

THE BIG IDEAS

Beast + Science of Grit
Intense passion + perseverance.

Effort Counts Twice
In pursuit of greatness + grit.

Gritty Passion
= Compass (vs. Fireworks).

How to Grow Grit
The four psychological assets.

Wise Parenting
vs. Not-so-wise parenting.

You're a Gritty Genius
If you want to be.

Grit

The Power of Passion and Perseverance

BY ANGELA DUCKWORTH · SCRIBNER © 2016 · 352 PAGES

“Why were the highly accomplished so dogged in their pursuits? For most, there was no realistic expectation of ever catching up to their ambitions. In their own eyes, they were never good enough. They were the opposite of complacent. And yet, in a very real sense, they were satisfied with being unsatisfied. Each was chasing something of unparalleled interest and importance, and it was the chase—as much as the capture—that was gratifying. Even if some of the things they had to do were boring, or frustrating, or even painful, they wouldn’t dream of giving up. Their passion was enduring.

In sum, no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were unusually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted. They not only had determination, they had direction.

It was this combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit.”

~ Angela Duckworth from *Grit*

Angela Duckworth is the world’s leading authority on the science of grit. In fact, she pioneered the field and, as Daniel Gilbert says on the cover: “Psychologists have spent decades searching for the secret of success, but Duckworth is the one who found it.”

What is grit?

In essence: It’s the combination of intense passion + intense perseverance toward a long-term goal that matters to you.

In this great book, Angela connects her research to a bunch of the other positive psychology luminaries we feature—ranging from [Martin Seligman](#) (her mentor at Penn) and [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) to [Anders Ericsson](#), [Gabriele Oettingen](#), [Carol Dweck](#).

Plus, she shares a bunch of inspiring stories about grit paragons while walking us through the key aspects of grit and teaching us how we can cultivate grit in our lives and in the lives of those we love and lead.

This is one of those books that I think is a MUST READ if you’re serious about optimizing + actualizing while helping others do the same. It’s my new favorite for 2016. I think you’ll really love it. (Get a copy [here](#).)

As you can imagine, the book is packed with a bunch of Big Ideas. I’m excited to share a handful of my favorites we can apply to our lives today so let’s jump in!

P.S. You may have already seen [Angela’s TED Talk](#). If not, check it out here!

“Grit depends on a different kind of hope. It rests on the expectation that our own efforts can improve our future. ‘I have a feeling tomorrow will be better’ is different from ‘I resolve to make tomorrow better.’ The hope that gritty people have has nothing to do with luck and everything to do with getting up again.”

~ Angela Duckworth

"There's an old Japanese saying: 'Fall seven, rise eight.' If I were ever to get a tattoo, I'd get these four simple words indelibly inked."

~ Angela Duckworth

BEAST + THE SCIENCE OF GRIT

"By the last day of Beast, seventy-one cadets had dropped out.

Grit turned out to be an astoundingly reliable predictor of who made it through and who did not.

The next year, I returned to West Point to run the same study. This time, sixty-two cadets dropped out of Beast, and again grit predicted who would stay.

In contrast, stayers and leavers had indistinguishable Whole Candidate Scores. I looked a little closer at the individual components that make up the score. Again, no difference.

So, what matters for making it through Beast?

Not your SAT scores, not your high school rank, not your leadership experience, not your athletic ability.

Not your Whole Candidate Score.

What matters is grit."

Angela's research on the power of grit begins at West Point where new cadets are put through a grueling (!) summer welcome called Beast Barracks. Or, just Beast.

For two months, these cadets (who spent the better part of two years trying to get into West Point) are put through a super challenging initiation designed to help them *"make the transition from new cadet to Soldier."*

A ton drop out during those grueling 7 weeks.

Military scientists had been trying to predict who would drop out for decades. They couldn't figure it out.

Although their "Whole Candidate Score" (which measures things like GPA, SAT, and leadership + athletic experience) *did* predict who would do well over the course of the four years at West Point, it DIDN'T predict who would actually stick around long enough to graduate.

