The Tipping Point Study Guide

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell

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Plot Summary

In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell follows trends from their inception to their end and tries to discover why some ideas "tip" and others do not. First, Gladwell gives the three rules for the tipping point: contagiousness; the fact that little causes can have big effects; and change happens in one moment.

In the opening chapter of the book, Gladwell uses the syphilis epidemic of Baltimore, along with other outbreaks of disease, to illustrate his three rules. He restates the three rules more simply as the law of few, the stickiness factor and the power of context.

In Baltimore in recent years, syphilis cases have spiked dramatically. Gladwell assumes that a few key infected persons spread the disease throughout the city. He cites documented cases of HIV spreading in just that manner, thus establishing the law of few. The stickiness factor inherently exists with disease outbreak, though cuts to public health clinics exacerbated the length of time people suffered with, and therefore spread, the disease. Finally, environmental circumstances served to spread the disease, such as limited healthcare and destruction of public housing.

In subsequent chapters, Gladwell expounds on the three rules, first dealing with the law of few. For his main example of this rule, he uses the midnight ride of Paul Revere. Gladwell classifies those people that contribute most to epidemics in three ways. These three ways are as connectors, those who know an unusual variety of people; as mavens, those people who make it a personal ambition to know and share a large variety of information; and as salesmen, those people who encourage others to try a new idea and make it almost impossible to resist. Gladwell proposes that when an idea comes to the attention of one or more of these special classes of people, the chance of the idea tipping increases.

Revere possessed attributes of each class. He made it his mission to know the movements of the British troops. Because he knew this, people constantly brought him more information, and he became an expert in the area. He also knew the countryside and knew important people in each village through which he rode. He connected the right people and told them the information he knew. Furthermore, he convinced them that his information required immediate action, thus sparking the battles in Lexington and Concord.

Gladwell's next law, the stickiness factor, discusses what small elements make or break a new idea. The children's television program *Sesame Street* serves as the central example for this section. Joan Gantz Cooeny desired to bridge the illiteracy gap of underprivileged children so she enlisted several technology experts and child psychologists. They developed an hour-long show of short skits geared towards improving literacy. After testing pilot shows, however, they discovered the need for a few changes. Foremost, they discovered children preferred for the human actors to interact with the puppets—known as "Muppets"—and other fantasy aspects. Such a small change illustrates the thin line between tipping and not tipping.

Environmental aspects influence the final rule, the power of context. The key example revolved around a subway shooting in New York City at a time when the subway suffered from much neglect and crime. When a group of young men attempt to mug Bernhard Goetz, he reacts in defense and shoots them, killing several. Experts involved in the later cleanup of the subway system cite small, environmental aspects such as petty theft and graffiti as contributing factors to this crime.

Such a theory is named the "broken window theory," which says that broken windows on a street encourage further vandalism, until the street becomes riddled with crime. City officials began to fight crime on the subways by painting over the graffiti, and keeping the system clean of vandalism religiously. The author returns to several, earlier examples to cite the importance of context there, such as the timing of Revere's ride, midnight.

The final chapters of the book give in-depth case studies, each of which illustrates one or more aspects of the tipping point. Suicide and teen smoking receive the most attention. On the subject of teen smoking, the author points out that cigarettes themselves do not draw young people to try smoking, but rather, the "coolness" of the stereotypical smoker. The smoker, therefore, becomes a salesman.

In conclusion, the author encourages his reader, pointing out that, if the laws in the book are true, which the examples support, change is always possible.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell follows trends from their inception to their end and tries to discover why some ideas "tip" and others do not. First, Gladwell gives the three rules for the tipping point: contagiousness; the fact that little causes can have big effects; and change happens in one moment.

The author begins with a recent fashion trend that seemed to come from nowhere. Hush Puppies shoes fell in popularity to the point that the parent company decided to cancel the brand. However, when they began to appear in New York City nightclubs, designers began to sell them once again. Thus, the brand enjoyed a new birth of success. This example illustrates the three rules of epidemics: contagiousness, little cause equals big effect and change occurs in one dramatic moment.

Yawning serves as an everyday example of an epidemic, though he points out that one may overlook the full ramifications because one cannot readily grasp their exponential growth. For example, when one folds a piece of paper fifty times, that paper would be tall enough to reach the moon. However, many people cannot understand how such small actions could lead to such large results. The tipping point exists in that moment when a new idea becomes a sensation, like the moment the temperature drops enough to cause rain to turn to snow.

The thesis of the tipping point appears clearly in this introduction. The author uses a clear and personable tone to discuss his ideas. In addition, he uses a blend of personal, everyday and technical examples to illustrate the rules of his theory, thus relating well to a variety of readers.

Chapter One: The Three Rules of Epidemics

Chapter One: The Three Rules of Epidemics Summary and Analysis

The opening chapter of the book renames the three rules of epidemics in the author's own, unique language. He calls them the law of few, the stickiness factor and the power of context.

Gladwell uses an outbreak of syphilis in Baltimore, Maryland to illustrate the three rules in detail. He points out that an idea can tip from any of several directions. In each situation, though, any one rule may carry more weight than the others may.

Outbreaks of disease often draw attention by the number of people infected, and experts strive to reduce the number. Gladwell points out, though, that a few connected people serve to spread the disease. A well-known saying states that twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work. Gladwell proposes that the same rings true in disease outbreaks.

He cites several documented cases of men spreading the HIV virus to multiple partners. First, he cites the case of Darnell McGee, who admitted to sexual relations with 252 people after he knew he carried HIV. He infected at least 30 people with the virus. Gaeton Dugas, a Canadian flight attendant, claims to have slept with 2,500 partners, spreading HIV to many along his flight routes. Such people tipped HIV from a little known disease to a worldwide epidemic. Gladwell then assumes that a few key people also spread syphilis in Baltimore.

