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Angela Duckworth (2016) *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*

Effort is more important than natural talent by roughly a factor of two

- Psychological equations
    - Talent x effort = skill, and skill x effort = achievement
        - So we see effort appearing twice in the overall analysis of achievement whereas talent only comes in once
        - **Talent** is operationalised as how quickly your skills improve when you put in a given amount of effort
    - These equations are just about the psychology of achievement and so are an incomplete story about achievement overall: they don't factor in, for example, outside factors like whether someone has access to good teachers or coaches

- This finding is important to bear explicitly in mind, because it cuts against the bias we have to favour [trust to perform well and/or think more highly of?] "naturals" over people who achieve their success through hard work (research suggests that we have this bias even though we often deny it/publically express the opposite opinion—it may be unconscious or "in the background")
    - Intelligence, among other things, can be improved with effective training and sufficient effort and motivation

Grit is passion for a high-level goal and the perseverance to pursue this goal over a long time horizon

Passion is one key part of grit

- Passion is a deep-seated, abiding/enduring, grounding interest in and commitment to question/project; it's a high-level, organising goal in your life—an end in itself that you are compelled by
    - Passion is not loving every single aspect of your job or loving every moment of engagement with what you're passionate about (this is impossible)
        - Being passionate about something can be subjectively unpleasant, frustrating, tough, a grind etc.: what characterises passion isn't always subjectively enjoying it but a strong, enduring motivation to engage with it (to get better at it, improve it, etc., depending on what it is) and experience of being compelled by it

- Interest and meaning are two key parts of passion,[1] and both are critical to sustaining passion over the long run, which is crucial for success/mastery/impact
    - **Interest**
        - Other things equal, unsurprisingly, being interested in what you do makes you better at it and happier in life
        - We are all neophiles, but whereas novelty for the novice is anything new, novelty for the expert is nuance—getting deeper into the subject in a way that no one without deep expertise could appreciate or understand the significance of
    - **Meaning** simply means finding what you're passionate about meaningful (another way of saying this is that it provide a robust sense of purpose): you think what you're doing benefits others and/or contributes to something larger than yourself
        - Questions to ask yourself to assess the extent to which you find your work meaningful: "does my work make the world a better place?" "Is my work one of the most meaningful parts of my life?"
        - Also unsurprisingly, not finding your work meaningful can result in quiet despair and/or significantly decreased life satisfaction (even if you become inured to it, it'll still be there somehow)

- How passion arises and grows over time
    - In broad strokes, it's a little discovery, a lot of development, and a lifetime of deepening—it doesn't happen all at once in a majestic/"aha!" moment
        - Interests must be discovered through experience, preferably self-chosen/self-directed/free experience: it's very difficult to figure out what you will and won't be interested in from the armchair, and, at least for some people, to develop an interest in something if they're put into it rather than trying it out for themselves
        - An initial interest needs cultivation and lots of support from different internal and external factors, including the support of others, to grow
            - In particular, when you're just getting introduced to something, it's important that the introduction is more on the fun, playful, and freely exploratory side rather than the serious side (note to self: this seems to be relevant for teaching intro classes and getting people excited about philosophy). Experts and beginners have different motivational needs: upfront, we need enjoyability,

[1] I'm not sure whether Duckworth analyses passion into interest and meaning in the book, but I find it a useful way to think about it

freedom to explore, and positive encouragement; a series of small, enjoyable wins

Perseverance: grit involves consistency of effort over time (among other things)

- It's more about stamina in the pursuit of a high-level goal and less about short-term intensity
    - The timescale can be as long as a career
    - The relentless pursuit of getting to the next level through training and feedback, characterised by a "whatever it takes, I want to get better" attitude
        - However, the desire to improve is positive: "it's not looking backward with dissatisfaction, but looking forward and wanting to grow"

- Means-end rationality is critical here
    - Choosing what not to do and what responsibilities not to take on are underratedly important
    - You can change up your lower-order goals (means) as necessary, but gritty people tend to stick with the same high-level, organising goal that shapes their lower-order goals