Enter Angela Duckworth and her Grit Scale—a super simple 10 question test (take it [here](#)). This simple test provided the most accurate prediction of who would make it through.

As Angela says: *"Half of the questions were about perseverance. They asked how much you agree with statements like 'I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge' and 'I finish whatever I begin.'"*

The other half of the questions were about passion. They asked whether your 'interests change from year to year' and the extent to which you 'have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.'"

Passion + Perseverance.

Grit.

If you want to make it through the Beast challenges in your life, you'd be wise to cultivate it.

Let's explore how.

WANT GRIT? REMEMBER: EFFORT COUNTS TWICE

"I have been working on a theory of the psychology of achievement since Marty scolded me for not having one. I have pages and pages of diagrams, filling more than a dozen lab notebooks. After more than a decade of thinking about it, sometimes alone, and sometimes in partnership with close colleagues, I finally published an article in which I lay down two simple equations that explain how you get from talent to achievement.

"The bottom line on culture and grit is: If you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you're a leader, and you want the people in your organization to be grittier, create a gritty culture."

~ Angela Duckworth

"I came to a fundamental insight that would guide my future work: Our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another."

~ Angela Duckworth

Here they are:

talent x effort = skill

-----> **skill x effort = achievement**

Talent is how quickly your skills improve when you invest effort. Achievement is what happens when you take your acquired skills and use them. Of course, your opportunities—for example, having a great teacher—matter tremendously, too, and maybe more than anything about the individual. My theory doesn't address these outside forces, nor does it include luck. It's about the psychology of achievement, but because psychology isn't all that matters, it's incomplete.

Still, I think it's useful. What this theory says is that when you consider individuals in identical circumstances, what each achieves depends on just two things, talent and effort. Talent—how fast we can improve a skill—absolutely matters. But effort factors into the calculations *twice*, not once. Effort builds skill. At the very same time, effort makes skill *productive*."

As a good, conservative scientist, Angela is careful to point out that there's more to achieving great things than just the psychology of achievement (great teachers, luck, etc.) BUT if you look at individuals in the same situation, you'll find two simple variables that will make the difference in what each achieves:

Talent + Effort.

And, although talent (defined by Angela as how quickly you can improve your skills when you put in the effort) **IS** important, EFFORT is counted twice. And, of course, we have control over how much effort we put in—which is exciting.

So, to recap the equation:

TALENT x EFFORT = SKILLS

-----> **SKILLS x EFFORT = ACHIEVEMENT**

The amount of effort we put into cultivating our talent = our skills. The amount of effort we put into giving our skills to the world = our achievement. A simple equation that says a LOT about the psychology of achievement.

Remember: Effort counts twice.

P.S. Angela quotes Will Smith a few times in this chapter. He says: "I've never really viewed myself as particularly talented... Where I excel is ridiculous, sickening work ethic."

And: "The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is: I'm not afraid to die on a treadmill. I will not be outworked, period. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, you might be sexier than me. You might be all of those things. You got it on me in nine categories. But if we get on the treadmill together, there's two things: You're getting off first, or I'm going to die. It's really that simple." (Watch video of that awesomeness [here](#).)

GRITTY PASSION = COMPASS (VS. FIREWORKS)

"What I mean by a passion is not just that you have something you care about. What I mean is that you care about the *same* ultimate goal in an abiding, loyal, steady way. You are not capricious. Each day, you wake up thinking of the questions you fell asleep thinking about. You are, in a sense, pointing in the same direction, ever eager to take even the smallest step forward than to take a step to the side, toward some other destination. At the extreme, one might call your focus obsessive. Most of your actions derive their significance from their allegiance to your ultimate concern, your life philosophy. You have your priorities in order."

Gritty people figure out what they are REALLY committed to and then they give themselves to it for YEARS or DECADES or an entire LIFETIME.

"Without effort, your talent is nothing more than your unmet potential. Without effort, your skill is nothing more than what you could have done but didn't. With effort, talent becomes skill and, at the very same time, effort makes skill productive."

~ Angela Duckworth

"Eventually, if you keep practicing in the same time and place, what once took conscious thought to initiate becomes automatic." There is no more miserable human being," observed William James, than the one for whom 'every beginning of every bit of work' must be decided anew each day."