A few people cannot make an impact, though, if the message does not also carry importance. This is Gladwell's point with the stickiness factor. In the case of viruses, sometimes the contagion itself changes to become stickier. Syphilis in Baltimore bears this out: because of cut funding and lack of treatment, those suffering from the disease suffered longer, thus infecting more people around them. With treatment, they would have been contagious for only a week. Without medicine, however, the same people spread the disease for many weeks, thus making the epidemic stickier.

For example, Winston cigarettes became sticky when they used a grammatical faux pas in an advertising campaign. Because the language sounded unique, in its incorrectness people remembered the slogan and, subsequently, bought the cigarettes. The slogan made the ads stickier. A stickier ad made more money for the company.

The final aspect of Gladwell's theory lies in the final rule: the power of context. He points out that the outbreak in Baltimore slowed in the winter, when people move around less. In addition, it moved along the highways of the city. Another well-known example

Gladwell uses is the murder of Kitty Genovese. Thirty-eight people admitted to witnessing the crime, but no one called the police. Further experiments produced the same results, showing that a person reacts differently depending on their surroundings. A larger crowd diffuses responsibility.

Gladwell claims all three rules point out the cause of epidemics. Many of these early examples appear later in the book, as the rules receive further explanation. The reader may be curious, however, as the reason for Gladwell's thesis. For much of the beginning of the book, he uses only past examples.

Chapter Two: The Law of the Few: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen

Chapter Two: The Law of the Few: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen Summary and Analysis

First in the book, Gladwell explains the law of the few, which he splits further into three classes of people: connectors, mavens and salesmen. For his example, he uses Paul Rever, a man he refers to as a super connector. Before Revere's midnight ride, a stable boy overheard rumors of British troop movement. He took the information to Revere, because the locals knew Revere to be a specialist on the movements of the British troops. Revere's expertise caused people to share more information with him, thereby increasing his expertise further.

To explain connectors, the author points out examples such as chain letters or the parlor game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon," in which a person connects any actor to Bacon within six common movies. A normal person, the author cites, normally connects with those closest to him or her. Connectors, however, know many people from several different social realms.

Gladwell devised a rough quiz to test the number of people a person may know. Given a random selection of last names from the phone book, Gladwell asks a person to score himself based on the number of people he or she knows with those names. A typical score comes in around 70. Few people score over 100. Those that do are classified by Gladwell as connectors.

Revere is someone Gladwell classifies as a connector. Revere knew the right people in each town he stopped in to activate the militias. One man the author met and interviewed, Roger Horchow, connects in this way as well. He takes notes on people he meets, noting birthdays, likes and disklikes. Furthermore, he remembers people for a long time. Horchow confesses to calling up childhood friends after decades apart just to say hello. Such behaviors, Gladwell claims, are unusual. Horchow scored well over 100 on Gladwell's connector test.

Gladwell also cites interviews with Louis Weisberg of Chicago, another person Gladwell classifies as a connector. Weisberg, Gladwell explains, occupies about twelve different social circles, compared to a normal person who only occupies a few. Weisberg, then, connects people from the business world to people in the artistic world, because she spends time in each. Furthermore, Weisberg thinks nothing of going an extra distance to meet an interesting person. While an average person would miss a new trend or idea, such as a restaurant or musical form, Weisberg discovers them because she unselfishly goes out of her way for people she desires to meet.

Not only do connectors know many people, they also operate in a variety of social niches. In the instance of the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, consider using instead John Wayne. Though Wayne starred in far more movies, he does not connect as well because he played mainly in westerns with the same actors repeatedly.

A person of one's own social environment rarely starts a trend, then, because those two people share the same information. A connector, however, may introduce a new idea in a niche where it was previously unknown. As Gladwell points out, the closer an idea or product gets to a connector, the more powerful that product or idea becomes.

Mavens also appear under the law of the few. While connectors collect relationships, mavens collect information. They serve the function of keeping the market honest because they are the few that make sure prices reflect current news and trends.

Mavens not only collect information, they share it; in this they become more social than an information expert, according to Gladwell. In fact, he describes mavens as pathologically helpful. Mark Alpert stands out as the author's personal example of a maven. Upon referral of another professional, Gladwell interviews Alpert. Immediately, Alpert offers advice about dining, hotels and cars. A maven's habit of offering advice unselfishly draws attention. In that, a maven may start an epidemic.

However, mavens are not often persuaders. They offer advice, but when a person takes time to offer rebuttals for subsequent arguments, that person is a salesman. This class of people assures those receiving a new message that the message holds importance to them.

The expert salesman for Gladwell is Tom Gau, a successful financial planner. His arguments for hiring a financial planner have proven so successful that an author interviewed Gau and transcribed his most common questions and answers in a handbook for financial planners. To investigate further what makes some people more convincing than others, the author turned to more research. After all, he noted that Gau possessed a personality that could sell anything.

Studies by Brian Mullen of Syracuse University showed that of the three major news outlets, Peter Jennings showed a bias toward the Republican candidates in the presidential elections of the 1980s. Furthermore, frequent viewers of Jennings were more likely to vote for Reagan. Such results show the importance of the smallest of conversational cues. Other studies showed that the simple act of a person nodding their head while listening to a tape made them more likely to agree with the contents of the tape.

Such habits also appear in what the author calls motor mimicry, where a person smiles in response to another's smile. Not everyone's expressions are equal, however. Select few people communicate their emotions more strongly than others do.

Psychologist Howard Friedman developed what he called the Affective test to measure this very thing. He noticed that the higher a person scored, the more charismatic that

person was and the more they shared their emotions with others. Gau scored 116 out of 117.

Such research appears contrary to what many people believe, however. Traditionally, people assume that emotions reside in a person, largely unaffected by the outside world. Friedman's research supports the theory that emotion comes more from one's surroundings than from inside one's person. In Friedman's experiment, subjects first took the Affective test. He then paired those scoring highest with those scoring lowest. He theorized that, just as high scorers communicated emotion well, low scorers took on another's emotions readily. The pairs sat in a room in silence for a prescribed amount of time. After the experiment, another survey showed that the emotions of the high scorers reflected the emotions of the low scorer in the same room. This was the case regardless of whether the emotions were joy or grief.

