

Grit Summary

By Angela Duckworth

Have you ever gone to a high school reunion, and been surprised at where some people ended up? Perhaps the person who came top of the class isn't as successful as you'd imagined, or that the star quarterback is selling second-hand cars for a living. Angela Duckworth explains that where we end up all comes down to grit.

Grit tackles the age-old question of why naturally talented people sometimes fail to reach their full potential, whereas other "less gifted" people achieve significant success. It's argued that success takes grit, which is a combination of perseverance, passion, persistence in the face of obstacles, and commitment to a long-term goal.

Duckworth argues that it all comes down to grit, and whether we have the drive and determination to reach our goals. This combination of perseverance and passion, rather than innate talent, helps us to predict success.

Angela Duckworth is a psychologist and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She recently received the MacArthur Fellowship award - also known as the "genius award." However, when she was in thirdgrade, she didn't test high enough for the gifted class. Duckworth began questioning the idea of natural talent and aptitude when she was a math teacher. While teaching, she noticed that her successful students didn't necessarily have the highest IQ scores, and some of the most intelligent children weren't doing so well. She realized that we attach such high importance to IQ scores in education, but our intelligence does not necessarily define our ability to succeed.

This summary briefly looks at whether or not hard work pays off. *Grit* is a pivotal text to help us on the path to achieving our goals. It identifies crucial ingredients to success, and reminds us that we should strive, not to be the smartest, but the grittiest, in whatever we pursue. Ultimately, when it comes to success, grit matters a lot more than talent. We'll look at the components of grit, and how it can be cultivated and grown.

The Fundamentals of Grit

Grit has two components. The first is perseverance. Top achievers don't abandon a task just because something new and seemingly more appealing crops up. They also don't quit in the face of obstacles. They stick with things, overcome setbacks, put in the time, and finish what they start.

The other component is passion. Successful people devote themselves to something that they genuinely enjoy, and then commit to it for the long term. Passion helps them stay on track and not deviate from this course. However, passion is slightly different from its frequent association with

intensity. We should regard it, not as commitment, but as more of a compass that takes time to set, before becoming a guide on the long journey to an ultimate goal. So, it's not just about having passion, but having the ability to sustain that interest and commitment that's crucial.

It's the combination of passion and perseverance that define grit. It could also be described as stamina; sticking with our ultimate goal, day in and day out - not for the week or month, but years. It's living life as a marathon and not a sprint, and it requires us to define a clear philosophy that serves as our constant reminder to stay on track.

We're encouraged to set top-level goals over a sustained period, and we're given strategies to do this. If we look at the Grit Scale, we can use this to measure our levels of grit. It covers questions such as: 'my interests change from year to year,' and, 'I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.' There's a scoring system for this scale that can help us to monitor our current grit levels. Getting to grips with our levels of grit is essential - because the research proves that when it comes to high achievement in any field, grit not talent, is the key ingredient.

The Hard Work vs. Talent Debate

There's a widespread debate about whether it comes down to hard work or natural talent when it comes to success. Some of us might think that it's hard work, but deep down, we actually tend to put natural talent on a pedestal.

In a 2011 study, this belief was put to the test. The psychologist, Chia-Jung Tsay, asked musicians whether they regarded talent or hard work

as more critical for success. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority said practice and hard work were vital. However, it didn't end there. This study showed that when it comes down to the wire, it turns out we have a lurking bias towards believing that talent is crucial.

The musicians in this study listened to two recordings of a musical piece. They were told that one was performed by someone who is naturally talented, and that the other was performed by a more hardworking and highly motivated individual. The participants listened to the two recordings, and were then asked to rate them. The majority chose the one they believed to be the naturally talented musician. They considered the naturally talented musician as superior to that of the striver. But there was a catch. The recordings were actually different parts of the same piece, played by exactly the same musician. Despite saying they regarded hard work as a critical ingredient for success, the musicians clearly had a bias towards natural talent.

This study indicates that talent is often over-emphasized in society, which means that everything else is under-emphasized. This focus sends a message that other attributes, such as grit, don't matter much when they actually matter enormously. The problem is that our talent-bias isn't good for business or personal growth.

Favoring Talent Often Leads to Toxic and Unproductive Work Environments.

Gladwell, who has written extensively on success, also critiques the talent mindset. He argues that it contributes to a narcissistic work culture, where people are pushed to prove they're smarter than everyone else. For example, at Enron, this focus on appearing smart, encouraged

competitiveness and short-term performance, at the expense of long-term growth and commitment. Enron took this to an extreme, with its practice of firing the bottom 15% of performers annually, which tended to reward deception and discourage integrity.

Praising talent also leads to a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is where we believe that we cannot improve beyond our perceived limitations. How many times have you thought to yourself, 'It's pointless, no matter how hard I work, I will never be as good as so-and-so'? The belief that innate ability is tied to our success is a fatalistic and inaccurate view of reality. Duckworth argues that 'our potential is one thing, what we do with it is quite another.' So the message here is that we need a different mindset, and we need to dig a lot deeper.

