

David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants is a 2013 nonfiction book written by Malcolm Gladwell. It's a collection of essays and articles detailing underdogs winning against impossible odds and examining why they were able to find success.

A 3 Minute Summary of the 15 Core Lessons

#1 Play Your Game

Gladwell points out that those who are most successful in life follow their goals and play "the game" based on their own rules. What he really means is that you shouldn't compare yourself to the techniques and mastery of others and focus only on improving yourself and on doing what you know works for your goals or needs. Sometimes this means doing things in ways that are not supported by common wisdom.

#2 Choose Your Pond Wisely

There are several stories in the book that illustrate the sudden shock that many skilled people found when they left a small community in which they were the best of the best and entered a more competitive marketplace or upon. In many cases, it's a lot easier to succeed if you're the biggest fish in a small pond than if you are a medium-sized fish in a really large ocean.

#3 Don't Jump to Conclusions About What Will Work

Many times, it pays to focus on what works without having to conclusions beforehand. This may mean not following conventional wisdom about how to attain your goal or doing the exact same thing that everyone else does to complete a task. Keep your mind open about potential other ways to complete your objective.

#4 Identify Your Disadvantages

In every aspect of life, it's important to focus on your own disadvantages and understand how these may hinder your efforts or your success. You can then read stories about those who have similar disadvantages to you and learn how they turn to those disadvantages into advantages.

#5 Don't Be Afraid to Copy

Gladwell asserts that you shouldn't be afraid to copy techniques that other people have mastered on your path to success. While you should keep your mind open to alternative ways of doing things, you should similarly not be afraid to copy the techniques and proven strategies of others.

#6 Develop Your Strengths

Just as (if not more) important as understanding your own disadvantages is understanding and developing your strengths. You should work long and hard at identifying and honing the skills that you have as a result of your genetics and upbringing. Then you need to leverage those strengths as much as you can to achieve your goals and find success in all areas of your life.

#7 Privilege Isn't Always Better

Gladwell examines several real-life stories that showcase that difficulty in the growing environment of current successful people may have played a big role in their overall victory. In fact, living in a privileged environment might actually hinder your success as you won't have to struggle as much to achieve your goals and will not be as developed as a result.

#8 Move To Another Field

You don't always have to do this, but if you determine that many of your disadvantages are under your development or progress in a particular field or career, you may want to switch careers. Different environments or careers may be better suited to your skillset. Your disadvantages may actually be benefits in a different circumstance.

#9 Rely on Your Unique Skills

Much of the book demonstrates the idea that unique skills can often allow underdogs to win against big competitors. Underdog stories are, oftentimes, tales of masters of a particular craft or field being surprised by the unique skills and abilities of their opponents. Many who are set in their ways will be unable to adopt it directly competed against by someone with a unique take on the situation or market.

#10 Disadvantages Can be Advantages

Gladwell has several anecdotal stories that showcase the fact that disadvantages like learning disabilities can help you over-develop your skills in other areas. As a result, you may become particularly proficient or excel at a different field and allow you to find a path forward by focusing on that new advantage. In other words, try to determine what your disadvantages may have produced accidentally in terms of benefits.

#11 The Inverted U-Curve

Gladwell uses this concept to describe the correlation between not having enough of something and having too much of something. This theory is integrated into class sizes in the United States. Here, class-size demonstrates that smaller sizes are actually not as good as medium-sized classes for facilitating teacher-student interaction, while classes that are too large have the opposite problem.

#12 Tragedy Can Lead to Success

Gladwell draws from several historical events to demonstrate that tragedy is not always a defeating event. In fact, survivors of tragedy can often overcome the trauma they feel and become even more successful or invincible. A great example is those people who survived the initial bombing of London; anyone who survived eventually came to feel that they weren't going to die and became braver as a result.

#13 Giants or "Masters" are Often Vulnerable

In many cases, those who are already successful in a particular field or who have attained lots of victories and become overconfident or overreliance on a specific strategy or skill. This may leave them uniquely vulnerable to the approach of an underdog or a unique attack.

#14 Money is Great... To a Point

Relating back to the U-Curve, Gladwell showcases several statistics that prove that money only actually increases your quality of life up to a particular point: about \$79,000 per year. Beyond this amount, money doesn't actually make you much happier. Further satisfaction is derived from your job or accomplishments.

#15 Being Bigger or Stronger is Not Always in Your Best Interest

All in all, the book proves that being bigger or stronger is not always the best thing for maximum success or victory. In many cases, being smaller and going about things in your own way can lead you to personal satisfaction and the attainment of your goals.

Top 10 Quotes from David and Goliath

1. "Courage is not something that you already have that makes you brave when the tough times start. Courage is what you earn when you've been through the tough times and you discover they aren't so tough after all."
2. "Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness."
3. "As the playwright George Bernard Shaw once put it: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."
4. "Any fool can spend money. But to earn it and save it and defer gratification—then you learn to value it differently."
5. "You can't concentrate on doing anything if you are thinking, "What's gonna happen if it doesn't go right?"
6. "What is learned out of necessity is inevitably more powerful than the learning that comes easily."
7. "We spend a lot of time thinking about the ways that prestige and resources and belonging to elite institutions make us better off. We don't spend enough time thinking about the ways in which those kinds of material advantages limit our options."
8. "There is a set of advantages that have to do with material resources, and there is a set that have to do with the absence of material resources- and the reason underdogs win as often as they do is that the latter is sometimes every bit the equal of the former."
9. "The excessive use of force creates legitimacy problems, and force without legitimacy leads to defiance, not submission."
10. "When people in authority want the rest of us to behave, it matters—first and foremost—how they behave."