

“Grit”
The Power of Passion and Perseverance
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What we eventually accomplish may depend more on our passion and perseverance than on our innate talent. I may not be the smartest person in the room, but I’ll strive to be the grittiest.” Grit matter more than talent.”

In fact, cadets with the highest Whole Candidate Scores were just as likely to drop out as those with the lowest. And this was why Mike’s door was open to me. What struck Mike was that rising to the occasion had almost nothing to do with talent. Those who dropped out of training rarely did so from lack of ability. Rather, what mattered, Mike said, was a “never give up” attitude. The highly accomplished were paragons of perseverance. It was this combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit. In other words, how talented a cadet was said nothing about their grit, and vice versa.

Our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another. Before jumping to the conclusion that talent was destiny, should I be considering the importance of effort?

What I discovered was that Lowell students were distinguished more by their work ethic than by their intelligence. During the next several years of teaching, I grew less and less convinced that talent was destiny and more and more intrigued by the returns generated by effort.

“The plain fact remains that men the world over possess amounts of resource, which only very exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use.” In my view, the biggest reason a preoccupation with talent can be harmful is simple: By shining our spotlight on talent, we risk leaving everything else in the shadows.

Meeting a teacher who believed in his potential was a critical turning point: a pivot from this is all you can do to who knows what you can do? “At what point,” Scott asked, “Does achievement trump potential?”

One way to interpret these stories is that talent is great, but tests of talent stink. But another conclusion is that the focus on talent distracts us from something that is at least as important, and that is effort. In the next chapter, I’ll argue that, as much as talent counts, effort counts twice.

The main thing is that greatness is doable. Greatness is many, many individual feats, and each of them is doable.” When you consider individuals in identical circumstances, what each achieves depends on just two things, talent and effort. As any coach or athlete will tell you, consistency of effort over the long run is everything. 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.

“And here’s the really important thing. Grit is about working on something you care about so much that you’re willing to stay loyal to it.” “It’s doing what you love. I get that.” “Right, it’s doing what you love, but not just falling in love—staying in love.”

Grit has two components: passion and perseverance. Rather than intensity, what comes up again and again in their remarks is the idea of consistency over time.

Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare.

Passion as a compass—that thing which takes you some time to build, tinker with, and finally get right, and that then guides you on your long and winding road to where, ultimately, you want to be.

Pete Carol's philosophy is: "Do things better than they have ever been done before."

What I mean by passion is not just that you have something you care about. What I mean is that you care about that same ultimate goal in an abiding, loyal, steady way. Most of your actions derive their significance from their allegiance to your ultimate concern, your life philosophy. You have your priorities in order. Grit is about holding the same top-level goal for a very long time. In very gritty people, most mid-level and low-level goals are, in some way or another, related to that ultimate goal.

Their goal hierarchy has a top-level goal but no supporting mid-level or low-level goals: I think one top-level professional goal, rather than any other number, is ideal. You need one internal compass—not two, three, four, or five.

What definitively set apart the eminent from the rest of humanity were a cluster of four indicators. Notably, these also distinguished the First Ten from the Last Ten—the super-eminent from the merely eminent. Cox grouped these together and called them "persistence of motive."

Degree to which he works with distant objects in view (as opposed to living from hand to mouth); active preparation for later life; working toward a definite goal; tendency not to abandon tasks from mere changeability; not seeking something fresh because of novelty; not "looking for a change;" degree of strength of will or perseverance; quiet determination to stick to a course once decided upon; tendency not to abandon tasks in the face of obstacles; perseverance, tenacity, doggedness; talents are not entirely genetic; the rate at which we develop any skill is also, crucially, a function of experience.

Grit grows as we figure out our life philosophy, learn to dust ourselves off after rejection and disappointment, and learn to tell the difference between low-level goals that should be abandoned quickly and higher-level goals that demand more tenacity. I also learned that years of hard work are often mistaken for innate talent, and that passion is as necessary as perseverance to world-class excellence.

"If you're a business, you don't care whether a kid thinks they're special. What you care about is 'Can you deliver? If you can't deliver, hey, we don't have any use for you.'

Either way, this snapshot reveals that grit is not entirely fixed; like every aspect of your psychological character, grit is more plastic than you might think.

First comes interest. Passion begins with intrinsically enjoying what you do. Next comes the capacity to practice. Third is purpose. And, finally, hope.

"My advice for you is, figure out what you enjoy doing most in life, and then try to do it full-time. Life is short. Follow your passion." –Will Shortz

Research shows that people are enormously more satisfied with their jobs when they do something that fits their personal interests. People whose jobs match their personal interests are, in general, happier with their lives as a whole. Second, people perform better at work when what they do interests them. Those whose intrinsic personal interests fit with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to their coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer.

