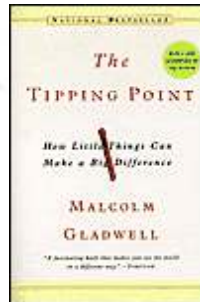




The Tipping Point

How Little Things can Make a Big Difference



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■ About the Author

Malcolm Gladwell

MALCOLM GLADWELL was born in 1963 in England, and grew up in Canada. He graduated with a degree in history from the University of Toronto in 1984.

From 1987 to 1996, he was a reporter for *The Washington Post*, first as a science writer and then as New York City bureau chief. Since 1996, he has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine.

■ The Big Idea

A business and science writer presents a book that is full of brilliant, fascinating and groundbreaking ideas that should affect the way every thinking person sees the world around him. It is a must-read material for educators, parents, marketers, business people and policymakers. It shows how small changes can make a big difference.

The book contains an analysis of the strategies people apply to influence and mold its direction. It is a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. It is a road map to change, with a profoundly hopeful message--that one imaginative person applying a well-placed lever can move the world, shape, and engineer the course of social epidemics.

■ How would you like to find answers for the following?

Why did crime in New York drop so suddenly in the mid-90s? How does an unknown novelist end up being a bestselling author? Why is teenage smoking out of control, when everyone knows smoking kills? What makes TV shows like Sesame Street so good at teaching kids how to read? Why did Paul Revere succeed with his famous warning about the coming of the British?

How could a company like Hush Puppies in a span of two years after its rebirth in 1994 increase its sales from 30,000 pairs of shoes to over 1,000,000 pairs, setting the fashion trends among young

Americans for the second time? Or like Airwalk, another shoemaker, whose sales exploded from \$16M-a-year business to \$175M in four years?

Why do various TV shows, movies, books and other products become so popular while others do not? These and other unexpected phenomena are explained by the Tipping Point theory.

■ What is Tipping Point?

The best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, the rise of teenage smoking, the phenomena of word-of-mouth, or any number of other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to view them as epidemics.

Ideas, products, messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do. These often spread like outbreaks of infectious disease. Just as a single sick person can start an epidemic of flu, so too can a few fare-beaters and graffiti artists fuel a subway crime wave, or a satisfied customer fill the empty tables of a new restaurant. These are social epidemics. The moment they take off, when they reach their critical mass, is the Tipping Point. The Tipping Point is one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once.

The three characteristics of epidemic:

1. contagiousness
2. little causes can have big effects
3. change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment

All epidemics have Tipping Points. The world of a Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is a contrary to all our expectations, it is a certainty!

■ CHAPTER 1: The Three Rules Of Epidemics

Epidemics are a function of:

1. the people who transmit infectious agents
2. the infectious agent itself
3. the environment in which the infectious agent is operating

1. The Law of the Few

One critical factor in epidemics is the nature of the messenger. The message itself is something that can be passed on. A pair of shoes, a warning, an infection, a new movie can become highly contagious and tip simply if associated with a particular kind of person.

The Law of the Few suggests that what we think of as inner states-- preferences and emotions--are powerfully and imperceptibly influenced by seemingly inconsequential personal influences.

2. The Stickiness Factor

In epidemics, the content of the message matters too. Is the message, the food, the movie, or the product memorable?

3. The Power of Context

The Power of Context says that human beings are a lot more sensitive to their environment than they may seem.

■ CHAPTER 2: The Law of the Few: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen

Success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts. The Law of the Few says that there are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting social epidemics, and can make it tip.

The three kinds of people that control the word-of-mouth epidemics are:

- **Connectors** - the social glue, they spread the message
- **Mavens** - the databank, they provide the message
- **Salesmen** - the select group of people who have the skills to persuade people unconvinced of what they hear

Connectors are people with a special gift for bringing the world together. They link us up to the world— people whom we rely more heavily than we realize. Word-of-mouth epidemics are the work of Connectors.

What makes someone a Connector?

1. They know lots of people.
2. Their importance is a function of the kinds of people they know.
3. People whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because they occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches. Their ability to span many different worlds is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy.
4. They are at the center of events.

