

The Talent Code Summary

By Daniel Coyle

What's the one thing that you wish you were good at? Have you ever looked at another person and wished that you were as talented as them?

The Talent Code delves into cracking the secret to true mastery. There's a mythology around talent, and this book reveals that talent can be nurtured and cultivated through tools and skills. Once we harness the power of fluency and accuracy, and access effective practice and motivation, we unlock the code to reveal talents.

In this insightful and straightforward book, Daniel Coyle, the author of the highly acclaimed *The Culture Code*, explores the 10 thousand hour rule genre. Once again, he gives us three clear themes on which to focus, giving us the tools to reach our full potential. Coyle traveled the world to find a series of small but exceptional places. He wanted to find unlikely places with huge talent pools to see what was going on beneath the surface. He identified nine extraordinary sites, including a tennis club outside Moscow, and a music school in New York. The tennis school has produced more top 20 players than the States, and the classical music school has students who complete a year of material in just seven weeks. His findings revealed that even though each place appeared unique and different, they shared commonalities, patterns, methods, and behaviors.

This summary will briefly take us through *The Talent Code*, and show how practice, motivation, and coaching are at the heart of unlocking talent. Through analyzing case studies and biographical accounts of renowned and exceptional people, we'll look at how talent can be nurtured. In so doing, we'll debunk a lot of common-sense beliefs about natural talent,

good luck, and superior genes. Talent isn't accidental, nor is it magic; it's a product of cracking a clear methodology.

Practice Makes Myelin

Coyle argues that we're not born great, nor do we have greatness thrust upon us. Instead, greatness is built and developed through deep and considered practice.

How do we know this? Well, according to neuroscience, our brains can tell us a lot about the effects of practice and building knowledge. Our brains are muscles, and like all muscles, they benefit and develop through proper training and exercise.

Studies reveal that one thing that talented people have in common, is the apparent presence of myelin in their brains. If we think of our brains as a circuit, with loads of wires linking all the different areas of the brain, myelin is the insulation around all of the wires. We need myelin to insulate our neurons because it helps communicate messages a lot quicker and more effectively. If a wire isn't insulated correctly, a lot can go wrong, and the same applies to neurons with insufficient myelin coating.

Owing to the fact that the brain is a muscle, all of the brain's circuitry develops over time. We're not born with highly developed brains; they need to be trained and developed. Once we have developed our brains, myelin starts thickening, allowing us to build our skills and talents more successfully and efficiently. Coyle argues that all skills come down to one thing. Myelin.

So how do we develop myelin? We produce it through deep and careful

practice. Coyle calls this deep practice, but it can also be called deliberate practice, or purposeful practice.

Let's look at the example of Meadowmount School of Music. They have a rule where if a passerby recognizes the song you're playing, then it's being played too quickly. The tennis school has the same mindset, with a strong focus on rhythmic and purposeful movement. Slow practice is absolutely crucial. This is because all skill is located in our brains, and when we practice in specific ways, we develop and improve our brains.

Another feature of deep practice is practicing on the outskirts of our comfort zone. When we practice, we should never feel as if we're "coasting." The idea is that we should stretch ourselves to be just outside of our comfort zone, but not at the point of snapping. So, for example, don't just practice the songs you know, or don't just run the same route everyday. We need to stretch ourselves and make practicing a challenge.

Many of us are put off deep practice because we've been led to believe that making mistakes is a sign of weakness. We should rethink mistakes. Mistakes are the best way to produce myelin, and therefore we should never be discouraged by failure. Through trial and error, and correction, we create more myelin. Aside from practicing slowly and methodically, it's also suggested that we "chunk up" whatever task we're practicing. The idea behind this is that it's a lot easier to tackle smaller units. Furthermore, when we see something as a sum of its parts, we get a complete picture of each element and its contribution to the whole.

So practice is about looking at each small element that makes up the whole task, practicing slowly and deliberately, focusing on repetition, and going outside our comfort zone. We'll make mistakes, but these are an essential part of the process. In fact, if we're not making mistakes, we're

not practicing deeply enough. Coyle takes this a step further, and argues that we need to engage a lot more with struggle. He says, 'Struggle isn't an option; it's a biological requirement.'

If we look at the Brazilian example of "futsal," this shows how struggle helps with growth and development. Futsal is a childhood game played by Brazilian children. It's very similar to football or soccer, except the ball is much smaller and heavier. This game requires higher precision than football, and has a focus on repetition and correction. This focus means that when youngsters grow up, and start playing with a soccer ball, they become masters of the game.