~ Angela Duckworth

As Angela says, their passion is less like fireworks that come intensely and then fade away and more like a COMPASS that guides every moment of their entire lives.

They don't run around chasing one goal after another; they have an "ultimate concern"—a top level goal that drives all the other goals.

They have their ONE Thing that [Gary Keller](#) describes so powerfully and they are willing to be seen as obsessed [Grant Cardone](#) 10x Rule-style.

Here's an example of a grit paragon that Angela shares: Tom Seaver. Tom is a Hall of Fame pitcher who received the highest-ever percentage of votes: 98.8. (Wow.) He pitched for 20 years and racked up some crazy stats: 311 wins, 3,640 strikeouts, 61 shutouts, a 2.86 lifetime ERA.

Here's how he approached his ultimate concern/ONE Thing goal to structure everything he did in his life: "Pitching . . . determines what I eat, when I go to bed, what I do when I'm awake. It determines how I spend my life when I'm not pitching. If it means I have to come to Florida and can't get tanned because I might get a burn that would keep me from throwing for a few days, then I never go shirtless in the sun. . . . If it means I have to remind myself to pet dogs with my left hand or throw logs on the fire with my left hand, then I do that, too. If it means in the winter I eat cottage cheese instead of chocolate chip cookies in order to keep my weight down, then I eat cottage cheese."

Reminds me of the [Black Hole Focus](#) Idea we talk about in [Purpose 101](#).

And, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi shares the same wisdom in his study of the most eminent Creators. [See the Notes](#) on *Creativity* where he tells us: "After creative energy is awakened, it is necessary to protect it. We must erect barriers against distractions, dig channels so that energy can flow more freely, find ways to escape outside temptations and interruptions."

Spotlight on you: Do you jump from thing to thing to thing, following your passion fireworks-style? Or, are you guided by a deep, abiding passion—an ultimate concern—that serves as a compass for all you do?

Let's get gritty with our passion. Let's find the thing that's worthy of us and give ourselves to it.

P.S. Angela makes the important point that she has one ultimate concern for her professional life AND she's committed to being an extraordinary mother to her two daughters. Super inspiring: "... my top-level, life-organizing goal is, and will be until my last breath: Use psychological science to help kids thrive."

P.P.S. In this section, Angela talks about Gabriele Oettingen's work on *Rethinking Positive Thinking*. [Check out the Notes](#) + [Interview](#) and remember to [WOOP!](#) :)

HOW TO GROW YOUR GRIT (THE 4 PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSETS)

"In fact, when people drop out of things, they do so for a reason. Actually, they do so for different reasons. Any of the following four thoughts might go through your head right before you quit what you're doing:

'I'm bored.'

'The effort isn't worth it.'

'This isn't important to me.'

'I can't do this, so I might as well give up.'

There's nothing wrong—morally or otherwise—with thoughts like these. As I tried to show in this chapter, paragons of grit quit goals, too. But the higher the level of the goal in question, the more stubborn they are about seeing it through. Most important, paragons of grit don't swap compasses: when it comes to the one, singularly important aim that guides almost everything else they do, the very gritty tend *not* to utter the statements above. ...

"Interest is one source of passion. Purpose—the intention to contribute to the well-being of others—is another. The mature passions of gritty people depend on both."

~ Angela Duckworth

*"In my 'grit lexicon,'
therefore, purpose means
'the intention to contribute
to the well-being of others.'"*
~ Angela Duckworth

Together, the research reveals the psychological assets that mature paragons of grit have in common. There are four. They counter each of the buzz-killers listed above, and they tend to develop, over the years, in a particular order."

We all quit things. (And, as we discuss in [Born for This](#), that is often the wise thing to do.) But... The grittiest among us DON'T quit the compass-driven top-level ultimate concern goals. That's what makes them gritty.