In a 2014 Gallup poll, more than two-thirds of adults said they were not engaged at work, a good portion of whom were "actively disengaged." Worldwide, only 13 percent of adults call themselves "engaged" at work. So it seems that very few people end up loving what they do for a living. Nobody is interested in everything, and everyone is interested in something. So matching your job to what captures your attention and imagination is a good idea. "I can't imagine doing anything else," but, in fact, there was a time earlier in life when they could.

Barry thinks that what prevents a lot of young people from developing a serious career interest is unrealistic expectations. A related problem, Barry says, is the mythology that falling in love with a career should be sudden and swift. Passion for your work is a little bit of discovery, followed by a lot of development, and then a lifetime of deepening. Even in the development of your interests, there is work—practicing, studying, learning—to be done. At the start of an endeavor, we need encouragement and freedom to figure out what we enjoy. The grittier an individual is, the fewer career changes they're likely to make. Endlessly dating new occupations, and never settling down with just one, is a more serious matter.

In fact, the word interest comes from the Latin *interesse*, which means “to differ.” How consistent your interests are over long stretches of time. If you'd like to follow your passion but haven't yet fostered one, ask yourself a few simple questions:

What do I like to think about?

Where does my mind wander?

What do I really care about?

What matters most to me?

How do I enjoy spending my time?

And, in contrast, what do I find absolutely unbearable?

Begin with the answers you're surest of and build from there. Don't be afraid to guess. Don't be afraid to erase an answer that isn't working out. In sum, the directive to follow your passion is not bad advice. But what may be even more useful is to understand how passions are fostered in the first place.

PRACTICE

Considering all the studies showing that gritty people typically stick with their commitments longer than others, it seemed like the major advantage of grit was, simply, more time on task.

Kaizen is Japanese for resisting the plateau of arrested development. Its literal translation is: “continuous improvement.” My interview research made me wonder whether grit is not just about quantity of time devoted to interests, but also quality of time. Not just more time on task, but also better time on task.

Csikszentmihalyi has published a contrary opinion: “Researchers who study the development of talents have concluded that to learn any complex skill well takes about 10,000 hours of practice.

Gritty people do more deliberate practice and experience more flow. In other words, deliberate practice is for preparation, and flow is for performance. Each of the basic requirements of deliberate practice is unremarkable:

- A clearly defined stretch goal
- Full concentration and effort
- Immediate and informative feedback
- Repetition with reflection and refinement

A mountain of research studies, including a few of my own, show that when you have a habit of practicing at the same time and in the same place every day, you hardly have to think about getting started. You just do. 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. At its core, the idea of purpose is the idea that what we do matters to people other than ourselves.

My claim here is that, for most people, purpose is a tremendously powerful source of motivation. There may be exceptions, but the rarity of these exceptions proves the rule. All of us, Terkel concluded, are looking for “daily meaning as well as daily bread.” The hope that gritty people have has nothing to do with luck and everything to do with getting up again.

It isn't suffering that leads to hopelessness. It's suffering you think you can't control. When you keep searching for ways to change your situation for the better, you stand a chance of finding them. Mindsets have been shown to make a difference in all the same life domains as optimism. A fixed mindset about ability leads to pessimistic explanations of adversity, and that, in turn, leads to both giving up on challenges and avoiding them in the first place.

The word parenting derives from Latin and means “to bring forth.” As much as children need freedom, they also need limits. If you want to bring forth grit in your child, first ask how much passion and perseverance you have for your own life goals. The real question is whether they're encouraged to employ their good old-fashioned hard work and their grit, if you will, to its maximum. In the end, those are the people who seem to be the most successful.” Harsh? I don't think so. High standards? Absolutely.

“Do not let temporary setbacks become permanent excuses.” And, finally, “Use mistakes and problems as opportunities to get better—not reasons to quit.”

Anson Dorrance observed that “talent is common; what you invest to develop that talent is the critical final measure of greatness.”

George Bernard Shaw: “The true joy in life is to be a force of fortune instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”

“Personally, I have learned that if you create a vision for yourself and stick with it, you can make amazing things happen in your life. My experience is that once you have done the work to create the clear vision, it is the discipline and effort to maintain that vision that can make it all come true. The two go hand in hand. The moment you've created that vision, you're on your way, but it's the diligence with which you stick to that vision that allows you to get there. So, for the Seahawks, Always compete means Be all you can be, whatever that is for you. Reach for your best.”-Pete Carol

What we accomplish in the marathon of life depends tremendously on our grit—our passion and perseverance for long-term goals. An obsession with talent distracts us from that simple truth.

It's amazing to me how many people I know who're well into their forties and haven't really committed to anything. They don't know what they're missing.”