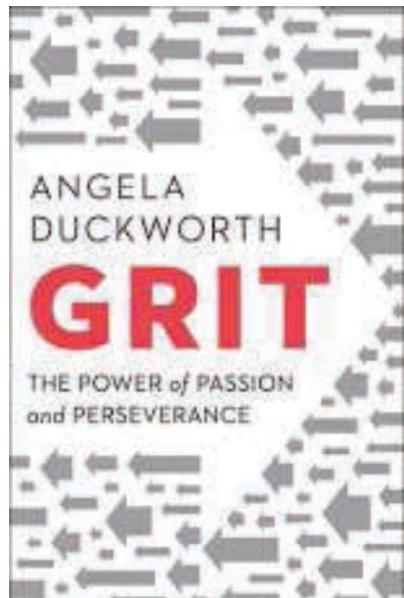


Book Review

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance



Written by: Angela Duckworth

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Angela Duckworth is a well-known professor and psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania who applies psychology to liven up other people's lives, especially children. Duckworth is also the co-founder of Character Lab, an organization whose chief goal is to further advance the practice and science of character development for children. Before her academic career, she was a management

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consultant at McKinsey & Company. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* is her first book, containing 13 chapters and divided into three parts. Many illuminating ideas are discussed and reinforced with narratives and personal insights.

Part I: What Grit Is and Why It Matters

Duckworth discusses straightforwardly her main thesis on grit as the key to success in any undertaking. She emphasizes that the concept cuts across different fields like education, military, work, contests, sports, etc. Here, the author defines grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” She then highlights how imperative grit is in one’s life since it determines one’s destiny. Interestingly, she points out that, as manifested in many of her studies, grit is a better determiner of success in life than IQ.

Backed up by research, Duckworth contends that whenever we think that a student is talented, we start to pay special attention to them and expect more from them. We tend to want them to be excellent, and that expectation can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. To elaborate, adults have this kind of natural liking to, for instance, shows that feature talented kids like *The Voice Kids*, *MasterChef Junior*, and *Little Big Shots*. No wonder adults prefer kids who are endowed with brilliance.

The same is true in the field of education. Teachers might not notice that they favor immediately the students who are intelligent, talented, and can easily pick up lessons. Though it seemingly is not harmful, this bias which is not known at the conscious level of a teacher can negatively impact the striving students. When we do not become aware of this, the gap between the talented and the striving becomes wider and wider.

If we put further attention to the brilliant ones and expect the striving ones to be mediocre or fail, then we are becoming unfair to them. The two types of students deserve justifiable attention and expectations to succeed. Whether a student starts as fair or excellent in a taught skill, he or she should never be left behind. This discovery and other psychological research should be made known to teachers to prevent problems in teaching and other educational innovations.

Furthermore, Duckworth proposes that something that is never natural can become second nature simply by doing it over and over. Nowadays, we commonly discount grit. We would rather avoid hard work if there is a shortcut. We want an easy way and desire immediate achievements. We do not want to delay our gratification. This can probably be traced to the fact that we live in a society where almost everything is instant.

If a student without grit focuses on getting high grades in grammar, he or she will abhor rigorous practice and rely on stress-free means like cheating on a test. The student may be gratified at the moment he or she achieves higher grades, but surely this will create repercussions in the future. We need to teach everyone, most especially students, to value grit by telling them that all talented and expert people today practice over and over. They may, at times, fail, but they did not surrender and still go through the process of improving themselves. Manifesting this virtue is crucial if we truly want to become skillful. Becoming aware of such matters can positively impact their view on learning and their learning habits.

Part II: Growing Grit from the Inside Out

Substantiated by a longitudinal study, Duckworth's suggestion shows that the overbearing faculty and parents deter children's inherent drive. On the other hand, children whose parents

allow them to choose whatever they want would most likely cultivate interests, which they later identify as passion. When children become interested in a certain play, game, or subject, they focus their whole attention on it and enjoy the process. Parents must value such autonomy.

