

## THE TIPPING POINT: HOW LITTLE THINGS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

By Malcolm Gladwell

Little, Brown and Company, 2000

---

- Three characteristics: Contagiousness, the fact that little causes can have big effects and that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment explain the flu attacks each winter. The third trait – the idea that epidemics can rise or fall in one dramatic moment – is the most important, because it is the principle that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into why modern change happens the way it does. The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the tipping point.
- We need to prepare ourselves for the possibility that sometimes big changes follow from small events, and that sometimes these changes can happen very quickly.
- We assume, intuitively, that neighborhoods and social problems decline in some kind of steady progression. But sometimes they may not decline steadily at all; at the Tipping Point, schools can lose control of their students, and family life can disintegrate all at once.
- The three agents of change I call the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor and the Power of Context.
- Economists often talk about the 80/20 principle, which is the idea that in any situation roughly 80 percent of the “work” will be done by 20 percent of the participants. In most societies, 20 percent of criminals commit 80 percent of crimes. 20% of motorists cause 80% of all accidents. 20% of beer drinkers drink 80% of all beer. When it comes to epidemics, though, this disproportionality becomes even more extreme: a tiny percentage of people do the majority of the work.
- Stickiness means that a message makes an impact.
- The stickiness factor says that there are specific ways of making a contagious message memorable; there are relatively simple changes in the presentation and structuring of information that can make a big difference in how much of an impact it makes.
- When people are in a group, responsibility for acting is diffused. They assume that someone else will make the call, or they assume that because no one else is acting, the apparent problem – the seizure-like sounds from the other room, the smoke from the door – isn’t really a problem.
- The Power of Context says that human beings are a lot more sensitive to their environment than they may seem.
- Milgram found that most letters from randomly chosen Mid-Westerners reached a specific Boston stockbroker in five or six steps. This experiment is where we get the concept of six degrees of separation.
- Six degrees of separation doesn’t mean that everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps. It means that a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few.
- These people who link us up with the world, who bridge Omaha and Sharon, who introduce us to our social circles – these people on whom we rely more heavily than we realize – are Connectors, people with a special gift for bringing the world together.
- Connectors are people whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because, for one reason or another, they manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches.
- When it comes to finding out about new jobs, or new information or new ideas, “weak ties” are always more important than strong ties. Your friends, after all, occupy the same world that you do.

- The word Maven comes from the Yiddish, and it means one who accumulates knowledge. Mavens discover information that is disseminated by connectors.
- Mavens are data banks. They provide the message. Connectors are social glue: they spread it. But there is also a select group of people – salesmen – with the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing, and they are as critical to the tipping of word-of-mouth epidemics as the other two groups.
- Emotion goes inside-out. Emotional contagion, though, suggests that the opposite is also true. If I can make you smile, I can make you happy. If I can make you frown, I can make you sad. Emotion, in this sense, goes outside-in. This allows certain kinds of people (emotional senders) to have an enormous amount of influence over others.
- The Law of the Few says that one critical factor in epidemics is the nature of the messenger.
- Kids don't watch TV when they are stimulated and look away when they are bored. They watch when they understand and look away when they are confused.
- Principle of mutual exclusivity means that small children have difficulty believing that any one object can have two different names. (Big Bird cannot be called Roy)
- Bruner: Children cannot understand theories that organize things in terms of cause and effect and relationships, so they turn things into stories, and when they try to make sense of their life they use the storied version of their experiences as the basis for further reflection. If they don't catch something in a narrative structure, it doesn't get remembered very well, and it doesn't seem to be accessible for further kinds of mulling over.
- The lesson of stickiness: there is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible.
- If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes.
- Minor, seemingly insignificant quality-of-life crimes, were Tipping Points for violent crime in NYC.
- 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, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment.
- All of us, when it comes to personality, naturally think in terms of absolutes: that a person is a certain way or is not a certain way. But Zimbardo, Hartshorne and May suggest that this is a mistake, that when we think only in terms of inherent traits and forget the role of situations, we're deceiving ourselves about the real cause of human behavior.
- The mistake we make in thinking of character as something unified and all-encompassing is very similar to a kind of blind spot in the way we process information. Psychologists call this tendency the Fundamental Attribution Error, which is a fancy way of saying that when it comes to interpreting other people's behavior, human beings invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of the situation and context. We will always reach for a "dispositional" explanation for events, as opposed to a contextual explanation.
- Character isn't a stable, easily identifiable set of closely related traits; it only seems that way because of a glitch in the way our brains are organized. Character is more like a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstance and context. The reason that most of us seem to have a consistent character is that most of us are really good at controlling our environment.

- We do reflect the influences of birth order but, as the psychologist Judith Harris points out in *The Nurture Assumption*, only around our families.
- It is easier to remember and appreciate something if you discuss it for two hours with your best friends.
- If you look at any species of primate, the larger their neocortex is, the larger the average size of the groups they live with.
- The figure of 150 seems to represent the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a genuinely social relationship, the kind of relationship that goes with knowing who they are and how they relate to us.
- Peer pressure is much more powerful than a concept of a boss. Many, many times more powerful.
- It is the loss of joint memory that helps to make divorce so painful. Divorced people who suffer depression and complain of cognitive dysfunction may be expressing the loss of their external memory systems. They once were able to discuss their experiences to reach a shared understanding. They once could count on access to a wide range of storage in their partner, and this too, is gone.
- At Lucent, the 150 people in manufacturing may have their own memory network. But how much more effective would the company be if, like Gore, everyone in the plant was part of the same transactive system – if R&D was hooked into design and design into manufacturing and manufacturing into sales?
- That is the paradox of the epidemic: that in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first.
- Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen are the ones who make it possible for innovations to overcome the problem of the chasm. They are translators: they take ideas and information from a highly specialized world and translate them into a language the rest of us can understand.
- Rumors are stories that are leveled. All kinds of details that are essential for understanding the true meaning of the incident are left out. The story is sharpened: the details that remain are made more specific. The story undergoes assimilation: it is changed so it makes more sense to those spreading the rumor.
- What Mavens and Connectors and Salesmen do to an idea in order to make it contagious is to 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.
- Smoking was never cool. Smokers are cool.
- Whatever environmental influence is, it doesn't have a lot to do with parents. It's something else, and what Judith Harris argues is that something else is the influence of peers.
- The environmental influence that helps children become who they are – that shapes their character and personality – is their peer group.
- The Law of Few says that Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen are responsible for starting word-of-mouth epidemics, which means that if you are interested in starting a word-of-mouth epidemic, your resources ought to be solely concentrated on those three groups.
- We cannot conceive that a piece of paper folded over 50 times could reach the sun.
- Those who are successful at creating social epidemics do not just do what they think is right. They deliberately test their intuitions.