Angela tells us there are four psychological assets we can cultivate to get our grit on. Here they are: **Interest + Practice + Purpose + Hope.**

Interest: If we want sustainable passion, we need to be intrinsically drawn to what we do. It needs to fire us up. We need to love it. We all have facets of what we do that aren't particularly awesome, but we're just not going to put in the effort over the long run unless we, like the grit paragons, have an "enduring fascination and childlike curiosity" and "practically shout, 'I love what I do!'" (<— Do you?)

Practice. Angela talks about [Anders Ericsson](#)'s research on deliberate practice (and juxtaposes + integrates it with Csikszentmihalyi's work on [Flow](#) in a super cool way) and points out that one key aspect of perseverance is the ability to discipline ourselves to show up every.single.day with an attitude of "Whatever it takes, I want to improve!" ([See the Notes](#) on [Peak](#) for more!)

Purpose. Purpose is all about seeing that our work matters in the world. It's essential that we love what we do, but we're not going to sustain our interest over the long run if it's just about us. We need to make the connection to something bigger than ourselves. Angela tells us that fully mature exemplars of grit invariably tell her: "My work is important—both to me and to others."

Hope. Hope defines every stage of grit. It's the "rising-to-the-occasion" kind of perseverance in which we KNOW that we have the ability to achieve what we set out to do. "If we stay down, grit loses. If we get up, grit prevails." ([Check out our Notes](#) on [Making Hope Happen](#) for more on the science of hope.)

Interest + Practice + Purpose + Hope.

How are you doing with each of those assets? What're you rockin'? What can you optimize?

GRIT + WISE PARENTING (VS. NOT-SO-WISE PARENTING)

"Indeed, over the past forty years, study after carefully designed study has found that the children of psychologically wise parents fare better than children raised in any other kind of household.

In one of Larry's studies, for example, about ten thousand American teenagers completed questionnaires about their parents' behavior. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, or parents' marital status, teens with warm, respectful, and demanding parents earned higher grades in school, were more self-reliant, suffered from less anxiety and depression, and were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior."

That's from a chapter on Parenting for Grit in which Angela walks us through the virtue of Wise Parenting (vis-a-vis Authoritarian Parenting, Permissive Parenting and Neglectful Parenting).

Here's the short story: Wise Parents are BOTH warm AND demanding. They have high standards AND total support. On the other hand, Authoritarian Parents have high standards but low warmth. Permissive Parents have high warmth but low standards. Neglectful have neither. (See [this +1](#) for more.)

So, Wise Parenting is a good idea. But, if you *really* want to cultivate grit in your kids, YOU must embody the qualities of grit. YOU need to have passion + perseverance for your own life goals. ... Do you? :)

*"Author and activist James
Baldwin once put it this way:
'Children have never been very
good at listening to their
elders, but they have never
failed to imitate them.'"*
~ Angela Duckworth

"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. To be gritty is to fall down seven times, and rise eight."

~ Angela Duckworth

P.S. Did you know the Latin root of the word *parenting* literally means "to bring forth"? To "bring forth potential." That's our job. Not just as parents, but as teachers, coaches, and leaders.

P.P.S. As part of their Wise Parenting practice, Angela and her family have what she calls "The Hard Thing Rule." In short, everyone in the fam picks something challenging that they're committed to mastering. For Angela, it's her psychological research. For her husband, it's his real estate development. For their daughters it includes things like ballet and piano.

Three rules: 1. You need to deliberately practice daily. 2. You can quit but not until the "season" is over—no quitting on a bad day mid-way thru. Gotta finish. 3. You pick your hard thing—you need to be intrinsically interested in it! (Might be cool for your family? Definitely for ours! :)

YOU'RE A GRITTY GENIUS

"You're no genius,' my dad used to say when I was just a little girl. I realize now that he was talking to himself as much as he was talking to me.

If you define genius as being able to accomplish great things in life without effort, then he was right: I'm no genius, and neither is he.

But if, instead, you define genius as working toward excellence, ceaselessly, with every element of your being—then, in fact, my dad is a genius, and so am I, and... if you're willing, so are you."

Want to be a genius?

Let's discover our passion and give ourselves to it with a fierce commitment to excellence + service over the rest of our lives. :)

To grit, my friend!!!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.