Flashing back to the first example of this chapter, Gladwell points out that one super connector and maven, Revere, sparked the American Revolution and several key salesmen convinced the local militiamen that Revere's message was important.

The depth to which the author explains each point greatly aids the reader in visualizing the concept of the power of the few. The reader will soon come to expect the frequent flashbacks to previous examples, as they expand with respect to each new rule that is explained.

Gladwell seems to deem connectors most important in communicating and tipping a new idea. He spends the bulk of this chapter discussing connectors, with mavens second and salesmen last. That said, Gladwell also admits that one person, such as Revere, often exhibits characteristics of two or more of the personalities discussed. The possibility exists, then, for redundancy in further embellishment.

Chapter Three: The Stickiness Factor: *Sesame Street, Blue's Clues*, and the Educational Virus

Chapter Three: The Stickiness Factor: Sesame Street, Blue's Clues, and the Educational Virus Summary and Analysis

According to Gladwell, stickiness measures the degree to which a product or idea stays with the audience. To illustrate this concept, the author uses *Sesame Street*.

Early in television's history, few people believed TV held any educational value. By its nature, viewers remain passive while watching TV. Joan Gantz Cooney, though, enlisted the help of several technology experts and child psychologists to create an educational television series that would "stick." Her motivation lay in the increasing gap in literacy levels between upper and lower class children. To that end, they slotted the hour-long show on public television stations. Stickiness, however, directly correlates with the impact of small, calculated changes. Wunderman, advertising agent for Columbia Record Club, increased the stickiness of his ads simply by drawing a link between televised and print ads when he encourages viewers to look for a treasure box in the magazine ads.

A second example of a small but effective change exists in the research of Howard Levanthal. Levanthal distributed pamphlets about tetanus shots to seniors at Yale University. The students received three different pamphlets: low fear, giving information only; moderate fear, giving more details of the risks of tetanus; and high fear, giving both descriptions and pictures of tetanus victims. Levanthal found no increase in the amount of students who came to receive a tetanus vaccine among the higher fear categories. The research did show, however, that when each type of pamphlet included a map to the campus health center, each category saw an increase in attendance to the vaccine clinic. Initially, Levanthal assumed such information unnecessary, because the test subjects, seniors, knew the college layout well already. Gladwell points out that when information becomes practical and personal it becomes stickier.

Early research for *Sesame Street* dispelled a number of myths about the way in which children view television. First, researchers found that flashing lights and bright colors do not, on their own, attract a child's attention. Neither did the presence of toys impact a child's comprehension. Rather, researchers noticed that children watch what they understand and look away when they become bored.

Ed Palmer developed an invaluable tool for *Sesame Street*, called the distracter. This device included a screen next to the television showing a *Sesame Street* episode. The

second screen flashed pictures at regular intervals, and observers noted when the children watched the pictures rather than the episode. Any episode that did not hold the children's attention for a high enough percentage of time received more work before it aired.

A second type of research that *Sesame Street* employed in an effort to make the show stickier is that of Barbara Flagg's eye movement sensor. By tracking a viewer's eye movement, the researchers noted whether a viewer tracked the appropriate action in the screen.

In Gladwell's example, the researchers at *Sesame Street* compared an episode where a character danced around and letters entered from various points of the screen. Though the episode held the children's attention, the eye movement sensor found that the children watched the bouncing character, not the letters, as intended. In a less flashy episode, in which the letters entered from left to write, children paid equal attention, according to the distracter. However, the eye movement sensor found that the children focused more on the letters in the second episode. Researchers found that by focusing on the appropriate part of an episode the intended message becomes stickier.

It seems, though, that Gladwell believes stickiness can always be improved upon. Todd Kessler of Nickelodeon desired to make a show that would be even stickier with children than *Sesame Street*. *Sesame Street* limited itself by appealing to an adult sense of humor, in efforts to appease parents that watch with their children. *Blue's Clues*, however, made children their only focus. They sought to make a show that would be more interactive and show more of a story line than the episodic *Sesame Street*. Researchers prior to *Blue's Clues* believed that children could not follow a plot. However, research into the language development of young children, as in the Emily example used by Gladwell, shows that children frame much of what they learn in the form of a storyline.

Another idea that aids in the stickiness of *Blue's Clues* is repetition. The same episode airs for five days, thereby allowing the children to grow familiar, ergo comfortable, with the material and grasp even more of the concepts. Executives resisted such an approach at first. However, one of the writers pointed out that his daughter watched the same episode 14 times in a row. Repeated exposure allows the young viewers to draw even more meaning from a single episode. Furthermore, unlike adult viewers, children appreciate concepts already familiar to them. Therefore, the repetition served to make the show stickier yet.

In relating the stickiness factor to the rule of epidemics that states small causes equal big effects, Gladwell focuses on seemingly trivial aspects of each show that produced big success. The chapter on stickiness, though longer than the previous, pales in comparison to the next two chapters, both on the power of context. However, the author still fails to mention how the reader may use the included information.

Chapter Four: The Power of Context (Part One): Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime

Chapter Four: The Power of Context (Part One): Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime Summary and Analysis

To first illustrate the power of context, the author introduces Bernie Goetz. On the New York City subway, several young boys approach Goetz and attempt to mug him. Immediately, Goetz pulls a gun and shoots the young men. At this time, crime on the subway happened frequently. In fact, many people of New York City hailed Goetz as a hero who did what others only wished they could do. Context, according to the author, made all the difference for Goetz. In another place, his behavior would have been different, as would the perception of the community.

A decade later, however, the volume of crime on the subway decreased considerably. Moreover, crime throughout the city fell dramatically. Many cite a change in three areas: crack trade, age and economy. The author, however, pointed that these three trends occurred slowly over time, whereas the crime dropped off sharply. Therefore, he looks for another cause for the reversal.

