

KRYPTON COURSE #002

The Sociology of Success: Culture and choice

From the work of Malcolm Gladwell

ORGANIZER EDITION

NOTE! Check to see if this is the latest edition or pick up the **student edition** by clicking here

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You could read this curriculum, absorb it on your own and declare victory.

If you did that, it would be like all the videos, blogs and writings on the Net. Useful, perhaps, even important. But you won't be getting the real benefit.

When we learn together, we push ourselves, discover real insights and most of all, dance with the discomfort that's essential to turn education into learning.

At Krypton, our mission is to enable groups of people to come together for brief, powerful, in-person learning experiences.

If you've been invited to a course, we hope you'll give it your best and contribute to each and every session. Or, if you've found this online somewhere, we hope you'll step up and lead a Krypton course.

Learn together.



Learn together™

The Sociology of Success: Culture and choice

From the work of Malcolm Gladwell

Who makes a difference?

This course draws on Malcolm's writing about how the society we build influences who we become, the heroes that lead us and the choices we make.

Course objectives

- Understand the dynamics of effort, culture and poverty in modern culture.
- Consider the power of the individual to judge and be judged.
- Explore the notion of heroism, and discuss how poverty (in all its forms) robs each of us of our potential.



Week 1, pre-class

Read and Watch*:

- [Habitus](#) (1 min.)
- [Can we make luck? on YouTube*](#) (20 min.)
- [Getting In: college as a luxury brand](#) (13 min.)
- [Immigration and culture*](#) (10 min.)
- [Do Parents Matter?](#) (10 min.)

*some of the videos in this course, mysteriously, start off a little rough or glitchy, but we promise they get better within a few minutes. Hang in.

Think and write:

- Four of the elements that Malcolm weaves together in his work are: Culture, Effort, Stupidity and Poverty. Our goal is to explore how each of these has an impact on us, our communities and the way we see the world. Gladwell isn't here to prove anything, his best work provokes us to think deeply about things that matter.

Some questions to consider from your own experience:

- What were the expectations of your family and your town--what do people around here do in situations like that?
- Were you expected to be charitable?
- To go to college?
- To be at the 'top of your class' regardless of what class you were in?

How are these cultural expectations expressed where you work?

For the Organizer, session one

Unlike the first course from Seth Godin, this course gives far less description of how each session should be run. There's so much material here, it's suggested that the organizer customize the discussion to match the needs of the group.

Ritual:

This is the first day of the first class. Your chance to establish a ritual, a way to separate the things we were just doing from the thing we're about to do. You could collect smart phones and lock them in a drawer, have people sit in a circle with no table, light a candle, share a reading... make it yours and make it clear that this moment is a bit different.

Questions for group discussion:

Peers!

The entire first session is about culture, about the way we do things around here, and the power of peers as much as bosses or parents.

For the Organizer - Activity

- Does Malcolm's story of immigration in the early 20th century ring true? If so, what parallels do you see today—not just in the political debate, but in your organization, school or other community?
- Do you belong to an organization that makes its own luck? How?
- Is the culture at Google or Apple different than it is at Kraft or Dupont? Why?
- Gladwell argues that culture (and thus society) has far more power than we give it credit for. If you were going to devote 15% of your time to improving the culture where you work, how would you do it?

Week 2, pre-class

Read and Watch:

- [The Ketchup Conundrum](#) (14 Min)
- [Innovation in Healthcare](#) (10 Min)
- [Xerox Parc](#) (6 Min)
- [Getting vs. going](#) (4 Min)
- [David and Goliath](#) (Optional. Last three chapters)

Think and write:

- Howard Moskowitz was the key driver in the evolution of spaghetti sauce. What did he bring to the project that you struggle with?
- In your work, is Cezanne-style innovation the standard? Can you describe how this works for you and your team?
- The alternative is serendipity. Find some examples from your work where this has paid off.

Week 2, pre-class

Think and write:

- From 2000 to 2010, what was the difference between Steve Jobs and Michael Dell?
- Pick your field--music, sports, business, writing--and make a list of creative and productive all-stars.
- For those all-stars, identify why you picked them.
- Then find the commonalities. Are they stars because of genes, culture or effort?



What does it take to run a four-minute mile before anyone else?

