found that despite their high intelligence, many of the participants did not achieve exceptional success later in life, challenging the conventional belief that high IQ alone guarantees success.
- **The Threshold Effect** – there are thresholds on most metrics of intelligence or factors of quality. You don’t have to be the smartest or go to the best college. Your chances of success are almost the same as long as you are “smart enough” or go to a “good enough” college. As long as you are above the threshold, you are just as likely to be successful as the smartest person in your class.
- **Practical Intelligence and Analytical Intelligence:**
 - **Practical Intelligence** or “street smarts” is the ability to navigate real-world situations effectively, solve practical problems, and adapt to different contexts. Practical intelligence is required in successful entrepreneurs, lawyers, and professionals who excel in environments that require interpersonal communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills.
 - **Analytical Intelligence** or “book smarts” is associated with cognitive abilities such as logical reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These cognitive abilities and analytical thinking are more linked to academic achievement and fields like mathematics, science, and technology, where complex problem-solving and reasoning are key components of success.
- **How to Improve** – Recognize and cultivate different forms of intelligence (emotional, social, practical, analytical, etc.) within the team to foster collaboration and build strong relationships among team members.

Origins, Timing, and Culture

- **Case Study:** Joe Flom graduated from Harvard in the late 1940s but because he was from an immigrant Jewish family he was unable to get a job at the most prestigious New York law firms. Fast forward 50 years and he is the principal at arguably the most prestigious law firm in the country. How?
 - Flom was born in 1923, which placed him at a unique advantage during the legal profession's transformation in the mid-20th century. This period saw a surge in corporate law due to the rise of mergers and acquisitions, and Flom's birth year allowed him to capitalize on this trend, shaping his career trajectory.
 - Growing up in a family working in the textile industry emphasized hard work, perseverance, and resourcefulness, Flom developed key skills and attitudes that prepared him for law school and were well-suited for navigating the competitive and rapidly evolving field of corporate law.
 - Discrimination early in his career due to his Jewish background forced Flom into the otherwise undesirable field of corporate takeover law, which later became hugely profitable during the era of corporate takeovers in the 1960s and 1970s.

"It is not the brightest who succeed. Nor is success simply the sum of the decisions and efforts we make on our own behalf. It is, rather, a gift. Outliers are those who have been given opportunities— and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them."

Part Two: Legacy

Cultural Heritage, Community Dynamics, and Individual Behavior

- Cultural legacies impact social behaviors and community dynamics.
- Despite economic and social changes over time, certain cultural patterns and values continue to influence behaviors and attitudes.
- The concept of "honorable people" and the importance of defending one's reputation through retaliatory violence are deeply ingrained in community identity.
 - Cultural legacy has significant implications for the development of the youth. The perpetuation of a code of honor centered around violence can hinder social mobility and limit opportunities for growth and advancement.
- **Case Study:** Gladwell explores how the cultural legacy of Appalachia, particularly in the town of Harlan, Kentucky, has shaped the social behaviors and community dynamics of its residents. The history of feuds and violence in the region is traced back to a cultural code of honor and vengeance that has persisted for generations. The example of Harlan, Kentucky, serves as a microcosm for broader societal issues related to cultural legacies, social norms, and community dynamics on individual behavior and outcome.
- **How to Improve** - Understand and address cultural differences within the organization to promote inclusivity, cohesion, and a sense of belonging among team members. Understand the context in which individuals and communities operate. Recognizing the influence of cultural legacies is crucial for implementing effective interventions and addressing social issues.

Cultural Factors and Communication Patterns

- Cultural norms can hinder assertiveness and communication. The way people speak and the way they perceive what they hear from others varies greatly depending on their cultural backgrounds.
- **Power Distance:** the concept of the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

- Cultural norms related to power distance can influence communication patterns and decision-making. **Cultures with higher power distance tend to not challenge authority.**
- The Power Distance Index (PDI) rates a culture's respect for authority. Low PDI countries attempt to underplay or mask an individual's power while high PDI countries embrace and relish in an individual's power:

- Highest PDI

- Brazil
- South Korea
- Morocco
- Mexico
- Philippines

- Lowest PDI

- United States
- Ireland
- South Africa
- Australia
- New Zealand

- **Case Study:** Gladwell examines the impact of cultural backgrounds on assertiveness and effective communication skills among cockpit crew members in major aviation accidents. The impacts of PDI and cross-cultural communication have been found causal in numerous safety investigations.
- **How to Improve:** Understanding the influence of cultural factors on communication and decision-making can help organizations mitigate unintentional errors. Foster open communication, flatten hierarchical structures, and encourage collaboration within your organization to improve team dynamics and decision-making processes.
 - Crew Resource Management (CRM): A concept that aims to improve communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills among flight crews (and other occupations) by addressing hierarchical structures when making decisions that affect flight safety.

Cultural Influences on Work Ethic, Academic Performance, and Success

- Success is not determined by innate ability but by the willingness to put in hard work and persevere through challenges, traits cultivated in environments with a strong cultural emphasis on diligence.
 - Culture influences an individual's attitude toward these characteristics. The demanding nature of certain cultures contributes to success in a variety of areas.
- Language and math:
 - Chinese numbers are constructed more systematically compared to other languages.
 - Chinese speakers, therefore, can recall and apply math to more numbers in their heads because of their language than English and other Latin-based language speakers.
- By recognizing the influence of cultural factors on learning attitudes and behaviors, educators can tailor instructional approaches to better engage and support students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Case Study:** Gladwell argues that cultural practices and values, such as those observed in rice farming communities, shape attitudes toward education, work, and achievement, contributing to disparities in academic performance and success. He explains how the intensive labor and planning required in rice farming fosters a mindset of hard work, persistence, and attention to detail, which translates into strong academic performance in children raised in this culture.
- **How to Improve:** Cultural diversity drives innovation and problem-solving. Embracing and leveraging cultural differences can lead to creative solutions and new perspectives, fostering a dynamic and inclusive environment conducive to learning and growth.

The transformative potential of education

- High expectations, extended learning time, and intensive academic support are important in fostering student achievement, and challenging traditional educational norms.
- By prioritizing student support, rigorous academics, and a culture of high expectations, schools can create environments where all students have the opportunity to thrive.

- Providing students with access to quality education, resources, and support systems is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving upward social mobility.
 - Summer break from school has a disproportionately negative effect on lower-class households as these families can't provide educational opportunities for their children throughout the summer.
- **Case Study:** Gladwell examines KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Academy, a charter school in the South Bronx. KIPP Academy's supportive environment, including dedicated teachers, mentors, and peers, contributes to students' academic growth and personal development with a disproportionate number of graduates moving on to advanced high schools and eventually attending college.
- **How to Improve:** Invest in education and provide opportunities for growth and development among team members, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and personal development. Create a culture of high expectations that values hard work in reaching your goals.

“To build a better world we need to replace the patchwork of lucky breaks and arbitrary advantages that today determine success—the fortunate birth dates and the happy accidents of history—with a society that provides opportunities for all.”

*This executive summary is composed of both verbatim excerpts and summarizations from **Outliers** by Malcolm Gladwell.*

Resources and Additional Reading

1. Mindset: The New Psychology of Success
2. Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance
3. Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us
4. Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World

Thanks to Adam Smith for writing this Executive Summary. Adam is a United States Air Force Pilot and former Headquarters Air Force Staff officer.

If your office or command is in need of one book or a hundred we would be honored to [source them](#)