The answer may lie in the "broken window" theory. In this theory, Gladwell explains that broken windows give permission for more vandalism until the area becomes anarchist. The presence of vandalism in a neighborhood incites people to commit other more serious acts that they would never believe they might get away with in a nicer, cleaner neighborhood. In such an area, the environment becomes the connector that allows the criminals to run rampant.

David Gunn became director the of the New York City subway system at the height of the crime problems. His first area of change became the graffiti that plagued the cars and stations. Getting rid of the graffiti, according to the broken window theory, no longer gives the criminals permission to commit other crimes. A task force developed a zero tolerance policy for graffiti. They guarded the cars closely and immediately painted over any defaced property.

After the graffiti came under control, the next obstacle became fare beating. People developed many different ways to skip paying the entrance fares of the subway system. Furthermore, police patrolling the area often failed to arrest fare skippers, because the process involved a trip to police headquarters that took all day. Gunn created a mobile processing unit for the scores arrested in a day. With the turnover rate much lower, officers began to see the need for arresting fare beaters. Furthermore, when they

checked those arrested, they often found outstanding warrants for other crimes. Such results made the new procedures much stickier for the officers.

The context of the subway explains not only the actions of the would-be muggers, but also the actions of Goetz himself. According to psychology, Goetz typified a man that could snap. He grew up underprivileged and suffered violence throughout his life. Weeks prior to the shooting on the subway, a man mugged Goetz outside of his apartment building. This incident spurred him to carry a gun. However, Gladwell seems to resist the idea that the problem was psychological alone and, therefore, unavoidable. Instead, if his environment contributed to his crime, changing the environment prevents the crime.

Zimbardo's experiment in the 1970s proves Gladwell's theory on this point. Zimbardo converted space at Stanford University to a mock prison. He enlisted psychologically stable men to serve as guards and inmates. He instructed the guards to maintain order at any cost. The previously mild-mannered men began threatening and nearly torturing the inmates, including showering them with fire hoses.

After just six days, Zimbardo closed the experiment due to the tremendous psychological pressure on the subjects, who were becoming increasingly violent towards one another. A few were even released earlier, suffering from deep mental distress. As a result, Zimbardo theorized that some situations overpower a person's predispositions.

Additional experiments cited by Gladwell test honesty and charity. The tests fail to pick out people that always exhibit these traits. In each study, the test subjects respond differently when the variables change. In one study, a group of seminary students prepare to give a lecture on the parable of the Good Samaritan. When told they are late, students pass by a man in distress, while others, believing they were early, stopped to help.

A second study tested a large group of schoolchildren in order to pick out an honest group among them. Schoolchildren, who did not cheat in earlier studies, did cheat in the same tests given six months later. Gladwell concludes that a person's attitudes reflect the environment more than any inborn or familial tendency.

Gladwell, therefore, comes across as a proponent of a nurture-bred personality rather than nature born. He gives little credence to one's upbringing; repeatedly, he downplays the impact parents have in their children's morals and attitudes. Peers, Gladwell states, effect a person's reactions to a given situation more than parental wishes or guidance.

Chapter Five: The Power of Context (Part Two): The Magic Number One Hundred and Fifty

Chapter Five: The Power of Context (Part Two): The Magic Number One Hundred and Fifty Summary and Analysis

To explain this second side of the power of context, Gladwell asks the audience to consider the success of Rebecca Wells' novel *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. The novel, Wells' second, enjoyed only moderate success in hardback format. Once it was released in paperback, the novel took off slowly, but soon reached the bestseller list. Book clubs became the key to Wells' success.

Book clubs, Gladwell explains, create the best environment for such a book. The book lends itself to a book club environment due to its highly relatable subject matter and multifaceted plot. By their nature, book clubs remain small and close knit groups. Just this type of group, Gladwell explains, launches an idea into popularity.

Most fundamentally, Gladwell points out that ideas enjoy more success in groups. Viewers enjoy movies more in packed cinemas that empty ones. According to Gladwell, however, the size of the group matters greatly. In fact, too large of a group limits the communicability of the idea.

The first example of this lies with Minister John Wesley. Wesley started his Methodist movement by teaching and training core groups across Great Britain and America. Wesley served as connector for the groups, finding that with groups of only a dozen or so, his ideas gained credibility and, therefore, became stickier. In any new area, if Wesley could only gather a small group of converts, he could spread his idea more quickly than he ever could on his own. Wesley, therefore, illustrates the power of groups, even when small in size.

Now, Gladwell delves further into the topic of a magic number. First, he explains channel capacity, which states that a person's brain only remembers six or seven types of a particular item. Because of this, Gladwell explains, telephone numbers contain only seven digits. The average person can name only names six or seven types of toilet paper, airlines, or other product.

On a personal level, however, a typical person claims about 12 close relationships. Having more than this would entail too much emotional pressure, along with the time it takes to know someone that well. Emotionally as well as logistically, most people cannot maintain more than 12 close relationships.

To explain the reason for this, Gladwell turns to monkeys, more specifically, the social habits of different species of monkeys. Researchers claim that the larger and animal's neocortex is, the more capacity the animal has for social interactions. In fact, British anthropologist Robin Dunbar developed a ratio between the size of an animal's neocortex and the size of the animal's social group. When Dunbar plugged in the size of a human's neocortex, the corresponding social group size calculated at 150.

History supports this number as well. One religious community, the Hutterites, much like the Amish, split their villages at 150 and have done so for centuries. One community leader of the Hutterites claims their community values and desired sense of cooperation begins to diminish when the community becomes larger than 150 members. Throughout history, armies also organized in groups of less than 200, roughly reflecting Dunbar's findings.

The business world also benefits from this concept. Gladwell visited Gore Associates, a specialized clothing and technology company that splits into separate divisions and buildings when any arm of the company grows beyond 150. As a result, the company needs no management structure. Every office appears the same; every employee refers to himself as an associate.