The Connectors have instinct that helps them relate to the people they meet. They see the possibility of being acquainted with everyone while most of us are busy choosing whom we would like to know. Connectors are extraordinarily powerful. We rely on them to give us access to opportunities and worlds to which we don't belong.

Knowing lots of people is a kind of skill, something that someone might set out to do deliberately. This skill can be perfected. The techniques that go with this skill are central to the fact that he knew almost everyone.

Connectors have instinctive and natural gift for making social connections. They simply like people in a genuine and powerful way. They find the patterns of acquaintanceship and interaction in which people arrange themselves to be

endlessly fascinating. They collect people the same way others collect stamps. They keep on their computers a roster of names of acquaintances.

The point about Connectors is that by having a foot in so many different worlds can have the effect of bringing them all together.

Lois Weisberg, the Connector, belongs to many different worlds--politics, drama, environmentalism, music, law, medicine, the railroad, the flea market. One of the key things that she does is to play the intermediary between different social worlds.

Paul Revere was able to galvanize the forces of resistance so effectively because he was, in part, a "Connector". He knew just about everybody, particularly the revolutionary leaders in each of the towns that he rode through.

Maven is one who accumulates knowledge and is happy to pass it around. He is usually not a persuader.

Mavens are not passive collectors of information. They are not just obsessed with how to get the best deal on a product. What sets them apart is that once they figure out how to get that deal, they will tell you about it. Mavens are persons with information on a lot of different products or prices or places. They like to be helpers in the marketplace. They connect people to the marketplace and have the inside scoop. Mavens are socially motivated.

Paul Revere was not only a "Connector" but he was also a "Maven" who gathered extensive information about the British.

Salesmen are charismatic people that can infect others with their emotions without saying anything and with the briefest of exposures.

What makes the Salesmen in our lives so effective?

- Little things can apparently make as much difference as the big things.
- Nonverbal cues are more important than verbal cues. How we say things may matter more than what we actually say.
- Persuasion always works in ways that we do not appreciate.

What makes someone so persuasive?

It's more than eloquence. It's more of the subtle, the hidden, and the unspoken.

Super-reflex is a fundamental physiological ability. To have a powerful or persuasive personality, one must have the ability to draw others into his rhythms and dictate the terms of the interaction, ability to conduct conversation on his terms, and the ability to create synchrony. Salesmen know when the crowds are with them in movements and nods and stillness in moments of attention. The essence of salesmen cannot be resisted. They can build a level of trust and rapport in a much shorter time than most people.

People who are very good in expressing emotions and feelings are more emotionally contagious than others. There are people who are carriers and there are people who are especially susceptible. Carriers are people who are more expressive.

Mimicry is also one of the ways by which we infect others with our emotions. If you see the other person smile, you will most likely smile back.

■ CHAPTER 3: The Stickiness Factor: Sesame Street, Blue's Clues, and the Educational Virus

The information age has created a stickiness problem. We simply don't remember much of what we are told or read or watched. But, there are simple ways to enhance and engineer stickiness into a message. The creators of children's educational television, Sesame Street and the Blue's Clues, have illustrated the potential of this kind of stickiness engineering.

1. Sesame Street succeeded because it learned how to make television sticky. This was the legacy of Sesame Street: If you paid careful attention to the structure and format of your material, you could dramatically enhance stickiness.
2. Blue's Clues took the sticky elements of Sesame Street and tried to make it even stickier.

First idea: More kids are engaged in watching something intellectually and physically stimulating, because the more memorable and meaningful it becomes.

Second idea: Kids learn through repetition. However, kids don't always like repetition. Whatever they are watching has to be complex enough to allow repeated exposure for deeper levels of comprehension. At the same time, it should not be so complex that it baffles the children and turns them off.

There is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible. All you have to do is find it.

■ CHAPTER 4: The Power of Context (Part One): Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime

The shooting incident in the subway involving Goetz and four black teenagers has become a symbol of a particular dark moment in New York history. This is the moment when the city's crime problem reached epidemic proportions.

