

GRIT: PERSEVERANCE AND PASSION FOR LONG-TERM GOALS

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"Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked...men the world over possess amounts of resource, which only exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use."

–William James (1907), *The Energies of Men*, pp. 322-323

In 1907, psychologist and philosopher William James suggested that talents were different from the strengths of character required to fully exploit those talents. For his entire distinguished career, James was fascinated with why only a handful of individuals realize the limits of their potential while the rest of us fall far short of what we could be.

As a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, I have taken up James's question of why some individuals accomplish more than others of equal talent. My research suggests that one personal quality is shared by the most prominent leaders in every field: grit.

What is grit?

Grit is perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining both effort and interest over years and years—despite failure, adversity, and even just stalls in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his 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.

The idea that grit might be essential to high achievement evolved during interviews with professionals in a variety of fields unrelated to sports, including investment banking, painting, journalism, academia, medicine, and law. Asked what quality distinguishes star performers in their respective fields, these individuals cited grit or a close synonym as often as they mentioned raw talent. In fact, many were awed by the achievements of peers who did not at first seem as gifted as others but whose sustained commitment to their ambitions was exceptional. Likewise, many noted with surprise that prodigiously gifted peers did not end up at the top of their field.

Encouraged by these interviews, my colleagues and I developed a self-report questionnaire to measure grit. A version of this questionnaire is available at www.gritstudy.com, and includes questions about how consistent an individual's interests tend to be over the long-term, and how the person reacts to disappointment and failure. (The questionnaire can be faked in the sense that a person can easily "pretend" to be grittier than he or she really is, but in the context of academic research, there is no serious incentive to do so.)

Research Findings:

Here is a summary of our findings. In our first study, we found that grittier adults

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