The reader may be most confused on this point. Gladwell himself admits this rule creates a paradox. In order for *Ya-Ya* to become an epidemic, it needed not one large group, but thousands of small groups, in the form of book clubs. The same is true of Wesley's Methodist movement and Gore's business success. In summary, not only can a small group be powerful, it may be more powerful than a large group, by virtue of the close emotional ties of the members.

Chapter Six: Case Study: Rumors, Sneakers, and the Power of Translation

Chapter Six: Case Study: Rumors, Sneakers, and the Power of Translation Summary and Analysis

In each set of case studies, Gladwell points out that they illustrate his rules, but each illustrates them differently, having some rules more prominent than others. Still, each study involves only trends that occurred in the past. Yet this chapter goes further in trying to explain how to predict a future trend.

Airwalk began as a niche company geared toward selling shoes to skateboarders. When they decided to take their product mainstream, however, they tipped into a youth fashion fad.

Early research into the flow of trends through a society mapped the use of new hybrid corn in the Plains states. Experts map any new trend in virtually the same way. First, innovators try the idea. Following them are the early adapters. Next comes the early majority, followed by the late majority and, last, the laggards. The innovators and early adapters represent visionaries, often people who operate small companies and are accustomed to taking big risks. The early majority represents larger companies, who only take calculated risks that offer adequate benefits. They observe the innovators and early adapters to assess risk and benefits.

Connectors, mavens and salesmen bridge the gap between each of the above groups. They also serve as translators, showing how an innovation benefits each person's situation. Often, the early majority modifies the trend of the innovator and early adaptor to make the trend more palatable. Consider the following example.

Gladwell tells the story of a Chinese professor working for an American university. While on holiday in Maine, he inquired of a particular mountain: one where he could take pictures of the scenery. The context of his visit, however, influenced the locals' opinions of the man. During World War II, many Americans, especially those in confined, rural areas such as Maine, harbored suspicions of outsiders. A rumor quickly spread about the man, and it followed a predictable pattern. First, the teller leveled the details. He became an Asian man, but no mention was made of his kind temperament. Second, he or she sharpened the details. People claimed the man was actually Japanese. Last, he or she assimilated the details to make them applicable to the listener. People soon believed the man to be a Japanese spy; they believed this because many of them had friends or sons in the war. Often, rumors travel along this same path.

This example serves to explain how an idea translates to fit into the majority. When a product or service tips from an innovative few to a majority, it also follows the same lines. Consider, again, the STD problem in Baltimore. To combat this problem, medical

professionals developed the needle exchange program. Their idea involved drug users bringing dirty needles to a specific place to exchange for clean needles, no questions asked. Experts doubted the success of the program, however, because they doubted the addicts would plan to get enough needles for the week. They anticipated exchanged one or two needles per person visiting the exchange van.

What happened, though, was that a few innovators brought duffle bags full of dirty needles. They exchanged the bags for clean needles, which they took to the drug houses and sold for one dollar a piece. The needle sellers served as a valuable connector between the medical community and the drug users. The physicians sought to use these connectors to spread other ideas of awareness and protection.

For the Airwalk Company, their ads translated their product into something to which the mainstream consumer could relate. For this, they employed DeeDee Gordon. Gordon enlisted the help of key innovators to predict upcoming trends. She kept in contact with innovators, young people who tried the newest ideas, from all over the globe. She knew, for instance, when young people became interested in freeing Tibet. This gave the company time to develop a product. When they released the new style, often the new trend would just be hitting the mainstream. Furthermore, the ads and product served to give the emerging idea credibility and tip it into the mainstream as well.

To ensure their success among the skateboarders, their base market, Airwalk kept specialty shoes that were only available in the skating shops that first carried their product. After some time at the top, however, they mainstreamed every shoe. When they lost their baseline support of the skateboarders, their popularity quickly fell.

The next chapter, however, finally discusses a current trend. This leads the reader to believe that the basis for Gladwell's research and the reason for such a novel lies in finding an end in that topic: to the rise of teen smoking.

Chapter Seven: Case Study: Suicide, Smoking and the Search for the Unsticky Cigarette

Chapter Seven: Case Study: Suicide, Smoking and the Search for the Unsticky Cigarette Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 begins with the story of Sima, a Micronesian boy who committed suicide after his father rebuked him for forgetting to bring home a knife for the family business. Such a case has become commonplace in Micronesia, a country were suicide used to be unheard of. However, suicide is now so commonplace that the horror of it barely registers and teens fail to see the seriousness of the practice. On this point, Gladwell draws a parallel with teen smoking in America.

The failure of many anti-smoking campaigns has been the focus on the cigarette. Gladwell points out that smokers know the risks of smoking, yet they continue. In one survey, smokers guessed cigarettes to be more dangerous than they actually are. Even as the amount of advertising against smoking increases, teen smoking goes up as well. The psyche of a teen is such that the more an adult says no, the more a teen wants to try the forbidden activity. Gladwell suggests that a closer comparison to the suicide epidemic in Micronesia may shed new light on the teen smoking problem in America.

At a time when suicide was still rare in Micronesia, one unnamed boy suffered the emotional distress of a love triangle. When the pressure from his two girlfriends became too much, he took his own life, leaving a note detailing the reason for his decision. The death of the young man from a well-know family made headlines in Micronesia. Soon, another boy in a similar situation also killed himself. Suicide became the answer for people suffering from relationship problems.

Such an occurrence relates to the broken window theory; researchers discovered that news coverage of suicide directly correlated with a spike in the same type of deaths. In fact, single person suicides also sparked a rise in single car fatalities, while murder suicides brought on a rise in car accidents with multiple deaths. One researcher theorized that many such accidents were actually persons committing suicide.

The permission giving, however, remains specific. If a young person commits suicide, other young people follow suit. If a man commits suicide over a lover's quarrel, other men will seek the same fate. One person's suicide permits another to take care of the same type of problem in the same way.

