

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

Malcolm Gladwell, New York, Back Bay Books, 2002

Tim Butler, updated 1/26/15

The Tipping Point identifies principles for understanding how something becomes contagious within an organization or population. These ideas offer a way of making sense of social epidemics. They provide us with directions for how to go about creating a "Tipping Point": the threshold that marks something becoming contagious in a population. The three rules of the Tipping Point are:

- 1) The Law of the Few: This concept highlights the importance of the "core" group; very small numbers of people who are in some ways sectional, who are different from the norm, can have an extraordinary impact on the direction of an epidemic. Certain kinds of people are critical in spreading information. The actions of a very small core group who are behaving in a smart way can tip an epidemic; can take an epidemic from being something that's at an absolute low level to being something that's exploding. Three types of people are instrumental in spreading social epidemics:
 - a) Connectors: The connector is that rare sort of person who doesn't mind the casual tie. They don't mind keeping up with someone. They love the casual sort of friendship. They love meeting someone even if they only meet them two or three times a year. They see value in that. And that makes them absolutely central in the transmission of ideas throughout a society because they have all these little tentacles out to people. They manage to maintain contact with people even if they only see them every now and again.
 - b) Mavens: Somebody who's an expert in people and information. Maven networks are increasingly important. They may be the most important of these personality types. The idea is that there are people within our midst who have specialized knowledge and we rely on them disproportionately when it comes time to make decisions. They are synthesizers, people who take in and make sense of a lot of diverse information. People rely on them to make good decisions. They are opinion leaders.
 - c) Salesmen: They are effective persuaders; tend to be seductive in a global sense, senders of emotion, often charming. They make the idea or change seem attractive; the thing to do.
- 2) The Stickiness Factor: The stickiness factor is the notion that it is important in crafting or creating a social epidemic to make a message memorable and move us to action. Sticky messages capture and keep the audiences attention. Think of slogans or jingles that lasted for years and are remembered long after they are no longer used in commercials or heard on TV or the movies. Some examples are:
 - *"Its easy to see, the best bulbs are GE"*
 - *"Winston's taste good like a cigarette should"*
 - *"The pause that refreshes"* - Coke
 - *"It's the Real Thing"* - Coke
 - *"You deserve a break today"* - McDonalds

- *"Where's the Beef"* - Wendy's Hamburgers
- *"Go ahead, make my day"* – Clint Eastwood, *Dirty Harry*
- *"See the USA in your Chevrolet"*
- *"If the glove fits, you must acquit"* – defense attorney *Jonnie Cochran* during the *O.J. Simpson* trial
- *"Pepsi Cola hits the spot, 12 full ounces that's a lot"*
- *"May the force be with you"*- *Star Wars*
- *"I'd walk a mile for a Camel"*
- *"Just do it"* - Nike, Inc
- *"More doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette"*
- *"I'll make him an offer he can't refuse"* – *The Godfather*
- *"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn!"* – *Rhett Butler* in *Gone with the Wind*

Political history is replete with "sticky" slogans and messages such as:

- *"Liberté, égalité, fraternité"* ("Liberty, equality, brotherhood") - used in the French Revolution
- *"I Like Ike"* - 1956 campaign slogan
- *"Those who stand for nothing fall for anything."* - Alexander Hamilton
- *"Workers of the world, unite"* - Karl Marx
- *"Better dead than Red"* - an anti-Communist slogan
- *"Remember the Alamo"* - For Republic of Texas independence
- *"Remember the Maine"* - The rallying cry by which William Randolph Hearst fomented the Spanish-American War
- *"Remember Pearl Harbor"* - a slogan, a song, an invitation to World War II
- *"War on Terror"* - George W. Bush

- 3) The Power of Context: Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur.
 - a) Small close-knit groups have the power to magnify the epidemic potential of an idea or message. To create an epidemic you often have to create many smaller epidemics. The average person has the ability to influence about 150 other people through their social relationships.
 - b) For LiVe Well/Healthy Living, this may mean developing a strategy to create many small epidemics within Intermountain's sub populations.