

Amazing Heights

How Short Men Stand Tall and Stand Out

By Seth Ulinski

Chapter 1: Introduction

Have you been pushed aside, rejected, made fun of, or simply ignored due to your height? In the United States, the average adult male is 5'10". If you fall below this metric, you may face some of these challenges, having been labeled "short" by society. Research confirms what you may already know: society favors taller guys. *Height bias* in American society is widespread. In general, being taller opens the door for more opportunities in business, politics, dating, and sports. As a result, some guys and teens who are vertically challenged succumb to a defeatist or victim mindset. Who can blame them? After all, society is programmed to think and feel a certain way, which can make life an uphill battle for the not-so-tall.

What is height bias?

What exactly is height bias and why does it exist? In a nutshell, the brain is wired to interpret height as a proxy for social status, which includes health, wealth, and power. Society isn't necessarily being evil with its height bias. Our brains are like computers. They come preprogrammed with software that helps us make quick decisions, shortcuts known as [*heuristics*](#), in the world of psychology. Heuristics are valuable in fight or flight situations when we don't have time to think rationally, such as when we're in survival mode. Pause too long when you're facing danger and you may become lunch for a predator. This plays into Darwin's survival of the fittest evolutionary theory. Taller guys are perceived to be stronger and more powerful. This makes them attractive for mating purposes, as well as for positions of leadership.

All other things being equal, this bias is why the vertically gifted tend to get the nod over the vertically challenged.

It seems these shortcuts that speed up decision-making and save energy also create *false cognitive biases*. Plenty of guys under 5'10" have become excellent leaders, attained powerful positions, or dominated their professions, and if not you're not aware of any of these guys, keep reading.

Terms used to describe short people

There are many colorful ways to describe being below average in height. Many of these terms don't carry positive connotations and are even derogatory: little guy, shrimp, Smurf, or dwarf (for the record, dwarf is inaccurate if you exceed 4'10"). *Vertically challenged* is one of the more politically correct terms that has gained acceptance. At 5'7", I'm a member of this fraternity.

The short guy fraternity

You may be curious about how many vertically challenged guys are out there. Per the latest U.S. Census data, approximately 60 million adult males qualify for this brotherhood. If you are frustrated and looking for answers, you're not alone. Like many fraternities or brotherhoods, the vertically challenged brotherhood can bond us through shared trials and challenges on the road to initiation. As I researched height bias, it became clear to me that guys under 5'10" shared many of the same experiences. I felt like this created a bond, and at a certain level, we belonged to the same fraternity. However, just like in traditional college fraternities, vertically challenged fraternity members will have different educations, family backgrounds, and belief systems. These differences make us unique. They can provide the launch pad to do amazing things—or if we allow them to, they can limit us.

Plenty of guys are more vertically challenged than I am. Indeed, I am tall for a short guy, if that makes sense. In the U.S., I am taller than about 25 percent of the adult male population. As one of my not so politically correct six-foot buddies so eloquently put it, I'm the "tallest midget."

Midget isn't the term used today. *Little people* or *dwarf* are the correct terms for the medical or genetic condition that usually results in an adult height of 4'10" or shorter. While I am not a dwarf, I've still faced my fair share of vertical challenges in life, such as when I've competed in sports, searched for clothes that fit properly, and sought the attention of females.

Height bias needs more research

At first, I thought I was either overly sensitive or too analytical regarding height (if you know me, you know that both are highly possible). However, the more research I conducted and shared, the more validation I received from vertically challenged buddies, female friends, business associates, and from reading biographies and watching documentaries. Height bias—or in extreme cases, *height discrimination*, also referred to as *heightism*—needed to be explored. There are plenty of articles and clinical studies on height but few are geared towards education and self-improvement.

I found books and movies about smaller guys doing big things in sports, and yes, a solid chunk of this book does review the accomplishments of vertically challenged athletes. However, I couldn't find books dedicated to showcasing other professions or career paths for guys who may be facing the height headwinds. And height isn't exactly a key topic in history or business classes.

