

# Big Tipper

*The Tipping Point* launched Malcolm Gladwell to fame. Will his new book send him over the top?

PHOTO BY ERIC OGDEN

**M**alcolm Gladwell has lived in six apartments since moving to New York City 11 years ago and is about to make it seven. “I like moving,” says the unmarried writer, 41, sitting in his swanky TriBeCa condo (“stunning 2 BRs, 2 baths loft with 700 s.f. planted terrace,” according to the listing), which he recently put up for sale. “It’s a way of changing your life without changing your life.” The loft, in a luxury high-rise, is furnished with oversize modern furniture and boasts river and city views from every room. It’s especially clutter-free today, explains Gladwell, a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and the author of *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, because he’s expecting his real-estate agent and a couple of prospective buyers within the hour.

It’s evidence of Gladwell’s status as a rock-star writer that when he bought the place about three years ago—for \$1.6 million—the deal made the real-estate column of *The New York Observer*, right next to Gisele Bündchen’s “tony new apartment.” And it’s a testament to the writer’s reputation as a natural wheeler-dealer that he’s now asking \$2.1 million. Sure, he’s an intellectual, but he’s also not ashamed to make a buck.

The gentle-mannered Gladwell—these days sporting an exuberant afro—has just written a new book titled *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (Little, Brown). An exploration of the process behind snap decisionmaking, it’s his follow-up to 2000’s *The Tipping Point*, a hard-to-categorize blend of psychology, sociology and business how-to that explores the way trends spread and then suddenly take off. *Tipping Point* earned Gladwell a reported \$1.5 million advance and remains on *The Wall Street Journal*’s list of best-selling business books. In fact, thanks to Gladwell, the phrase “tipping point” has become so ubiquitous that William Safire pronounced it “the overpowering cliché of the year.” (“We tease him about that all the time,” says Gladwell’s friend Jacob Weisberg, editor of *Slate*.)

All this success has opened several lucrative doors: Last year, Simmons Market Research Bureau developed a research tool called the Tipping Point Segments, paying the author for the use of his ideas. And Gladwell is now a regular on the lecture circuit, speaking at technology conferences, Fortune 500 corporations and nonprofits. (A 45-minute keynote speech by Gladwell runs in the ballpark of \$40,000.) “He’s a media whore!” jokes his boss at *The New Yorker*, David Remnick, adding that he has nothing but praise for his star staffer. “He’s an intellect combined with a sense of humor and a good set of legs—I mean that in the reportorial sense, of course.”

Like *Tipping Point*, Gladwell’s new book investigates its brainy, abstract subject matter with a range of engaging, real-life case studies—from speed dating to Pentagon war games. “I started off thinking that I wanted to write about intuition,” says Gladwell. “But I realized that it’s more interesting to talk about intuition as a form of thinking. It’s not feelings—it’s thinking that takes place so fast you can’t track what’s going on.” And, like *Tipping Point*, *Blink* is relatively slim (288 pages), readable and definitely business-friendly—the kind of book that marketing and advertising execs devour.

Which is more than okay with Gladwell. “I love advertising,” he says. “I think it’s really cool.” In fact, when young Malcolm graduated from the

University of Toronto with a degree in history, he wanted to work in advertising. “I applied to all these agencies, but I couldn’t get a job.”

He grew up outside Waterloo, Ontario, where his mother, a therapist, and his father, a mathematician, still live. In high school, Gladwell was more known for his athletic abilities than his academic ones: At 13 he held the Canadian 1,500-meter record for his age. After college, he worked for a series of right-leaning organizations: *The American Spectator*, the Ethics and Public Policy Center (a conservative think tank) and *Insight* magazine. “I sort of began my career on the conservative side,” he says, a bit sheepishly. “I’ve since left that.” Things really got going when he landed a job at *The Washington Post*, which led to *The New Yorker*, where he’s worked since 1996.

Gladwell’s current celebrity has thrust him into a strange new world, with a plethora of boldfaced fans. Academy Award-winning producer



Gladwell in his New York City apartment

Brian Grazer calls Gladwell his “journalistic soul mate” and counts the writer as a friend. “We are both interested in exploring subcultures,” he says. The hip-hop group The Roots named their latest album *The Tipping Point*. And, in what is possibly the strangest sign of his fame, when Gladwell’s hair briefly caught fire at a cocktail party last October (low ledge, candle) it made the gossips. “It would be hard not to envy Malcolm,” says Weisberg. “But success hasn’t changed him.”

According to Gladwell, however, writing *Blink* has. “I’ve become a lot less obsessed with gathering information before I make a decision,” he says. And the subject made him “acutely aware of the importance of the first five seconds” in making an impression. Which brings us back to the prospective buyers for his loft. “I should probably have done more, like gotten flowers,” he says, sighing. “I don’t always take my own advice.” —CATHERINE HONG