

# How to Start a Revolution

Summary<sup>1</sup> paraphrasing the main ideas in Malcolm Gladwell's book: "The Tipping Point"

## THE TIPPING POINT IS:

- That one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once.
- The moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point, a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is a certainty. Epidemics...
- Tip b/c of the extraordinary efforts of a few select carriers. But they also sometimes tip when something happens to transform the epidemic agent itself.
  1. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.
  2. Are another example of geometric progression: when a virus spreads through a population, it doubles and doubles again into infinity.
  3. 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:
    - They (Epidemics) have clear examples of contagious behavior.
    - They both have little changes that make big effects.
    - It takes only the smallest of changes to shatter an epidemic's equilibrium.
    - They happen in a hurry.
- This is the most important trait, b/c 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.
- Epidemics involve straightforward simple things; a "product" (I put this in quotes b/c Gladwell writes this book using mostly marketing/business ideas. However, I see it as a way to spark revolution.) and a message.
- In order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first.
- Contagiousness is in larger part a function of the messenger. Stickiness is primarily a property of the message.

## THE LAW OF THE FEW

There are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting epidemics. All you have to do is find them. With an epidemic, a tiny majority of the people do the work. Once critical factor in epidemics is the nature of the messenger. Messengers make something spread. Word of mouth is still the most important form of human communication. Rumors are the most contagious of all social messages.

**"If anyone wants to start an epidemic, then – whether it is of shoes or behavior or a piece of software – he or she has to somehow employ Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen in this very way: he or she has to find some person or some means to translate the message of the Innovators into something the rest of us can understand."**

## Connectors

1. People with a special gift for bringing the world together, people specialists
2. Know lots of people
3. Have an extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances, making social connections.

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from Robert Patterson's summary.

4. Have mastered the "weak tie"; a friendly, yet casual social connection.
5. Manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches. By having a foot in so many different worlds, they have the effect of bringing them all together.
6. Acquaintances represent a source of social power, and the more acquaintances you have the more powerful you are.
7. Social glue: they spread the message

### **Mavens**

- Information specialists – real subject matter experts – SMEs
- Once they figure out how to get that great deal, they want to tell you about it too.
- Solves his own problems, his own emotional needs, by solving other people's problems.
- Have knowledge and the social skills to start word-of-mouth epidemics.
- A teacher and a student
- In a social epidemic, Mavens are data banks. They provide the message.

### **Salespeople**

- Have the skills to persuade when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing.
- Little things can make as much of a difference as big things.
- Gives nonverbal clues that are more important than verbal clues.
  - "Interactional synchrony": human interaction has a rhythmic physical dimension. We dance to each other's speech? we're perfectly in harmony.
  - Motor mimicry: we imitate each other's emotions as a way of expressing support and caring and, even more basically, as a way of communicating with each other. Emotion is contagious. "Senders" are very good at expressing emotions and feelings. They are far more emotionally contagious than the rest of us.
- Persuasion often works in ways that we do not appreciate
- You draw others into your own rhythms and dictate the terms of the interaction.

### **THE STICKINESS FACTOR**

There is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible/sticky and compels a person into action. All you have to do is find it. In order to be capable of sparking epidemics, ideas have to be memorable and move us into action. Content of the message matters too.

1. What is needed is a subtle but significant change in presentation to make most messages stick.
  2. The elements that make an idea sticky turn out to be small and trivial.
  3. "Clutter" has made it harder and harder to get any one message to stick. The information age has created a stickiness problem.
  4. Pay careful attention to the structure and format of your material, and you can dramatically enhance stickiness.
  5. Can tip a message by tinkering, on the margin, with the presentation of their ideas
- THE POWER OF CONTEXT**

We don't necessarily appreciate that our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances. We are more than just sensitive to changes in context. We're exquisitely sensitive to them. And the kinds of contextual changes that are capable of tipping an epidemic are very different than we might ordinarily suspect. 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.

1. Small changes in context can be just as important in tipping epidemics.
2. An environmental argument.
3. What really matters is little things
  - o "Broken Windows Theory": 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 (Rudy Gulliani's belief)
4. An epidemic can be reversed/tipped by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment.
5. There are specific situations so powerful that they can overwhelm our inherent predispositions.
6. Human beings invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of the situation and context. We are a lot more attuned to personal cues than contextual cues.
7. Character is more like a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstances and context.
8. The convictions of your heart and the actual contents of your thoughts are less important, in the end, in guiding your actions than the immediate context of your behavior.

## **THE MAGIC NUMBER 150**

"There seems to be some limitation built into us either by learning or by the design of the nervous systems, a limit that keeps our channel capacities in this general range (i.e. the human minds inability to comprehend things beyond sets 7)" ?George Miller "The Magical Number Seven"

"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. Putting it another way, it's the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar." ?Robin Dunbar,

1. Even relatively small increases in the size of a group [beyond 150] creates a significant additional social and intellectual burden.
2. The rule of 150 suggests that the size of a group is another one of those subtle contextual factors that can make a big difference.
3. Peer pressure is much more powerful than a concept of a boss
4. Transactive memory: we store information with other people. Since mental energy is limited, we concentrate on what we do best.
5. Groups of 150 are an organized mechanism that makes it far easier for new ideas and information moving around the organization to tip; to go from one person or one part of the group to the entire group all at once.

## **CONCLUSION**

## First Lesson of the Tipping Point

Starting epidemics requires concentrating resources on a few key areas. Your resources ought to be solely concentrated on the Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen.

## Second Lesson of the Tipping Point

The world 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.

**“In the end, Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push – in just the right place – it can be tipped.”**

## Important Conclusion

What must underlie successful epidemics, in the end, 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. Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push; just in the right place; it can be tipped.

Diffusion model: a detailed, academic way of looking at how a contagious idea or "product" or innovation moves through a population.

1. Innovators: the adventurous ones. Visionaries.
  - Connectors, mavens, and salesmen make it possible for innovations to connect with the early adopters. They are translators: they make ideas and information from a highly specialized world and translate them into a language the rest of us can understand. They drop extraneous details and exaggerate other details so that the message itself acquires a deeper meaning.
2. Early adopters: the slightly larger group that is infected by the innovators. Visionaries.
3. Early Majority: the deliberate and the skeptical mass, who would never try anything until the most respected of this group try it first.
4. Late Majority
5. Laggards: the most traditional group that see no urgent reason to change.

**“When people are overwhelmed with information and develop immunity to traditional forms of communication, they turn instead for advice and information to the people in their lives whom they respect, admire, and trust. The cure for immunity is finding Mavens, Connectors, and Salesmen.”**