Time to beat the bias

The final confirmation I needed to embark on this book was a [postingⁱⁱ](#) by a high school kid who was distraught about being 5'6". At only seventeen years old, this kid was *convinced* he couldn't play sports and would never hold leadership positions—all based on a few articles he'd read. My immediate

thought was, *hey this kid is only seventeen and he could still grow a couple inches, maybe more*. Then I wondered what the heck type of message his parents, teachers, and coaches were delivering to him. Unfortunately, he is not alone. If height bias is bad, heightism is evil. There are frequent reports of short children and teenagers being bullied. In some cases, it is so intense that the victims commit suicide.

While height bias may have strong grips in certain areas of life and with some people, our heart and determination cannot be measured. As we review the accolades and achievements of guys in our fraternity, we find height bias is or was a major challenge for them many times. Other times, it was the least of their challenges.

What can you find in this book?

In this book, I aim to synthesize height data across different professions and compile stories of vertically challenged fraternity members who've achieved amazing heights in life. In addition to me being a member of the club, my credentials include a background in market research, a passion for writing, and a quest for self-improvement. If you're looking for education, motivation, or strategies, think of this book as a tool to help level the playing field, or at least, to better understand it.

Helping you change your perspective and your life

The goal of this book is to empower vertically challenged guys and their entourage (i.e. parents, coaches, bosses, and teachers) with a fresh perspective to help understand and overcome some of the real or self-imposed limitations of height. Whether you identify as a student, athlete, educator, business professional, entertainer, or a combination of these, a shift in your perspective can be life-changing. I am confident the content here will provide at least one takeaway that will enlighten, motivate, or inspire you. In addition to education, this book contains action items. Knowledge is power but as we'll see, action is ultimately where the magic happens. The vertically challenged can adopt a can-do attitude

and chart their respective courses in life despite the biases they encounter. These action-takers do not allow head-to-toe measurements to dictate the heights they achieve in life. Wouldn't it be a confidence boost to know more than one U.S. president has been under 5'10" and that our fourth president was only 5'6"? How about the fact that NASA sent a 5'5" astronaut into space not once but twice? Are you aware that two of the most iconic figures who fought for equal rights and freedom would be deemed vertically challenged by today's standards? How about the fact that today's digital world is largely architected by guys who are below average in height? Perhaps this book will help pave the way for the next wave of business and creative geniuses to launch their ideas and dreams.

Self-assured short men provide inspiration

Knowing that others of similar stature have done amazing things in the past or are currently rising to the top may ignite an inner fire to help you overcome a hurdle or break free of limiting beliefs, like those of the high school kid I mentioned above. Perhaps reassessing your core values and what's important to you will help you identify a new path or create new habits. Or maybe one or two life hacks I'll share will be enough to help you become more confident.

Height cannot prevent you from being a good student, an awesome brother, a loving dad, a respected teacher, a pillar of the community, an entrepreneur, a doctor, or a world explorer. An undersized kid may not be tall enough to get on the rollercoaster ride, but he can climb Mt. Kilimanjaro if he sets his mind to it. You are dealt a certain hand when it comes to height. It's up to you to determine how you play your hand.

Changing habits and perspective to deal with height bias

Understanding height bias is one thing. How you deal with the bias is another. I've learned to appreciate and maximize what I have. When I divulge my 5'7" status to people, many times the response is "You

don't seem *that* short." Yes, I could chalk this up to being closer to 5'7 ½", but kidding aside, I believe my not-so-short appearance can be attributed to a few things, including relatively good posture, a healthy lifestyle, attire that fits, and last but not least, self-confidence. I make an effort to manage each of these areas and am convinced the last item in the list is the result of managing the previous ones. Sometimes things happen which are out of your control, testing you mentally and physically. Control what you can. Start with yourself.

Transitioning from old habits to new ways of thinking and behavior requires regularly doing things differently. I like the motto of becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable. Test and learn. Be bold, be brave. Keep an open mind. Being open to new ideas and ways of thinking can be just as challenging as a new exercise. After all, the same heuristics at work in society are embedded in you.

So, let's begin this quest for growth and achieving amazing heights, shall we? Start with the shoulders back, tuck the chin and squeeze the shoulder blades back and downward. In addition to appearing more confident, good posture can add up to two inches to your height. If we're going to talk about standing tall, let's start by practicing it.

ⁱ Heuristics in Judgment and Decision-making. Accessed January 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heuristics_in_judgment_and_decision-making.

ⁱⁱ Growing Taller. December 2011. <https://talk.collegeconfidential.com/parent-cafe/1261074-growing-taller.html>.