If parents always interrupt choices made by children and assert their own predilections, they then smother their children's budding interests. Though parents may sincerely think of the welfare of their children, such intrusion might negatively affect them as their children will not be able to explore and harness their curiosity on their own.

Parents, therefore, should support their children in the games and subjects they like by providing them with resources that will advance their skills and knowledge. Teachers and school administrators should realize this too. They must do the same by not spoon-feeding and imposing clubs and activities on students. In this way, education is personalized and shaped in accordance to students' penchants which, hopefully, may foster their dazzling talents and skills.

Duckworth reinforces the insights of two prominent psychologists who study the development of children. According to Bodrova and Leong (2006), children would get to learn the adults' responses, such as frowning and flushing of cheeks, when they themselves create mistakes. Through such responses, adults teach children the concept of embarrassment and shame. They might also unwittingly teach children negative things such as viewing mistakes as noxiously bad, and this is perhaps due to ignorance or lack of awareness on the part of the adults.

Therefore, adults need to radically improve themselves before engaging in the noble profession of teaching. When teachers do not become aware that their actions influence the thinking of students,

otherwise known as implicit curriculum in the jargon of educational studies, the latter's self-esteem and perception of learning might be in jeopardy. Teachers must learn to rectify the errors in learning calmly and without negative reactions. Such acknowledgment may affect education as a whole.

Part III: Growing Grit from the Outside In

Duckworth also recommends that if one wants to be grittier, he or she must find a group with a gritty culture. If one wants a gritty organization, its leaders should strive to create such gritty culture first. Environment plays an immense role in the education of any individual as we are social creatures and learn immediately from our surroundings. It is inherent that we easily absorb the actions and nuances of social interactions.

Leaders, teachers, and administrators should understand this. This invisible force, also known as culture, is a way of life at school: it can result in the success or failure of students and the school in general. Therefore, the latter should be aware of the prevailing culture at school and make necessary interventions when they see an aspect that is damaging to the organizational welfare and should, at the same time, reinforce the strengths that make it grittier. The task of making the school grittier lies in its leaders. They should deliberately devise ways to realize it and make sure that they start them. Culture is transmissible. So, it will surely reach students and other school stakeholders.

Duckworth also issues a caution: people with grit know the alluring charms of complacency, but none should be worth swapping in exchange for achieving potential. We adults must recognize that grit, as Duckworth emphasizes, is a tool for success. It is not easy since the world lures us with habitual comfort and brain vegetation put forward by easy access to almost anything. If it is hard, then we tend to easily give up. We want to instantly be gratified.

We mythologize those who are successful and increasingly become passive. We think that they succeed because they are inherently gifted and talented. After all, we only see their achievements and not the matters behind the screen such as their sacrifices and their repetitive practices. Adults, particularly those working in the field of education, should debunk this fallacy. If teachers create a gritty culture in educational institutions, students will work on their capacities, fueled by discipline and an intense desire to be the best version of themselves. Teachers and school administrators, thus, must help their students to acquire a laser-like focus on learning a skill or knowledge. No matter how complicated it is, when broken down and coupled with grit, everything can be learned.

Conclusion

Though the main thesis of this book is novel since many authors already talked about similar topics before (e.g., Marshall, 2006; Mischel, 2006), Duckworth makes it compelling because she supports it with her research and scientific undertakings of others. She also infuses it with vivid narratives and examples that further strengthen her proposition. Commendable are the lessons garnered from this book, which can cut across various disciplines, but, most importantly, in the arena of education.

It is helpful if we also make use of psychological findings from this book. For teachers, it can help them plan and set up strategies to promote grit in their teaching, so that they can provide students with meaningful learning experiences. For students, it encourages them to focus on grit rather than grades because grit is more beneficial to them in a long run. For school administrators, this book can empower them to deliberately improve the school culture, to make it grittier to produce graduates who can keep pace with the 21st-century world. Last but not least, this book is also helpful to everyone who works with children and youth.

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