



Malcolm Gladwell Session Handout





Malcolm Gladwell

Host, Revisionist History Podcast; Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*; Former Science & Medicine Reporter, *The Washington Post*; Best-Selling Author

Recognized as one of the 100 most influential people by *TIME* magazine and one of the *Foreign Policy's* top global thinkers, Malcolm Gladwell is a world-renowned, five-time *New York Times* best-selling author and sought-after thought leader delivering expertise on management, innovation, history, and leadership. He is the host of the popular Revisionist History podcast and has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1996. Gladwell's latest book is *Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War*.



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GLS21 Notes: The Urgency of a Leader

One of the responsibilities of leadership, particularly when it comes to creating cultures and gearing towards innovation—is the need to focus on urgency.

In his talk at The Global Leadership Summit, Malcom Gladwell explored the untold stories of two leaders who accomplished breakthrough innovations. He unpacked what was behind these successes and how they utilized their influence to create urgency and give the permission to risk all for innovation.

Enjoy these official session notes to help you dive deeper into what you learned!

The Story of Emil Freireich and Childhood Leukemia

- [Emil Freireich](#), hematologist in America, was sent to the National Cancer Institute.
- Freireich's boss, [Gordon Zubrod](#), said, "I want you to cure childhood leukemia."
- Leukemia was the one of the most common causes of death for children at that point. Doctors were often unwilling to use the drugs commonly used because it prolonged the agony.
- Freireich studied the four drugs and began to use them together.
- In 1965, Freireich published an article saying, "We have cured childhood leukemia." It was one of the most important medical findings of the 20th century.
- This is a classic example of a great innovation. It was operational risk-taking.

Social Risk & Urgency

- To do something truly innovative, you need to take a social risk. You must convince others that what you are doing makes sense.
- What is at the core of social risk taking? Urgency.
- What Freireich was proposing to do was conduct a blind experiment on deathly ill children using four untested, horribly toxic drugs. The idea was crazy. But he was persistent.
- Up until that moment, no one had seen the problem like Freireich had seen the problem.
- What sets Freireich apart is that he is in a hurry. He sees the urgency. He's willing to stick his neck out and try something new.

The Story of Xerox PARC

- Xerox PARC was right in the middle of Silicon Valley. It was started in the 1970's. Xerox hired 60-70 of the greatest computer scientists of the day. They were to imagine the office of the future.
- They built the first real personal computer. They created the graphical user interface. They invented the mouse. They created the idea of windows, the ethernet, word processing, laser printer, etc.
- In December 1979, Steve Jobs visits Xerox PARC. They showed him the Alto, the personal computer. He asks, "Why haven't you brought this to market?" They were working to perfect it.
- Jobs runs back to his headquarters. He tells his engineers to change what they're doing. They create the Macintosh.
- Was Jobs smarter than the engineers at Xerox PARC? Was he wiser? No. But Jobs had a sense of urgency. He wanted to do it now.
- Jobs had to admit that his own ideas were wrong, and others' ideas were better.
- Jobs had to convince people to take another path. That social risk-taking is what leaders must do.

Protect and Nurture Risk Taking: Back to Freireich

- Freireich introduces a new treatment with horrible side effects. He says that he is going to have to do it every month for two years. People think he is a monster. Other physicians on the ward refuse to help. They would stand in the back of the room and heckle him.
- He was not at the National Cancer Institute to make friends. We need this attitude to take risks.
- Our leaders need to learn to protect and nurture this disruptive spirit.
- The real hero of the Freireich story is not Freireich, it's his boss Gordon Zubrod.
- Zubrod understood that his responsibility as a leader was to make his organization safe for risk-taking.
- We need more Emil Freireich's in this world but we won't get them without more leaders like Gordon Zubrod.

TAKING ACTION 

What is ONE action step you will take
from this talk and when will you take it?

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