

Session 3 Reading

The 10,000 Hour Rule (Excerpt)

By Malcolm Gladwell

"In Hamburg, we had to play for eight hours"

The section comes from Chapter 2, immediately after a list of the seventy-five richest people in history.

Do you know what's interesting about that list? Of the 75 names, an astonishing 14 are Americans born within nine years of each other in the mid 19th century. Think about that for a moment. Historians start with Cleopatra and the Pharaohs and comb through every year in human history ever since, looking in every corner of the world for evidence of extraordinary wealth, and almost 20 percent of the names they end up with come from a single generation in a single country.

Here's the list:

01. John Rockefeller, 1839.
02. Andrew Carnegie, 1835.
28. Frederick Weyerhaeuser, 1834.
33. Jay Gould, 1836.
34. Marshall Field, 1834.
35. George Baker, 1840.
36. Hetty Green, 1834.
44. James G. Fair, 1831.
54. Henry H. Rogers, 1840.
57. J.P. Morgan, 1837.
58. Oliver Payne, 1839.
62. George Pullman, 1831.
64. Peter Widener, 1834.
65. Philip Armor, 1832.



What's going on here? The answer is obvious, if you think about it. In the 1860's and 1870's, the American economy went through perhaps the greatest transformation in its history. This was when the railways were built, and when Wall Street emerged. It was when industrial manufacturing started in earnest. It was when all the rules by which the traditional economy functioned were broken and remade. What that list says is that it really matters how old you were when that transformation happened.

If you were born in the late 1840's, you missed it. You were too young to take advantage of that moment. If you were born in the 1820's, you were too old: your mindset was shaped by the pre-Civil War paradigm. But there is a particular, narrow nine-year window that was just perfect for seeing the potential that the future held. All of the 14 men and women on that list had vision and talent. But they also were given an extraordinary opportunity. . .

Session 3 Reading

The 10,000 Hour Rule (Summary)

By The Quicklet Team

Gladwell focuses in this chapter on the following principle: **Practice is a key factor in the success of outliers.**

No “naturals” are found or, in other words, those born with superior talent who don’t have ample hours of practice.

He calls this factor the “**10,000 hour rule.**”

To prove his point, Gladwell discusses a study of violinists in Berlin. Those born with talent excel until around age 8. After that key differences emerge: those who practice excel, those who don’t, see their ability fall behind. Gladwell mentions **Mozart** as an example - he’d been playing and studying for years by the time he wrote his masterpieces.

Gladwell focuses on a few key outlier case studies to illustrate his theory.

The first outlier case study focuses on **Bill Joy**, co-founder of **Sun Microsystems** and the man who rewrote **UNIX**, which remains the operating system still in use by millions of computers and **Java**, another important computer language. Joy is often referred to as the “**Edison of the Internet.**” Gladwell writes: “Bill Joy is one the most influential people in the modern history of computing” (37).

Some key opportunities came Joy’s way, which enabled him to gather 10,000 hours of computer programming experience before his legendary contributions:

- Bill Joy attended the University of Michigan at age 16, just as their state-of-the-art Computer Center -- one of the most advanced Computer Science programs in the world -- opened.
- Computers were rare. they were the size of rooms and expensive. Therefore, programming practice opportunities were limited.
- Joy **spent most of his time in the computer center practicing programming.** This is a key opportunity: Joy had innate talent, but benefited from the timing and opportunity of his circumstances. **Bill Joy happened to be in the right place at the right time.**

After Bill Joy, Gladwell discusses The Beatles' time in Hamburg as another test of the 10,000 hour rule. The legendary rock and roll band formed in 1957 in Liverpool, England, 7 years before they found huge success in America in 1964. Their opportunity to practice live came in Hamburg, Germany, which which happened to import bands from Liverpool to play locally.

The Beatles went because it paid well and they could play live, a rare opportunity for a struggling young band.

The festival required them to play for 8 hours at a time, 7 days a week.

John Lennon said: “We got better and got more confidence. **We couldn’t help it with all the experience playing all night long**” (49).

This opportunity translates to Gladwell’s theory on success: **The Beatles had the necessary 10,000 hours by the time they made it big.**

Next, Gladwell discusses **Bill Gates**, founder of technology powerhouse, **Microsoft**. Gates had a series of lucky opportunities that enabled him to obtain 10,000 hours of computer programming experience before his work with Microsoft.

He attended the private Lakewood School in Seattle. The school started a computer club with funds from The Mother’s Club. Most colleges at this time didn’t have such clubs, so this was a rare opportunity for a grade school student. Thanks to The Mother’s Club’s paying of usage fees, **Gates was given opportunity to practice programming on the large computer at the University of Washington.**

From here, Gates’s opportunities to practice computer programming were remarkable for someone his age: He had the opportunity to work at ISI at nights on their payroll software, while still a teenager. And he received permission from his school to spend his spring term at TRW writing computer code.

This significant practice happened before Gates even attended college. Gates says, “**I was very lucky**” (55).

Gladwell’s final examination of success focuses on **the impact of timing**. Gladwell provides a list of the 75 richest people in human history. Of these, **14 are American and born “within 9 years of one another in the mid-nineteenth century”** (61).

During the 1860s and 1870s, the American economy experienced the greatest transformation in its history, creating unprecedented opportunities. **John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Marshall Fields and J.P. Morgan, among other success stories, were all born within years of each other in the 1830s.** These people were born at exactly the right time.

Gladwell shows the impact of timing on another generation of entrepreneurs: **Bill Gates, Bill Joy, Paul Allen, Steve Ballmer, Steve Jobs, Eric Schmidt** were born at the right time for computer success - in the mid-1950s.