

Connecting Through Books – September 6, 2007

The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell

Sit back and open your mind for a minute. Imagine we just handed you a list of 250 surnames. Your assignment is to go through the list and note how many people you know with that surname. The rules are loose. It can be somebody you know well, just met on an airplane, or remember from your childhood, virtually anybody. What would that look like? *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell has that very exercise. Ironically different types of people have different average numbers of surnames they know. As an example, academics and the wealthy tend to average around 39 names. A random selection of professionals and journalists averaged 41 names. When we did the exercise, Norma knew about 91 and Bob knew 122 surnames. That makes us great connectors.

The Tipping Point is one fascinating book. And it is definitely one to read, absorb and digest and not look for a way to skim and glean what you can. Gladwell, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and former business and science reporter for the *Washington Times* has boiled this down to an understandable level that will make you look at your business in different terms.

We found it to be, frankly, mind boggling. *The Tipping Point* deals in epidemic transmissions that tipped a product or concept from either obscurity or falling short of success, to overwhelming success and or significance. Why was Paul Revere believed when he took his famous ride? What caused a huge drop in crime in New York City while Rudy Giuliani was in office? How did the *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* become such a huge success? What is the logic behind Gore, makers of Gore-Tex® and their rule of 150 and no titles other than associate? What happened to turn around Hush Puppies from the brink of disaster? And what is this about AirWalk?

In each of these cases and others, there was a tipping point. That tipping point was a verbal epidemic that completely turned the course of events for a company. We should warn you that there are some very complex theories in this book. Malcolm Gladwell has made them understandable, approachable and we're guessing you'll start looking for what would or could be a tipping point for your business. This book will give you the insight as to how Mavens and Connectors and Stickiness and Context – either singly or in combination – helps to explain those tipping points and epidemics that have caused a total turn around for companies and in human behavior.

Bob, who has been in advertising for 30 years says if companies understood the things that could tip and utilized them to generate word of mouth via Mavens, that their advertising could be much more effective. Those who read this and are in the advertising and marketing business will quickly understand when you read *The Tipping Point*.

Our good friend, Erica Olsen, President (Reno native) and co-founder of M3Planning says, “The Tipping Point is worth reading because it provides great examples of consumer super trends for numerous businesses that were lucky enough to tap into. The

super trends highlighted are transgenerational in popularity. Current trends that have `tipped` include the iPod, Sudoku puzzles, and the Wikipedia. So what can other businesses learn from these examples? We can learn how to spot these trends through systematically and strategically assessing the markets we serve and strategically planning to take action on what we discover”. Erica is the author of the soon to be released book, *Strategic Planning for Dummies* which is scheduled for release in November of this year.

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell is definitely not a quick read, although it is only 294 pages. It is one of those books with a lot to digest. That’s one of the reasons it is on our recommended reading list.

In the next issue, we are going to talk about a great little book called the Fred Factor by Mark Sanborn. Here is a hint...it is all about customer service...just in case you do not want to wait for the next issue.

Please feel free to comment on this column. If you have a favorite business book you’d like for us to review, let us know. Norma Havens can be reached at norma@UniversityOfStreetSmarts.com. Bob Belknap can be reached at bob@UniversityOfStreetSmarts.com.