The Law of the Few looked at the kinds of people who are critical in spreading information. The chapters on Sesame Street and Blue's Clues looked at the question of stickiness, suggesting that in order to be capable of sparking epidemics, ideas have to be memorable and should move us to action. We have looked at the people who spread ideas and we have looked at the characteristics of successful ideas.

The Power of Context is as important as the first two. Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur.

The Power of Context says that we are more than sensitive to changes in context. And the kinds of contextual changes that are capable of tipping an epidemic are very different than we might ordinarily suspect.

Crime is the inevitable result of disorder. The Broken Windows theory says that if a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares. In a city, relatively minor problems like graffiti, public disorder, and aggressive panhandling are all the equivalent of broken windows, invitations to more serious crimes.

The epidemic theory of crime says that the crime is contagious-- that it can start with a broken window and spread to an entire community. However, the Tipping Point in this epidemic is not a particular kind of person; it is something physical like graffiti. The impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior is not coming from a certain kind of person but from a feature of the environment.

Minor, seemingly insignificant quality-of-life crimes are Tipping Points for violent crime. Broken Windows theory and the Power of Context are one and the same. They are both based on the premise that an epidemic can be reversed or tipped by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment.

The Power of Context suggests that the criminal-- far from being someone who acts for fundamental, intrinsic reasons and lives in his own world-- is actually someone who is acutely sensitive to his environment, who is alert to all kinds of cues, and who is prompted to commit crimes based on his perception around him. It says that behavior is a function of social context.

The Power of Context says that what really matters are little things. The Power of Context says you don't have to solve the big problems to solve crime. The shooting incident on the subway between Goetz and the four youths had very little to do with the psychological pathology as well as with their background and poverty. It has everything to do with the message sent by the graffiti on the walls and the disorder at the turnstiles.

The essence of the Power of Context is that our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances.

We need to remember that small changes in context can be just as important in tipping epidemics, even though the fact appears to violate some of our most deeply held assumptions about human nature.

Context matters. The specific and relatively small elements in the environment can serve as Tipping Points. Environmental Tipping Points are things that we can change. We can fix broken windows and clean up graffiti and change the signals that invite crime in the first place. Crime can be more than understood, it can be prevented.

Studies of juvenile delinquency demonstrate that a child is better off in a good neighborhood and a troubled family than be in a troubled neighborhood and a good family. The Power of Context says that the children are powerfully shaped by their

external environment. The features of our immediate social and physical world--the streets we walk down, the people we encounter--all play a huge role in shaping who we are and how we act. In the end, it isn't just serious criminal behavior that is sensitive to environmental cues, it is all behavior. It is possible to be a better person on a clean street or in a clean subway than in one littered with trash and graffiti.

■ CHAPTER 5: The Power of Context (Part Two): The Magic Number One Hundred and Fifty

Small, close-knit groups have the power to magnify the epidemic potential of a message or idea.

As human beings, we can only handle so much information at once. We get overwhelmed once we pass a certain boundary. Our intellectual capacity and our ability to process raw information is limited. We clearly have a channel capacity for feelings as well. The most interesting natural limit is our social channel capacity.

The **Rule of 150** suggests that the size of a group is one of those subtle contextual factors that can make a big difference. If we want groups to serve as incubators for contagious messages, then we have to keep groups below the 150 Tipping Point. Above that point, there will be structural impediments to the ability of the group to agree and act with one voice. Once the Tipping Point is crossed, group members begin to behave very differently as they become divided and alienated.

It says that congregants of a rapidly expanding church, or the members of a social club, or anyone in a group activity banking on the epidemic spread of shared ideals needs to be particularly cognizant of the perils of bigness. Crossing the 150 line is a small change that can make a big difference.

The kind of bond in small groups is a kind of peer pressure-- knowing people well enough that how they see you matters. Peer pressure is much more powerful because it drives people to live up to what is expected of them.

The advantage of adhering to the **Rule of 150** is that it provides a mechanism to make the flow of new ideas and information to move around the organization to tip-- to go from one person or to the entire group all at once. You can exploit the bonds of memory and peer pressure.

