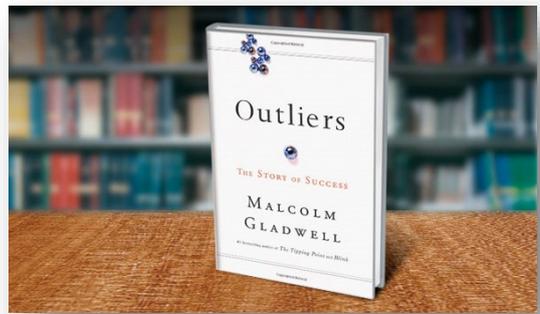


Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell

Book Review by Carl Atkin



The Headship Institute pathway has turned its attention to a thought-provoking new text – Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell. Whilst we are only part way through the text, it has already sparked interesting debate and discussion. It has also highlighted some interesting facts about the education system and the ways in which we currently work.

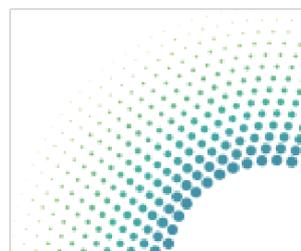
Part 1 has focused on the following themes:

- 1) **Opportunity knocks for some** – often quite arbitrary (e.g. birth dates, in the right place etc)
- 2) **Timing** – Critical to success and opportunity.
- 3) **Upbringing leads to opportunity** – The quality of upbringing a child has been shown to be a key determinant on future success (even more so than pure IQ).
- 4) **10,000 hours** – it typically takes that amount of time to ‘master’ something. People with opportunity have the chance to ‘do’ the 10,000 hours. Others don’t.

Part 1 has certainly highlighted how children (and adults) are sifted and sorted with the most talented separated out and pushed to the next level. This works to a certain extent as it is purely based on talent and ability. However, it also presents issues with those where their birth date falls the wrong side of the cut off, nor does it factor in where they are from and the culture, they live in.

Gladwell acknowledges that people don’t rise from nothing. The benefit from the hidden advantages, extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies which allow them to work hard and learn hard.

Selection systems over time can cap potential – e.g. Birth months and cut off points – selection, streaming and differentiated experience. The system has the potential to lock children into patterns of achievement and underachievement – they get used to and go on in life with the same expectations too! The children left behind also can start to think that nobody cares about them whilst



the older children in the same year group end up in a more advanced stream, learn better skills and go on to do even better – the gap gets wider!

The risk of “prematurely writing people off as failures” is that we end up overlooking how large a role we all have to play and the onset of COVID during 2020 has highlighted this even more – some of the people in our society on the lowest incomes have made the biggest difference during the pandemic.

In addition to the above, the book explores the significance of the 10,000 hour rule. 10,000 hours is deemed to be the required number of hours needed to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world class expert in any field. For example, the top performing sportspeople, scientists, musicians, computer programmers to name a few. People like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and The Beatles – they all had talent but, more importantly, they had the opportunity to achieve the number of hours required to become experts.