What, then, gives teens this permission to smoke? Socially, smoking appears sophisticated. In addition, experts identify habitual smokers with a specific personality. They are extroverted, though honest, because they care little about what others may think of them. Teens feel draw to this type of person. Thus it is the power of these few magnetic personalities that draws teens to smoking.

The stickiness of cigarettes, however, remains innate in the cigarette itself. A person's initial reaction to nicotine serves as the greatest predictor for their smoking patterns. After reviewing research about the effects of deadly nicotine in rats, Gladwell surmises that a person with a greater threshold for nicotine harbors more of a tendency to smoke on a regular basis. A breed of rats particularly sensitive to nicotine poisoning drink less water laced with nicotine at toxic levels. Somehow, they know to avoid it. In the same way, a person with sensitivity to the poisonous nature of nicotine will not enjoy smoking as much as a person with a higher tolerance for the substance.

Thus, Gladwell points out, the way to prevent teen smoking is to limit the stickiness; in other words, prevent the contagion from reaching the youth. Gladwell mentions two methods, though he admits each presents substantial challenges. They are, first, to prevent those extroverted smokers, the permission givers, from smoking. These smokers, however, lack motivation to do so. Second, Gladwell suggests encouraging teens to look elsewhere for what is "cool." However, this may present more difficulty, because once an adult suggests something, that thing is no longer cool.

Another problem, Gladwell points out, is the lack of input from parents. Some experts have suggested that poor modeling at home influences the children to smoke. However, adopted children do not follow this pattern. In fact, children of smoking parents, adopted by nonsmokers, show more of a link to their biological parents' habits. Gladwell theorizes, then, that the children may inherit the smoking personality from their parents, but they do not show tendency to model their parents' behaviors.

Turning back to the examples given earlier in the book, Gladwell seeks a smaller cause that may have a large impact on this epidemic. First, he points to a link between smoking and mental disorder. Nicotine, Gladwell explains, acts as an antidepressant. In testing new antidepressants, subjects reported an unexpected side effect of a lessened desire for cigarettes. Therefore, many smokers may just be self-medicating for an unrealized depression disorder. Therefore, authentic treatment for a mental disorder may decrease the need for nicotine. However, giving up cigarettes poses a real threat to the person's mental health, without a plan in place to combat the resulting emotional distress.

Another complementary area that Gladwell suggests attacking is that of timing. Teens rarely become regular smokers. It typically takes three years for a person to become addicted, when that person starts in his or her teen years. Most young people do the equivalent to social drinking: they smoke around their friends that smoke. To become a regular smoker, a person must reach their addiction threshold. A person reaches his or her nicotine threshold by smoking a given amount of nicotine in one day. Gladwell proposes that if companies would only lower the amount of nicotine in a cigarette, it

would take many more cigarettes for a person to become addicted, thereby lessening the likelihood that a social smoker would become a regular smoker in their teen years.

Using the rules of Gladwell's tipping point, there is no need to fight the whole problem. Instead, opponents can concentrate on fighting key factors of stickiness. Gladwell suggests not fighting to stop teen experimentation, which would be difficult, but to make the experimentation safer, which cuts down on lifelong health risks.

In this chapter, Gladwell does not contradict himself, though this may seem to be the case. Instead, he first tries to solve the problem through conventional rules of epidemics. When this proves to be problematic, he suggests following his own theories of the tipping point and concentrating on smaller aspects of the problem. The reader will see where this method proves effective. However, it only serves to help a majority of teens. Therefore, some absolutist may find the suggested solutions lacking.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: Focus, Test and Believe

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: Focus, Test and Believe Summary and Analysis

In the conclusion, many of the previously mentioned studies and examples appear again, as may be expected. However, Gladwell opens with a new illustration.

Georgia Sadler desired to spread information about breast cancer and diabetes in the African American community. First, she tried a large-scale approach. She offered meetings in churches after the weekly service. Church represented a place where her audience—young, African American women—gathered frequently in large groups. However, she found few attended and those who did were already reasonably educated. She turned to a smaller approach, then, and found a much larger result.

When Sadler sought for a venue that communicated with as many African American women as their church, she found the hair salon. She realizes that the women of her intended audience spent much time at the salon and put much confidence in their stylist. Sadler began educating the stylists about breast cancer and diabetes. She gave them a steady stream of stories through which to relate the information. Soon, Sadler saw a marked increase in attendance to breast cancer and diabetes screening clinics.

Gladwell admits that some view his principles as a Band Aid solution. While sometimes such a solution proves inadequate, Gladwell offers that sometimes a Band Aid is all one needs. True solutions, therefore, need not be comprehensive, only focused and flexible.

In that statement lays many of the fundamentals of the tipping point. One must maintain flexibility in one's ways and beliefs. People tend to fail to see the impact of small changes because their focus itself remains too narrow. Gladwell closes by stating that nature itself exhibits potential, not in spite of its volatility, but because of it. In a nutshell, Gladwell exhorts the reader that "change is possible."

Characters

John Zenilman

John Potterat

Darnell "Boss Man' McGee

Jaap Goudsmit

Paul Revere

Stanley Milgram

Roger Horchow

Linda Price

Mark Alpert

Howard Friedman

Joan Gantz Cooney

Wunderman

Daniel Anderson

Barbara Flagg

Emily

Alice Wilder

Bernhard Goetz

William Bratton

Philip Zimbardo

Rebecca Wells

Robin Dunbar

Deedee Gordon

Gordon Allport

Sima

David Philips

Georgia Sadler

Objects/Places

Hush Puppies Shoes

The author begins the book with the story of Hush Puppies, a shoe line that almost went under. However, a few key people at just the right time became interested in the shoes, leading to a resurgence in the popularity of the shoes. This occurrence demonstrates the laws of the tipping point.

NYC Subway Cars

The graffiti that covered the old cars in the NYC subway system served to give permission to the vandals and criminals that frequented the system. Thus, vigilantly cleaning up the cars served to curb other, more serious crimes on the subway.

