



From the Business Section

By Dan Beaulieu

The Tipping Point

How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

By Malcolm Gladwell

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How does a fad start? Why is it that something becomes enormously popular, seemingly overnight? In 1994 the shoe company Hush Puppies sold about 30,000 pairs; in 1995 they sold a whopping 430,000 pairs. How did that happen? By the way, they did nothing different, they did not advertise more, they did not introduce new products, the company did nothing at all to increase sales. In 1996 Hush Puppies won the prize for best accessory from the Council of Fashion Designers. How did that happen? Here's another story. Only a few years ago, New York was known as the crime capital of the country. In 1992 there were 2,154 murders in New York City as well as 626,182 serious crimes. Then within five years murders dropped 64.3% to 770 and total crimes dropped almost by half to 355,883. What happened?

What happened is exactly what this book is about. "The Tipping Point" is the precise point when an idea, a concept, a product of any sort transforms from being obscure to being popular. It is the study the emergence of a trend or a fad if you will. Take Hush Puppies for example. The trend was traced to a bunch of kids in New York who decided that shoes were pretty cool and started wearing them to clubs and cafes or just walked the streets of New York. They exposed other people with the fashion sense of thee shoes to a point as they author states "they infected them with the Hush Puppies "virus".

The same kind of thing happened with the crime decline in New York. A small group of people started to do things that ended up affecting a small number of situations that created new social forces and thus people around them began to act differently. It is a prime example of one of the three distinguishing characteristics of tipping points. In these two cases a small group of people did some small significant things that eventually lead to a "Tipping Point". People started acting differently; they started taking responsibility for what was going on around them. They started influencing those around them to the point where it really started to make a difference. One of the three basic characteristics of a turning point is when small things influence bigger things.

Author Gladwell covers a number of interesting topics including the development and rise to immense popularity of the children's program Sesame Street; the Bernie Goetz vs. Kitty Genovese change in social norms in New York and the surprising rise to national popularity of the book "The Ya Ya Sisterhood". This is fascinating stuff, especially for anyone who makes his living trying to figure out where people are going, what are they going to be interested in next and what they are going to buy next...which is most of us.

Consider reading this one, you'll thank me for it. I just couldn't get enough. When I reached the last page, I wished there would have been five hundred more pages and dozens more case studies to read about. I felt like the guy who only had one Lay's Potato Chip.

Until next time, see you in the business section.

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