For the Organizer - session two

Questions for group discussion:

- Why did it take so long for seatbelts to catch on? Today, as we take them as a matter of course, it's hard to find someone apoplectic about wearing them.
- In your opinion, is the framing strategy an uncomfortable way to sell an idea? How much time are you spending looking for frames?
- The essence of 'effort' in a white-collar world has nothing to do with lifting heavy objects. Instead, we bring effort to bear when we confront things that make us uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable to talk about this discomfort, ironically enough. Let's try. Where are the areas of your work that require effort?

Week 3, pre-class

Watch and read:

- [Capitalization](#) (10 mins)
- [More on Capitalization](#), (5 mins)
- [Understanding 10,000 hours](#) (3 mins)
- [Do genetic advantages makes sports unfair?](#) (10 mins)
- [The man who wore a sanitary napkin](#) (11 mins) [don't miss this one]

Think and write:

- What does Kenya do to maximize the capitalization of long-distance runners? How does this compare with the way we raise our kids?
- Once we head down the trail of maximizing capitalization, the real question is: what's worth maximizing? Running might not be the best thing to devote an entire country's culture to...
- Constraints on capitalization happen when we set up systems that waste resources. The parallel hockey league is a cost-free way to dramatically double the capitalization rate of hockey players in Canada. The key question about our systems, our organizations and our culture is: Who else are we wasting? What resource is being flushed away.
- Gladwell argues that the Chinese-American students are culturally expected to push through the Dip. How can we re-organize our organizations and families to confront the fact that we are setting up huge portions of the culture to fail?
- And finally, think long and hard about why it's so tempting to misunderstand the 10,000 rule, in both directions:
 - Some people want to argue that talent is responsible for all success, that you're either born with it or you aren't?
 - And others would like us to believe that talent doesn't matter at all.

For the Organizer

Judge or be judged.

This is the group's opportunity for an honest conversation, a chance to discuss how we judge people (and how we think we're judged). Some questions to get you started:

Does it matter that Twitter's board of directors is all white men?

Should performance-enhancing drugs be banned from sports?

What role does expectation have in the way your colleagues and employees perform?

Does your cohort (the people you live and work and talk with) make it more or less likely you will reach your goals? What should we do to help others have cohorts that help them?

Week 4, pre-class

Read, watch and write:

- [How David Beats Goliath](#) (14 mins).
- [What do job interviews tell us?](#) (12 mins).
- [Income inequality](#) (4 mins).
- [The Tipping Point](#) (Social problems are contagious) (15 mins).

Questions

- By this point, it's becoming clear that many of the things we thought Malcolm was writing about go far deeper...
- In *David and Goliath*, Malcolm argues that the stress and focus that comes from being an underdog actually changes not just the strategy but the posture of the underdog. Has this worked for you?
- In *The Tipping Point*, what appears to be a treatise about marketing virally actually can be seen as a meditation on the power of culture to amplify both bad and good behaviors. See through this light, what are you doing to change the culture you care about to make it more likely that the outcomes you seek will happen?

For the Organizer

The impact of poverty

Gladwell's argument about poverty is that it costs all of us. It costs our society heroes, it diminishes the ability to capitalize and create the outcomes it seeks. Poverty reduces luck, of course, and it makes it more likely that its victims will be judged poorly.

There are many forms of poverty. Other than the poverty of income, challenge the group to make a list of other scarce essential resources that can plague a society.

The two key questions to discuss in class:

Do you buy this argument? Do you believe that various forms of poverty rob us all?

and

If so, what should be done? Is it ethical and moral (not to mention in our selfish interests) to stand by and watch as our society is robbed by the (alterable) costs of poverty?

If it's not, then how much effort and time and money and heroism are we willing to devote to eradicate the problem?

About Malcolm

Malcolm Gladwell searches for the counterintuitive in what other take to be the mundane.

A staff writer for the New Yorker since 1996, Gladwell is the author of New York Times Bestsellers including: *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference* (2000), *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), and *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008). His latest book, *David and Goliath* (2013) is an instant bestseller.

Gladwell says: "There is more going on beneath the surface than we think, and more going on in little, finite moments of time than we would guess."

[Find out more.](#)



photos courtesy of Random House

We hope that this curriculum helped you, and that it provided a springboard for the group to create learning that will last.

If you've got feedback, and we hope you do, we've created a simple three question survey. Check it out [here](#).

To find out more about Krypton, click on the Narwhal to the right...

Thanks for caring and thanks for making a ruckus.

