

The Hottest Read in Hollywood

Joe Ferullo | Jun. 4, 2009 NCR Today

Even more so than the rest of America, Hollywood is a place obsessed with the secret to success. Here, you're confronted every day with how elusive a secret that can be: everyone knows a remarkable actor who can't seem to get a break, a brilliant writer whose screenplays are among the most admired and least produced in town.

So it's not surprising that a book about success is currently the hottest read in Hollywood. What's shocking is the book's message: the secret of success, it says, is other people, and tight-knit supportive communities like the local parish.

The hot read is [Malcolm Gladwell's *'Outliers'*](#)^[1], number one on the Los Angeles Times non-fiction bestseller list for all 27 weeks since it hit the stores. In it, the author looks at the factors that create exceptional people, societies and trends, phenomena that are "outliers," beyond the statistical norm.

Hollywood movies -- going back at least as far as "High Noon" and as recently as the latest "Batman" movie -- have built the myth of the successful loner: the man or woman apart from society, who molds himself into a force to be reckoned with. In the biggest mainstream movie hits, the single hero stands alone against the powers of evil, and triumphs against all odds.

That is not what Gladwell has uncovered. What he reports both challenges the Hollywood myth-machine, and confirms the real-life experience of the real people who live and work here.

Gladwell writes that successful men and women are shaped by the people and support structures around them -- much more than Americans care to admit.

In the introduction to his book, he recounts a medical study performed in the 1950s on a Pennsylvania hill town called Roseto. The entire population of the small hamlet traced their roots to immigrants from a Southern Italian village of the same name. In Pennsylvania, the people of Roseto -- who smoked, drank wine, and ate far too much -- had rates of heart attack and disease far below the national norm. What made them different, what made them "outliers"?

Researchers concluded that people made the difference. They noticed that residents stopped to chat in the street, and that three generations often lived under one roof. Gladwell writes "They (researchers) went to Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and saw the unifying and calming effect of church." They counted 22 different religious and civic organizations in a town of just under two-thousand people. Those connections made far people happier and healthier than a low-fat diet.

That resonates here, much more than the movie myth of the lonely hero. People in Hollywood know it is other people that make a difference: when a television show is cancelled, friends and relatives comb the landscape to help find new jobs. My parish posts job listings and job-wanted notices in the online newsletter. Working in film and TV is a fragile business, molded by unpredictables such as ratings, box office receipts and the other bits of alchemy that go into making a hit. Minus the goodwill of others, you could not survive.

More than that, a good community supports your dreams. Each year, our parish school hosts a student film festival that anyone from kindergarten to 8th grade can enter. Winning entries are shown to thousands of people at our annual fundraising festival. That kind of thing tells our kids it's okay to dream of being a filmmaker or a cinematographer, a singer or an actor. The parish gets it and is here to encourage you. This support, Gladwell says, breeds exceptional people, the "outliers" who succeed.

In an interview on his web site, Gladwell says this about the central point of his book: "That it makes us understand how much of a group project success is. When outliers become outliers it is not just because of their own efforts. It's because of the contributions of lots of different people and lots of different circumstances and that means that we, as a society, have more control about who succeeds and how many of us succeed than we think. That's an amazingly hopeful and uplifting idea." (<http://www.gladwell.com/outliers/index.html>)

Keep that in mind when you watch the sequel to "Ironman" or "Terminator." The people who make those movies can separate the myth of success from the reality that's why "Outliers" is the hottest read in town.

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