Our Potential Depends on Our Grit

Consider the following study. Officials at West Point have long tried to determine why some students make it through an intense seven-week summer training camp, while others drop out. Research showed that cadets with high SAT scores or high grades were no more likely to succeed than those with lower scores. Nor did athletic ability or previous leadership experience play much of a part in success. The determining factor was grit. Measures of grit successfully predicted who was likely to complete the training. These findings were then replicated in business and education. For example, another study in an educational setting focused on spelling bee contests and the importance of grit. We tend to think that spelling bee children are verbal geniuses and that those who win are the most talented contestants. However, research shows otherwise. The youngsters who placed higher in the final didn't have the top verbal IQ scores, but they did score highest in grit.

Society persuades us that prodigies are born, not made. But research shows that no world-class performers, in any field, have put in less than ten years of consistent practice to get to a level of excellence. For example, Mozart is regarded as a musical genius, but he practiced up to 8 hours a day as a child. If you compare this to other world-class performers, most put in a maximum of 4 hours of daily practice.

Or we could look at John Irving. Irving is an award-winning writer, and most people would regard him as a gifted wordsmith. The truth is that he struggled at school, and was diagnosed with dyslexia, but he didn't give up. Instead, Irving put enormous effort into his work, a habit he has maintained throughout his life. Furthermore, if we look at how he spends his time, he spends most of it revising his novels instead of actually writing the first draft. His secret is grit and hard work.

When it comes to honing your craft, effort is twice as important as talent. And, talent without effort is just unmet potential. We can extend this by arguing that skill without effort, is nothing more than something you could have done, but didn't.

As a former math teacher, Duckworth turned this idea into a two-part formula. The formula is that talent multiplied by effort, equals skill. Skill multiplied by effort equals achievement.

If you've been observant, you'll notice that "effort" appears twice. The idea is that when you apply effort to any baseline talent, you develop skill. When you apply effort to skill, you get achievement. Dan Chambliss describes outstanding achievement, as quite simply being based on countless individual components, each of which is mundane. So there's no special ingredient to skill and achievement; it's not magic, it's literally

an abundance of effort.

How To Increase Our Grit

What takeaways can we put into action to grow our grit? And, how can we bring this formula to life?

Being gritty isn't easy, but there are four ways to grow our grit. These tend to develop over time and in a particular order.

The first is interest. Interest is about having a passion for the overarching notion of what we do, and having the ability to remain curious. Next, there's practice. We need to figure out our weaknesses, and form a daily discipline to work on them. Thirdly, there's purpose. Purpose is all about holding onto the conviction, that what we do matters. Finally, hope links to all these stages, motivating us to keep going, despite setbacks.

Let's delve into these a little more. It can take time to work out what ignites our interest. We should prioritize tasks that speak to our passion, and we need to venture out and try different things. We need to experiment. There will be things you already know that you don't like. Grit is as much about quitting when something is wrong for us, as it is about sticking with what feels right. Passion isn't an epiphany - it's more of a discovery, followed by the development, and then by a lifetime of deepening.

Next comes practice. This is the daily discipline of trying to do better than you did yesterday. But the secret to improvement lies in doing deliberate practice. Deliberate practice means not just turning up each day and racking up 10,000 hours; it's isolating and working on

weaknesses, and then getting constructive criticism from other experts. Paragons of grit, have the mindset that whatever it takes, they want to improve. Irrespective of how good they already are. They also hungrily seek feedback on how they're doing, even if much of that feedback is negative.

Purpose is the motivator behind this practice and helps to turn passion into a conviction. It's when the work you do provides you with meaning, and also benefits others. This can be explained in the following parable:

"Three bricklayers are asked, 'What are you doing?' The first says, 'I am laying bricks.' The second says, 'I am building a church.' The third says, 'I am building the house of God.'" The first bricklayer has a job, the second has a career, and the third has a calling."

Grittier people are significantly more determined to live a meaningful life, which is a strong motivation source.

Hope Fuels Grit because it Connects Us to Our Purpose

Duckworth reminds us of the saying, 'Fall seven times, and rise eight.' Hope is rising the eighth time, and it encompasses the belief that our efforts will make a positive difference to our future.

Grit can also positively shape our children's future. It's been well-researched that wise parenting is the most effective parenting style. Wise parenting is where parents are both supportive and demanding of their children. However, for a child to develop grit, parents need to do

something more. They need to model grit and show that they have both the passion and perseverance to stick to their own long-term goals. Ultimately children look up to their parents, so it's essential that parents embody the grit mindset.

Furthermore, mentors also play a crucial role in the development of a young person's life. Mentors and other leaders can also provide this grit-enhancing support. These mentors often work with children in various extracurricular activities and sports. These activities are beneficial when it comes to developing grit. Interestingly, research shows that grit is more likely to be enhanced if a young person gives at least a two-year commitment to a particular activity. It appears that both follow through and progress count. On a broader level, being around gritty people, also makes you grittier.

In Conclusion

In a world where procrastination is the name of the game, and where attention spans are dwindling, it's time to pull up our socks and embrace the grit mindset. Duckworth says: 'To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. '

So why not spend some time exploring your passions and trying new things? True grit comes from being brave and embracing variety and change. Then, once you've picked something to focus on, challenge yourself to focus and develop your skills. Keep practicing and set yourself long-term goals. You might just find yourself at the very top of your game.