

KRYPTON COURSE #002

The Sociology of Success: Culture and choice

From the work of Malcolm Gladwell

STUDENT EDITION

***NOTE! Check to see if this is the latest edition
or pick up the [organizer 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?

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?

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.

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?

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.