The phenomenal book *Secrets of Ya-ya Sisterhood*, the widely spread early Christian church, Wesley's Methodism and Gore Associates have successfully embraced and applied the **Rule of 150**.

The paradox of epidemic is that in order to create one contagious movement you often have to create many small movements first. Just like what Gore did in order to be unified, in order to spread a specific company ideology to all of its employees, he had to break itself up into semi-autonomous small pieces.

■ CHAPTER 6: Case Study: Rumors, Sneakers, and the Power of Translation

Why did Airwalk tip? Airwalk tipped primarily because its advertising was founded very explicitly on the principles of epidemic transmission. The advertising company used dramatic images--single photographs showing the Airwalk user relating to his shoes in some weird way. In one, a young clad girl is holding up a shiny vinyl Airwalk shoe like a mirror and using it to apply lipstick.

The advertising firm Lambesis served as the Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen for Airwalk. The Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen simply take ideas and information from a highly specialized world and translate them into language the rest of us can understand. They are the translators. To make an idea contagious, they alter it in such a way that extraneous details are dropped and others are exaggerated so that the message itself comes to acquire a deeper meaning.

The most sophisticated analysis of this process of translation comes from the study of rumors, the most contagious of all social messages.

■ CHAPTER 7: Case Study: Suicide, Smoking, and the Search for the Unsticky Cigarette

Studies suggest that suicide can be contagious. Suicides lead to more suicides. Suicide stories are a kind of natural advertisement for a particular response to your problems. The death of people in highly publicized suicides give others "permission" to die. This serves as Tipping Point in suicide epidemics.

Smoking epidemics begin in precisely the same way that the suicide epidemic in Micronesia began. In this epidemic, as in all others, a select few are responsible for driving the epidemic forward.

The teen smoking epidemic does not simply illustrate the Law of the Few. It is also a good illustration of the Stickiness Factor. The problem is that many of those teenagers end up continuing their cigarette experiment until they get hooked. The smoking experience is so memorable and powerful for some people that they cannot stop smoking. The habit sticks.

■ CHAPTER 8: Conclusion: Focus, Test, and Believe

Tipping Point Lessons

First Lesson: Starting epidemics requires concentrating resources on a few key areas. The Law of the Few says that Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen are responsible for starting word-of-mouth epidemics. Your resources,

therefore, should be concentrated on these three groups. No one else matters. The theory of Tipping Point requires that we reframe the way we think about the world.

Second Lesson: The world, as much as we want to, does not accord with our intuition. Those who are successful at creating social epidemics do not just do what they think is right. They deliberately test their intuitions. To make sense of social epidemics, we must first understand that human communication has its own set of very unusual and counterintuitive rules.

Third Lesson: What must underlie successful epidemics is a bedrock belief that change is possible-- that people can radically transform their behavior or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus. This contradicts some of the most ingrained assumptions we hold about ourselves and each other. We think we are autonomous and inner-directed, that who we are and how we act is something permanently set by our genes and our temperament.

Fourth Lesson: We are actually powerfully influenced by our surroundings as shown by the following examples:

- Taking the graffiti off the walls of New York subway turned New Yorkers into better citizens.
- Telling seminarians to hurry turned them into bad citizens.
- The suicide of a charismatic young Micronesian set off an epidemic of suicides that lasted for a decade.
- Putting a little gold box in the corner of a Columbia Record Club advertisement suddenly made record buying by mail seem irresistible.

Complex behaviors like smoking, suicide or crime show that we are suggestible in the face of what we see and hear, and that we are acutely sensitive to even the smallest details of everyday life.

That's why social change is so volatile and so often inexplicable because it is the nature of all of us to be such.

If there is difficulty and volatility in the world of the Tipping Point, there is a large measure of hopefulness as well. Merely by manipulating the size of a group, we can dramatically improve its receptivity to new ideas. By tinkering with the presentation of information, we can significantly improve its stickiness. By finding and reaching those few special people who hold so much social power, we can engineer the course of social epidemics.

Tipping Point reaffirms the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. The world may seem like an immovable, implacable place, but it is not. With the slightest push in just the right place, it can be tipped.