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*David and Goliath* by Malcolm Gladwell

The theory of advantages and disadvantages has been inadvertently misconstrued by the public. We measure advantages with properties, intelligence, and power. We have long nourished the idea that people with the advantages are infallible. A journalist, speaker, and the best-selling author, Malcolm Gladwell, uses his book, *David and Goliath; Underdogs, Misfits, and The Art of Battling Giants*, to give people a different perspective of so-called advantages. What we consider as valuable might not be as valuable as we think. What we assume to be a strength might be our biggest weakness. Gladwell applies real life examples to illustrate the idea that underdogs, misfits and the art of battling giants is not as simple as we may think. He shows that being a giant, a person with great strength and power, does not always result in victory. He also shows that being a “small fish in a big pond” rather than a “big fish in a small pond” might just drag you down. Gladwell’s argument more fully informs my shared perspective regarding contemporary belief.

Gladwell asserts that power and strength are not always what they seem. We often believe that once we have that strength, we have the victory. However, “The same qualities that appear to give us strength are often the sources of great weakness. And the fact of being an underdog can change people in ways that we often fail to appreciate; it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seem unthinkable” ( 6 ). Our culture perpetuates this ancient misunderstanding of what may or may not be advantages. We often judge a book by its cover, judge a person by his or her look. In fact, it is very often that the assumption is inaccurate, but how can it possibly be inaccurate? Based on the description in the book, Goliath is a giant compared to David. Goliath is six foot nine tall with all sorts of protections attached to his body; on the other hand, David is an ordinary shepherd boy. He went to fight with Goliath without any sword or protections. Apparently, we see that Goliath has an extremely high potential to beat David. We assume that someone who is smaller or less skilled is necessarily at a disadvantage. The reality is often in contrast to our assumptions. David defeated Goliath with a stone and a sling. David’s victory was improbable and miraculous. How can a very powerful person not able to escape a stone? Indeed, a person with the advantages are also capable of failure and making mistakes. His advantages have become his weakness. He takes his body structure, strength, and extra protections as symbols for his advantage and assumes that he will win the battle. Those advantages are in fact disadvantages when placed in juxtaposition against David, the slinger. While David uses his courage, flexibility, and different skills that were trained from the challenges and hardships that he had encountered to win the battle with goliath. The disadvantage allows him to do the impossible. It challenges him and allows him to rise a level above Goliath who seems to be the one with the advantage.

Gladwell challenges his readers to “push back” against this social construct. “ We have, I think, a very rigid and limited definition of what an advantage is. We think of things as helpful that aren’t and think of other things as unhelpful that in reality leave us stronger and wiser” ( 25 ). We were trained to buy into the idea that bigger and more are always better. For example, attending an elite school will expand our opportunities, and guarantee us a better outcome because it indicates how intelligent we are. In contrast, if we go to an ordinary school, we are least likely to have a successful life as the ones go to the top school. The theory is true to a certain extend. The highly competitive and challenges environment in elite schools will encourage students to try harder. Students have to put in tremendous effort and amount of time. It is twice, if not more, harder for students to get A’s in elite schools than ordinary school. This advantage becomes a disadvantage when some students are not able to get as good grades as they would at an ordinary school. Thus they lose the enthusiasm to learn. It leads them to hate what they used to like, and in the worst scenario, they give up. People ought to find a definition of advantage that suit themselves. Advantage comes in many different forms, it all comes down to how the one who possesses it decides to use it. Trying to obtain the advantage that does not suit them is not helpful.

Hardwork, and effort are the keys to extricating oneself. Gladwell stated that “effort can trump ability and that conventions are made to be challenged” (35). People with the disadvantage often seek every ways they can to fight against the disadvantage they have. Gladwell uses a real life example to offer a new interpretation of what it means to be setback by the obstacles; Although a person with dyslexia is in a great disadvantage, he tries hard to develop a better skill in listening and visualization to overcome the setbacks. Same concept applies to me. I immigrated to the United States in 2013. I barely understood any English. Yet, I have overcome it. When other person spends only one hour to study, I have to spend three hours. I am willing to put in the extra effort that help me accomplish so much. Even though we have disadvantages, we shouldn’t give up. The world is fair enough that hard work can compensate the disadvantage.

Gladwell’s powerful storytelling in the book, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and The Art of Battling Giant* reshape how we think of the world around us. It encourages us to face obstacles positively. Disadvantages can give us opportunities to fight in an unconventional way, and allows us to appreciate what we have, allowing us to achieve more.

Citation

Gladwell, Malcolm. *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling*

*Giants*. Little, Brown, 2013. Print.