Dirty Needles

When Baltimore instituted its needle exchange program, they envisioned addicts exchanging needles one at a time; they doubted such actions would make an impact in the spread of disease. However, they found that a few needle brokers collected hundreds of dirty needles, exchanged them and sold the clean ones in drug houses for a dollar a piece. Thus, a few key people made the needle exchange a success.

Financial Planner's Script Book

Tom Gau serves as one of Gladwell's examples of a maven. In his financial planning business, Gau enjoys success because of his talent for relating his rather complicated business to his customers in a caring way. Such success sparked a person to write a book in which Gau's responses to common questions about financial planning are recorded.

Television

In its advent, experts thought television possessed little educational value. Researchers have found, though, that TV not only transmits knowledge actively, such as a young child watching *Sesame Street*, it also engages passive viewers and transmits even emotions. Researchers theorize just that after noticing that voters seemed to notice Peter Jennings' bias toward Republican presidential candidates in the elections of the 1980s.

Muppets

At the conception of *Sesame Street*, researchers cautioned against mixing real and fictional characters, such as the Muppets, because they feared children could not differentiate between the two. However, research quickly showed that the children responded better when the human actors interacted with the Muppet actors.

Tetanus Brochures

In an effort to encourage seniors of Yale University to receive tetanus vaccinations, researchers developed three brochures, which they classified as low fear, moderate fear and high fear. They noticed little increase in response in the high fear, more graphic pamphlets. However, when they added a map of the campus, which they assumed would be useless to a senior, they noticed a marked increase in attendance to the vaccination clinics. Such results emphasize Gladwell's theory that small, seemingly insignificant changes sometimes produce drastic effects.

Distracter

Researchers for *Sesame Street* developed a machine they called the distracter. While a child watched *Sesame Street*, another screen, next to the TV screen, showed pictures that changed at predetermined intervals. They then observed to see when the child glanced away from the TV to the pictures on the second screen. An episode was deemed a success if the child glanced away for little of the time.

Airwalks

Marketing researchers for Airwalk used the principle of epidemics to market their shoes, previously geared to skateboarders. They closely followed trends; then, they released shoes that mirrored those trends at their peak. Such attention to social epidemics caused the shoe to be a youth clothing sensation.

Cigarette

Much of Gladwell's research comes to a point in the area of teenage smoking. He proposes that researchers in this area long looked at the wrong angle. He points out that an "unsticky" cigarette will not immediately cure the problem, because the allure does not lie with the cigarette itself, but with the personality behind it.

Themes

Importance of Little Events

According to Gladwell, little events determine much of what happens in life, even though the big events receive most of one's attention. Furthermore, the major events that gain attention actually occur because of some little event that sparked, or tipped, them into occurrence.

The first example given in the book discusses the rise in popularity of Hush Puppies brand shoes, which came not from a large marketing scheme, but because of a select group of youth in New York City that bought the used shoes in a thrift store. In this way, Gladwell traces tipping trends not back to the point that they tipped, thus giving credit to that major occurrence. Instead, he traces that major occurrence even farther back, to discover just what smaller event brought about the major change that caught the public's attention.

The fall of crime in New York City also served a prime example of this theme. One may assume a great police presence prevented criminals in the subway. Instead, the author proposes with much supporting testimony, the cleanup in the subway started with the removal of graffiti, bringing about the change in attitude and therefore actions in the subway.

Power of One

Many of the themes of this book relate closely to one another. Whereas in the first theme, the occurrence themselves held importance, for this theme the people themselves serve the most.

The power of one draws many readers into the theories of this book. When just one person can affect great change, no one person remains insignificant. The smallest push may tip the next big idea into popularity.

However, not just any person can produce such change. As the author explains, such vast change requires a special person. The greatest example the author gives is that of Paul Revere. Single-handedly, Revere road the American countryside and warned the colonists of the invading British troops. Few historians argue that this one man greatly affected the outcome of the struggle for freedom in the colonies.

Thus, the right kind of person, called a maven, connector or salesmen by this author, serves as the one that may tip an idea through his or her ability to spread that idea to the proper people and convince them of its importance.

Given these two theories, therefore, the right idea need only meet up with the right person to affect great change, thus leading into the final theory of this book.

Change is Always Possible

In the conclusion, the author summarizes the theories and admonishes the reader that, though it may not always be apparent, change is always possible. Even when crime seemed darkest in New York City, the right person in leadership and buckets of paint served to cover graffiti and curb crime on the subway.

Change was also possible for a company like Hush Puppies that nearly went under. Even though they were not trying to market their product to hip youth in the city, the collision of the product with the right people changed the outlook of an entire company.

The author encourages the reader look in the theories of this book, as a way to affect change for the better. Though the author illustrates the principles of *The Tipping Point* with negative occurrences sometimes, such as the outbreaks of STDs in Baltimore, they can also tip society for the better, as in the ministry of John Wesley.

The author admonishes the reader, however, to look not to large events as a signal for change, but small, seemingly insignificant occurrences. Everyday happenings may in fact serve as harbingers for life altering changes.

Style

Perspective

In this book, the author intends to exploit the rules of epidemics. He encourages the reader to pay attention to the little details that cause an outbreak of a new product or idea. In doing so, the reader may be able to introduce and escalate ideas that benefit society.

Gladwell shows much research in his efforts to communicate his ideas adequately. The time invested points to a life's work, rather than a passing and temporary interest. The author gains expertise from interviews with various experts and witnesses. Gladwell inserts with much variety interviews with financial advisors in Texas and tapes of monologues of children in New York.

Though Gladwell extends the premises of his theory to any change-driven reader, the most receptive audience would be young adults, who respond positively to change. In anticipation of such an audience, Gladwell refers to examples with which the audience would be familiar, such as *Sesame Street*. Immediately, the intended audience relates to the theories of tipping. Once he gains their attention, the author issues a few calls to action. First, he simply encourages the reader to pay attention. He implores them to see that little things around them affect society individually and collectively. Second, Gladwell encourages the reader to use the theories of this book to affect change in their own world. The very fact that little changes lead to major changes opens the possibility for any person to affect change in his or her world.