- **Deliberate practice:** it's not just about putting in more hours (though of course you do need a sufficient quantity of training), but also about training in an effective way—deliberate practice
    - The general idea is to try to do what you can't yet, come up short, learn, and iterate: repetition with reflection and refinement
    - More specifically, start with a specific, clearly-defined **stretch goal** that's aimed at growing in an area for improvement rather than simply banging away at stuff you're already good at, try to accomplish the goal, get immediate, informative feedback on what you can improve, and iterate until you're where you want to be
        - To find clearly-defined goals and areas for improvement, break whatever it is you want to ultimately be good at down into components, identify where you're getting stuck, and train that
    - Deliberate practice requires full concentration and effort
        - 3-5 hours of deliberate practice per day seem, and about 1 hour per session seems to be the peak
        - Because it's an attempt to do something you can't yet do well (skill is unequal to task), deliberate practice can often be unpleasant. However, gritty people tend to find it less unpleasant and more rewarding than others. There are competing hypotheses for why this is

    - Gritty people tend to do more deliberate practice and to experience more flow. The author's hypothesis is that doing more deliberate practice allows you to get to greater flow, a state in which what you're doing is well matched to your skill

- Failure and growth mindset
    - Endorses Dweck's research on growth mindset and finds that growth mindset and grit mutually support one another
    - How to handle failure
        - Interpret failure as something with a specific cause that you can learn from (rather than, eg, "I'm useless [in *x* situation]") and grow stronger/more adept from with effort
        - Once you've learned what you can from your failure, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and retain your optimism: grit does not allow setbacks or failures to keep us from pursuing our highest goals
    - Even if we consciously believe growth mindset, a different part of us usually puts a significant credence in fixed mindset, similar to our bias in favour of naturals over people who succeed via hard work

Grit and culture

- Because we're so strongly wired to conform to our in-groups/cultures, one of the best things we can do to increase grit is to join and commit to a gritty in-group/culture
- We can think of a culture as a community with a shared set of norms and guiding values: "this is how we do things around here, and why"
    - So cultures aren't just macroscopic, spreading across nation-states and religions: they are also specific to institutions, teams, businesses, and other organisations
    - You make a culture your in-group by identifying with it—"I'm a [blank, eg a Fulbrighter]"
        - When you come to identify with an in-group and spend long enough in it, you come to internalise its norms (among other things—see your Global Optimum podcast notes for how you also come to internalise and desire the markers of high status in your in-group)

Summary of ways to grow grit in yourself

- Cultivate growth mindset and actively challenge fixed mindset narratives
- Do deliberate practice
- Learn how to grow from failure
- Situate yourself in gritty in-groups
- By doing the above things, come to identify as a gritty person

    - Sometimes we make decisions based on "this is the type of person I am" rather than reflectively thinking it through

Misc psychological findings

- As we age across decades, we tend to become more conscientious, calm, caring, and confident
- Nature and nurture are both relevant to many traits—so the interesting question is not 'is it nature or nurture' but 'in what proportion do nature and nurture impact this trait?'
- Evolutionary psychology has shaped us to pursue pleasure, but also to pursue things we find meaningful, ie self-transcendent, altruistic behaviour (why? Very roughly, benefitting the tribe)
- Having bad things happen to you that you have no control over does not make you stronger and can lead to learned helplessness, whereas meeting adversity (particularly earlier in life) that you can and do overcome through effort leads to strength and resilience

<u>The outside view</u>

- Duckworth and colleagues checked to see if earlier research on grit replicated. It did, but the upshot seems to be that grit it's the magic ingredient that it can seem like in the popular book, and that lots of other psychological ingredients go into the stew of success (APA source)

- This meta-analysis suggests that grit plays a positive, but small, role in success and that consistency of effort is the most important part

Key Takeaways

<u>Grit and success</u>

The relentless pursuit of getting to the next level through training and feedback, characterised by a "whatever it takes, I want to get better" attitude

- However, the desire to improve is positive: "it's not looking backward with dissatisfaction, but looking forward and wanting to grow"

How to handle failure

- Interpret failure as something with a specific cause that you can learn from (rather than, eg, "I'm useless [in x situation]") and grow stronger/more adept from with effort

- Once you've learned what you can from your failure, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and retain your optimism: grit does not allow setbacks or failures to keep us from pursuing our highest goals

Choosing what not to do and what responsibilities not to take on are underratedly important in career success

Misc psych

When you're just getting introduced to something, it's important that the introduction is more on the fun, playful, and freely exploratory side rather than the serious side. Experts and beginners have different motivational needs: upfront, we need enjoyability, freedom to explore, and positive encouragement; a series of small, enjoyable wins

- Application to teaching intro-level classes

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