

Unit 5 ANGELA LEE DUCKWORTH

The Key to Success? Grit

Part 1

When I was 27 years old, I left a very demanding job in management consulting for a job that was even more demanding: teaching. I went to teach seventh graders math in the New York City public schools. And like any teacher, I made quizzes and tests. I gave out homework assignments. When the work came back, I calculated grades.

What struck me was that I.Q. was not the only difference between my best and my worst students. Some of my strongest performers did not have **stratospheric**¹ I.Q. scores. Some of my smartest kids weren't doing so well.

And that got me thinking. The kinds of things you need to learn in seventh grade math, sure, they're hard: ratios, decimals, the area of a parallelogram. But these concepts are not impossible, and I was firmly convinced that every one of my students could learn the material if they worked hard and long enough.

After several more years of teaching, I came to the conclusion that what we need in education is a much better understanding of students and learning from a motivational perspective, from a psychological perspective. In education, the one thing we know how to measure best is I.Q., but what if doing well in school and in life depends on much more than your ability to learn quickly and easily?

Part 2

So I left the classroom, and I went to graduate school to become a psychologist. I started studying kids and adults in all kinds of super challenging settings, and in every study my question was, who is successful here and why? In all those very different contexts, one characteristic emerged as a significant **predictor**² of success. And it wasn't **social intelligence**³. It wasn't good looks, physical health, and it wasn't I.Q. It was grit.

Grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. Grit is having stamina. Grit is sticking with your future, **day in, day out**⁴, not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years, and working really hard to make that future a reality. Grit is living life like it's a marathon, not a sprint. . . .

Every day, parents and teachers ask me, "How do I build grit in kids? What do I do to teach kids a solid **work ethic**⁵? How do I keep them motivated for the **long run**⁶?" The honest answer is, I don't know. What I do know is that talent doesn't make you gritty. Our data show very clearly that there are many talented individuals who simply do not follow through on their commitments. In fact, in our data, grit is usually unrelated or even inversely related to measures of talent.

So far, the best idea I've heard about building grit in kids is something called "growth mindset." This is an idea developed at Stanford University by **Carol Dweck**⁷, and it is the belief that the ability to learn is not fixed, that it can change with your effort. Dr. Dweck has shown that when kids read and learn about the brain and how it changes and grows in response to challenge, they're much more likely to persevere when they fail, because they don't believe that failure is a permanent condition.

So growth mindset is a great idea for building grit. But we need more. And that's where I'm going to end my remarks, because that's where we are. That's the work that stands before us. We need to take our best ideas, our strongest intuitions, and we need to test them. We need to measure whether we've been successful, and we have to be willing to fail, to be wrong, to start over again with lessons learned.

In other words, we need to be gritty about getting our kids grittier.

Thank you.

This is an edited version of Duckworth's 2013 TED Talk. To watch the full talk, visit TED.com.

¹ We use the adjective "stratospheric" when we want to emphasize that something is very high.

² A "predictor" is a thing (or person) that suggests what will happen in the future.

³ A person's "social intelligence" is based on their ability to build social relationships with others.

⁴ The phrase "day in, day out" means every day.

⁵ A person's "work ethic" refers to the degree of they put effort into a task.

⁶ The "long run" refers to an extended period of time from now until the far off future.

⁷ Carol Dweck is a professor known for her research in motivation and intelligence.