Tone

Unexpectedly, the author uses a subjective tone for this book. At first glance, the material seems quite intellectual, which often leads to dry reading. However, the direct address by the author, using the first person point of view, makes the material more personal for the reader.

By referring to himself in the first person, the author makes it possible to insert his opinions about the topics and people he discusses. Most of the readers, however, will agree with most of the author's opinions. Such relationship between the reader and the author draws a tighter connection between the viewer and the material.

Often, the author strives to make the language of his research understandable to his reader. He defines terms, often coining his own vocabulary. Memorable words such as *salesman* and *maven* stick with the reader because of their quirkiness. New terms, however, receive definition nearly immediately.

The rich language, personable tone and fast pace serve to draw the reader to the material. The reader follows along, wanting to see the next example. An intrigued reader

desires to find out what a "sticky cigarette" is and how it relates to a book that also talks at length about STDs and Paul Revere.

Structure

The author arranges the book into eight chapters plus an introduction. Each chapter also breaks into several parts after its own introduction, much like a thesis. The opening chapters serve to introduce the three aspects of the tipping point; each aspect receives its own chapter. Subsequent chapters discuss detailed case studies, illustrating one or more aspects of the tipping point.

The structure works well for many readers. It breaks complex theories into manageable chunks. Such arrangement also aids in referring back to earlier points, as the case studies becomes more complex. The reader must pay close attention, however, from beginning to end, because earlier examples often appear repeatedly, and many times without warning.

Quotes

"These three characteristics—one, contagiousness; two, the fact that little causes can have big effects; and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment—are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade-school classroom or the flue attacks every winter." p. 9

"Why is it that some ideas or behaviors or products start epidemics and others don't? And what can we do to deliberately start and control positive epidemics of our own?" p. 14

"Epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself, and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating." p. 18

"When it comes to epidemics, though, this disproportionality becomes even more extreme; a tiny percentage of people do the majority of the work." P. 19

"Stickiness means that a message makes an impact." P. 25

"But it is safe to say that word of mouth is—even in this age of mass communications and multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns—still the most important form of human communication." P. 32

"When Weisberg looks out at the world or when Roger Horchow sits next to you on an airplane, hey don't see the same world that he rest of us see. They see possibility and while most of us are busily choosing whom we would like to know, and rejecting the people who don't look right or who live out near the airport, or whom we haven't seen in sixty-five years, Lois and Roger like them all." P. 53

"What make people like Mark Alpert so important in starting epidemics? Obviously, they know things that the rest of us don't. They read more magazines than the rest of us, more newspapers, and they may be the only people who read junk mail." P. 67

"Mavens are really information brokers, sharing and trading what they know." P. 69

"But the essence of a salesman is that, on some level, they cannot be resisted." P. 84

"And once the advice became practical and personal, it became memorable." P. 98

"Kids don't watch when they are stimulated and look away when they are bored. They watch when they understand and look away when they are confused." P. 102

"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." P. 110

"*Blue's Clues* may be one of the stickiest television shows ever made." P. 112

"It was only a small change. But a small change is often all that is takes." P. 131

"Worrying about graffiti at a time when the entire system was close to collapse seems as pointless as scrubbing the decks of the titanic as it head toward the icebergs. But Gunn insisted." P. 142

"Goetz's bullets, Rubin concludes, were "aimed at targets that existed as much in his past as in the present." " p. 149

"Zimbardo's conclusion was that there are specific situations so powerful that they can overwhelm our inherent predispositions." P. 154

"The lesson of *Ya-Ya* and John Wesley is that small, close-knit groups have the power to magnify the epidemic potential of a message or idea." P. 174

"What Mavens and Connectors and Salesmen do to an idea in order to make it contagious is to alter it in such a sway that extraneous details are dropped and other are exaggerated so that ht message itself comes to acquire a deeper meaning." P. 203

" "When we became bigger, that's when we should have paid more attention to the details and kept a good buzz going, so when people said you guys are sellouts, you guys went mainstream, you suck, we could have said, you know what, we don't." " p. 215

" "Thus as suicide grows more frequent in these communities the idea itself acquires a certain familiarity if not fascination to young men, and the lethality of the act seems to be trivialized." " P. 219

"Smokers aren't smokers because they underestimate the risks of smoking. They smoke even though they overestimate the risk of smoking." P. 221

"The kind of contagion Phillips is talking about isn't something rational or even necessarily conscious. It's not like a persuasive argument. It's something much more subtle than that." P. 223

"Just as Tom Gau could, through the persuasive force of his personality, serve as a Tipping Point in a word-of-mouth epidemic, the people who die in highly publicized suicides—whose deaths give others "permission" to die—serve as the Tipping Points in suicide epidemics." P. 224

"Smoking was never cool. *Smokers* are cool." P. 233

"It is simply to say that what makes smoking sticky is completely different from the kinds of things that make it contagious." P. 238

"But, because of the reduction of nicotine levels below the addiction threshold, the habit would no longer be sticky. Cigarette smoking would be less like the flue and more like the common cold: easily caught but easily defeated." P. 250

"We think people are different, but not that different." P. 258

"What must underlie successful epidemics, in the end, is a bedrock of belief that change is possible, that people can radically transform their behavior or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus." P. 258

Topics for Discussion

How can the principles of *The Tipping Point* be applied to your life?

Do you feel the case studies mentioned in this book adequately illustrate the author's main point?

What are some variables that the author may have overlooked in his explanation of this theory?

Give an additional example of an epidemic, one not already used, that follows the rules of this book.

Why did the author choose to discuss the examples he chose? Who is his intended audience?

Did this book influence the way you look at small occurrences in your life? Explain.

Who do you know that is an example of a connector, maven or salesman? Give specific examples.

Which is the most important age group in selling a new idea, according to the theories in this book? Explain.

How would you use the theories in this book to promote a new soft drink?