

Accomplishing Long Term Goals

6/19/2012

Why do some individuals accomplish more than others?

Dr. Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania Psychology Department and colleagues identified a personality trait found among high achievers across several different domains. The term given to the personality trait – grit.

“We define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.”

Recently, much attention has been given to the concept of the ten year rule for the development of elite performance. Dr. Anders Ericson and Talent Code author Dan Coyle point to ten years of deliberate practice needed for a performer to develop and reach an elite level. With such a great amount of time and effort needed to achieve elite level, grit, perseverance and passion would surely play an integral role in attaining elite performance.

Dr. Duckworth developed a grit scale to measure an individual’s grit. In a study conducted at USMA West Point, the grit scale predicted completion of the rigorous first summer- Beast Barracks - better than the overall West Point Whole Candidate Score.

As we look at the long process of developing an athlete the trait of grit/perseverance should be considered a critical element that contributes to achieving elite performance levels.

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Grit: Can it be developed or is it innate?

Do you know an athlete who not only never misses a workout, but never misses a yard of their training, or a rep in the weight room? No matter how tired or beat up they might be, they see their work through to the end. Despite the fact that they may not be the most talented on the team, aren't they usually one of the most successful? Is this sort of determination, or Grit, just how they are, or have they developed their grittiness over time? It's a good question.

What is Grit? Angela Duckworth, a Ph. D. in Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, began studying Grit in 2005. She studied students, athletes, soldiers, CEOs, spelling bee competitors and many others and found that self-discipline scores were better predictors of success than IQ assessments, academic grades, physical fitness measurements and leadership testing. She described Grit as, "the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals."

Can you be born with Grit? Maybe. Some studies have shown that Dopamine (a neurotransmitter that becomes activated when something good happens) can influence the amount of physical activity someone undertakes. If you know someone that goes for a five-mile run on their day off, then you know someone who gets a dopamine boost from exercise. This is a genetic trait and is just how some athletes are wired. Even though they may be extremely gifted through birth, they believe their talent exists because of their dedication.

Grit may be a trait that can be learned.

- Parents can teach their children to focus on the hard work necessary to achieve a goal, not necessarily the end result.
- Coaches can set long-term goals for their athletes and their teams, and then not only pursue those goals, but follow up on the progress towards them.

Gritty athletes learn to persevere through challenging times, consistently work harder than their competition and focus on improving their weaknesses. Additionally, a motivating factor like money, a perceived slight or a noble cause provides the fuel to keep them going. Whether learned or innate, Grit can be the difference between a medal and a fourth place finish for two equally talented athletes.

How gritty are you? Take the [test](#)