



*Great Leaders
Great Organizations
Lasting Results*

The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference

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In medicine a tipping point is the critical point where an outbreak will either become an epidemic or vanish. In his book, *The Tipping Point*¹, Malcolm Gladwell explores how social epidemics have similar tipping points. He will help you see the world in a different way, and each of his main points are thoroughly explored using a wide range of different types of examples. As a result, leaders, influencers and negotiators will all learn valuable lessons on how to develop the critical support necessary to bring their goals and objectives to fruition.

The Tipping Point is masterfully researched and written by one of the most engaging, enlightening and knowledgeable thinkers of our time. Gladwell makes you want to read this book because he is such a superb story teller and the stories he tells are supported by an amazing amount of intriguing research used to support his points. In the book he focuses on the tangible and intangible factors that make or break social epidemics. For example, some of the latest technological, political, social and business changes are: streaming video, Facebook, texting, or changing an organizational culture, to volunteer projects that help to make the world a better place.

Gladwell highlights the power of small changes to make a big difference. For example, in a campaign to increase the number of students coming to a health centre for tetanus shots, researchers used high and low fear campaigns. The high fear had gruesome pictures of the effects of tetanus. The result in students coming for their tetanus shots, for both the high and low fear campaigns was only a 3% increase. However, one small change was enough to tip the vaccination rate up to 28%. It was simply including a map of the university campus with the health centre circled and the times it was open. Why do you suppose this happened? It made it easier for the students to visualize, that is seeing themselves going to get their shots.

The Law of the Few

It is important to look at your own leadership potential by looking at Gladwell's three types of people and how they create social epidemics in which change, such as violence against women or eliminating the risk of concussions in hockey, are much more likely to occur. The three types of peoples: Connectors, Mavens and Salespersons.

Connectors are talented networkers who have wide ranging connections and are adept at making connections between others.

Connectors are people with a special gift for bringing the world together. They have a natural and instinctive gift for making connections. Connectors are important for more than simply the number of people they know. Their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know. They 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, 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.

The closer an idea or a product comes to a Connector, the more power and opportunity it has to start a social epidemic. Therefore if you are looking for a job or want start any type of social epidemic, you will need to connect with Connectors.

Mavens are collectors and have amassed a great deal of knowledge about a particular topic, or several topics, and they genuinely want to help other people learn.. They want to make sure you know everything you need to know to make the best decision possible.

Mavens are data banks. They provide the message. Maven's are information specialists. The word Maven comes from the Yiddish meaning one who accumulates knowledge. Mavens are interested in and curious about everything. What sets Mavens apart is not what they know, but how they pass it along.

Mavens and Connectors have different personalities and are working for different reasons. But they both have the power to spark word-of-mouth epidemics. Mavens' mission is to educate — not persuade. To be a Maven is to be a teacher, but even more emphatically, it is to be a student. They are information brokers who trade what they know.

Salespersons on the other hand are persuaders. They are charming, likeable, can put forth a winning argument that you see merit in and get on board with, or they can be so subtle that you do not don't know why you agree, you just do. You've been influenced in some intangible way and you act on it because you've been persuaded.

I am convinced there is a fourth category, and that category is Champions. Champions have the profile, determination, perseverance and passion to articulate why a change or cause is critically and crucially important. A Champion either has all of the characteristics of a Connector, Maven and Salesperson or has built a team that posses all three categories. An inspirational and moving example of a Champion in action is Rick Mercer's rant on bullying. In the words of Winston Churchill this very well might be Rick Mercer's "finest hour" even though it is only one minute and thirty-four seconds. I suggest that you stop reading at this point and see for yourself. Just enter www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh1jNAZHKIw in your browser or go to www.youtube.com and search for rick mercer rant bullying.

We all know people in our lives who call groups of people into action and unite people that otherwise would not meet. They make you want to take their advice because you see them as knowledgeable and trustworthy. They bring about change and impact our society by programs such as MADD (Mother's Against Drunk Drivers), they cause organizations to succeed or fail and may even influence the future of nations, as demonstrated by the Arab Spring.

The Stickiness Factor

The Stickiness Factor is what makes an epidemic endure. It is that special something that makes it stick. Even though some ideas are very well thought out, with expert opinions and reams of scientific data to support them, they just aren't successful. Sometimes, just little tweaks to a product, idea or information change it from being largely ignored to having a large and lasting impact. What makes something sticky isn't always obvious, people respond and they do not necessarily know why they are hooked on a brand, film, book, television show or YouTube video that has gone viral. Just think of the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad. That's the Stickiness Factor. To find out more about the Stickiness Factor there is no better resource than the book *Made to Stick* by Heath and Heath².

The Power of Context

The Power of Context is the third rule of epidemics. When and where did the social epidemic occur? What were the circumstances or conditions that underlie it? If you look back on a particular social epidemic, ask yourself if it would have occurred if it took place in a different city, a different year, a different era, or a different culture or society. Just think of the contexts in which smoking is acceptable and unacceptable today and how different this was twenty years ago or how successful Bill Gates would have been had he been born in the slums of India.

In summary, the book, *The Tipping Point*, presents a plethora of fascinating examples and case studies that demonstrate how social epidemics work in the real world. Leaders, whether they realize it or not, use social epidemics to bring about the changes that impact our world by enabling and/or inspiring others to take action.

Exercise: Who are three of the best Connectors you know of or have known?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Who are three of the best Mavens you known or have known?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Who are some of the best Salespersons you know of or have known?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Who are some of the best Champions you know of or have known?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Are you primarily a Connector, Maven, Salesperson or Champion? Please provide a brief description of what is it that you do or have done that makes you believe that? Alternatively, reflect on a time when you were able to bring one of your most important goals or objectives to fruition. Which of these four categories did you demonstrate at that time?

Would other people describe you in the same way? An excellent way to find out is to rate yourself from 1 to 10 on each of the first three types: Connector, Maven and Salesperson and then ask others who know you well to do the same and then see how congruent the two sets of data are.

For more information on how you can develop and/or enhance your leadership, negotiating and presentation skills, contact:

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ALDI offers courses and keynotes on: “Tipping Point Leadership”, “Become a Master Negotiator” and “Become a Master Presenter”. Custom-designed courses can also be created to meet an organization’s specific needs and requirements.

¹ Gladwell, Malcolm. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. N.Y.: Little Brown and Co.

² Heath, Chip & Heath Dan. (2007). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. NY: Random House.