Coyle suggests that deep practice increases skill acquisition ten times faster than regular practice. And, practice makes perfect, *but* it has to be the right kind. Many people think that Michaelangelo was born a genius. However, he grew his genius by building his myelin through deep practice. He started apprenticing at the age of six, by working alongside a stonemason. He moved between apprenticeships and learned and mastered new skills from numerous highly skilled mentors. At 25, he created the masterpiece the *Pieta*. Michelangelo said if people knew how hard he worked, they wouldn't be so surprised and in awe.

The trouble with recognizing talent, is that we only see it once it's been established. We see the finished product, rather than all of the hard work and practice that's gone into honing skills. A lot of the reason for this is because we only notice people once they've reached their peak. People who rise to greatness have cultivated their skills and developed myelin through hours and hours of deep practice.

Ignite Your Passion

When we look at the history books, we often see periods of outstanding achievement, endeavor, and excellence. In *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, we're given tremendous insight into a period of significant scientific discovery. The Renaissance was a time of great artistic accomplishments, and the Space Race was a time when America and Russia were literally reaching for the moon.

Many would say that walking on the moon, measuring the weight of the Earth, or painting the Sistine Chapel, were feats of impossibility; however, they proved something about human nature. These periods of human excellence are often ignited by the idea that the impossible has become possible. When individuals witness impossible achievements being accomplished, this often creates a bit of a boom.

You may have heard of the "Bannister Effect" from Steven Kotler's book, *The Rise of Superman*. The Bannister Effect is what happened after Roger Bannister ran a 4-minute mile back in 1954. At the time, a 4-minute mile was seen as physiologically impossible. However, when the unlikely candidate, Roger Bannister, ran the first 4-minute mile, it changed the landscape of running. The Bannister Effect lit a fire in people, and made them realize that the impossible was possible. For this reason, *Sports Illustrated* argues this was the most significant sporting accomplishment of the 20th century. Greatness is about thinking about what's possible. And, because we tend to mirror the people around us, when they achieve excellence, this galvanizes us to do the same.

Another example of this is Se-ri Pak, a South Korean golfer, who won a

major in 1998. Up until this point, golf was not on the radar for many South Koreans. However, after Se-ri Pak put South Korea and women's golfing on the map, the country experienced golfing fever.

Honing our skills and developing our talents takes long-term motivation and commitment. This isn't always easy to muster, and sticking to the 10 thousand hour rule takes discipline and persistence. Perseverance comes from passion, and passion comes from inspiration. We have to believe that we will reach our goals. Having events and people to ignite our passion is a huge part of developing our talents, because it encourages us to get out of our comfort zone, stretch ourselves, and develop the myelin needed to excel.

A Master To Guide Mastery

We've all watched Hollywood films with locker room pep talks, rousing speeches before battle, or reluctant mentors overcoming some form of obstacle to answer a call to arms.

Doing things alone is all very well and good, but having a coach, master, or mentor helps us achieve greatness through learning and inspiration. On the one hand you have deep practice, and on the other, you have passion. A coach often bridges the gap between the two. Some coaches straddle the line between passion and discipline, while others choose to focus on either passion or technical skills.

Take for example John Wooden, a college basketball coach. Wooden wasn't from the school of pep talks or motivational speeches. However he wasn't about praise or criticism either. Wooden believed in providing exact and concrete information to each of his players. His coaching

method focused on being as consistent as possible, and making his players realize what adjustments needed to be made. Through concentrating on deep practice, he showed the importance of examining the small elements of a player's performance, and honing skills from the bottom up.

Coyle explains that there isn't one right way to coach, and that coaching is context and person-specific.

Some coaches provide the foundation for deep practice, while others offer much-needed passion and ignition. What type of coaching we need also depends on personality type and how advanced we are in the process. Ultimately coaching is about connecting ignition and deep practice, and often this means that we need a technical coach, alongside another more gregarious coach.

If our deep practice needs work, then it's best to seek the advice of a coach who favors simple and precise communication. Whereas if we have put in the time for deep practice but are finding it difficult to get out of our comfort zone, we may need someone to spark a desire.

In Conclusion

One of the 20th century's leading psychologists, Albert Ellis argued that 'Neurosis is just a high-class word for whining.' Much Freudian-style therapy sought to make us feel better, but the trouble is it didn't make us feel better because it lacked a push towards action. The argument is that the only thing that will genuinely make us feel better, is actually doing something about what we lack. We need to focus on action. There's no use talking about all the things we could become, and all the things we could achieve. So often we make excuses for our failings, or blame a lack of aptitude or talent. We need to stop moaning, start practicing, and

believe in the impossible. As the Nike slogan famously says, 'Just Do It!'