

0:00

BEN FRIED: We're here today to talk to Angela Duckworth, whose

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book, "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance"--

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today is the official publication day, right?

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ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Today is the official publication day.

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BEN FRIED: Congratulations.

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ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

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[APPLAUSE]

0:15

Thank you.

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BEN FRIED: And incredibly gracious of her

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to fit time in at Google with a really, really busy publicity

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tour, which I was getting exhausted just hearing about it

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a few minutes ago.

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So for those of you who aren't familiar with Angela

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Duckworth's work, I'll try to briefly read a biography.

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Angela Duckworth is professor of psychology

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at the University of Pennsylvania

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and the founder and scientific director of the Character

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Lab, a nonprofit whose mission is

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to advance the science and practice of character

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development.

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In 2013 Angela was named a MacArthur Fellow in recognition

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of her research on grit, self-control,

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and other non-IQ competencies that predict success in life.

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It's a very impressive resume.

1:00

Prior to her career in research, Angela

1:02

founded a summer school for low income children

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that was profiled as a Harvard Kennedy School case study.

1:07

She's been a McKinsey management consultant, a math and science

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teacher in the public schools of New York City, San Francisco,

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and Philadelphia.

1:14

She has degrees from Harvard, Oxford,

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and the University of Pennsylvania

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in neuroscience and in psychology.

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Did I mention she's a MacArthur Fellow, 2013 MacArthur Fellow?

1:26

All right, I'll stop there.

1:27

And "Grit" is her first book, it says.

1:29

So welcome again, Angela.

1:31

Thank you for coming.

1:31

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Ben.

1:32

Thank you for having me.

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I'm delighted.

1:33

Thanks.

1:34

[APPLAUSE]

1:38

BEN FRIED: So let's get right into it.

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If you're not with her work-- the TED talk, the book--

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I guess, hopefully it's fair for me to summarize the thesis

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as that the power, as you put it,

1:53

the power of passion and perseverance

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are at least as strong indicators and contributors

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to success or achievement as things like IQ

2:01

and talent, which are what societally at least

2:04

we've traditionally focused on.

2:06

And that resonated enormously for me,

2:08

because I think at Google we spend

2:10

a lot of time thinking about talent, IQ, raw talent.

2:16

It's kind of baked into this crazy hiring process

2:19

that we have.

2:20

And which brought me to the first question I had for you,

2:24

which was, do you think that-- I mean,

ex
exit
explore
explosion

bring me
to

2:25

from what you know about Google-- do you think that we

2:28

or do you think that organizations in general

2:30

select for the wrong things in the hiring process?

2:33

And would organizations be better off

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if they looked for grit plus fit,

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as opposed to attempting to measure innate talent?

2:42

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, I think the interests that we all

2:46

have in talent-- and it's not just Google, it's me too.

2:51

I wish I were more talented.

2:52

Talent's great.

2:54

And if you could give me five more IQ points, I'd take them.

2:57

So I don't think it's wrong to think about talent.

2:59

I don't think it's wrong to think about potential.

3:02

I do think it's useful to think about what we really mean

3:04

when we say the word talent.

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And if you force yourself to write down

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on a piece of paper in a sentence that

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ends with a period, talent is, it's really hard

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to actually fill in.

3:14

What do I mean?

3:15

Potential?

3:16

I mean, we start to use metaphors.

3:17

Here's my definition of talent, and I

3:19

think it reveals that I do think it's important.

3:21

Talent is the rate at which you increase in your skill

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with effort.

3:27

Some people are going to increase their skills faster

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than others.

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And I think it's legitimate to say

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those are the quick studies.

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Those are the talented people.

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I think it's legitimate for Google to look for them.

3:38

Why not?

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Why not try to hire the more talented people?

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But in my data I find two things.

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One is that more talented individuals don't always

3:47

keep showing up.

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Woody Allen famously once said, "Eighty percent of success

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in life is just showing up."

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He was later asked by William Safire of "The New York Times"

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how he got to the number 80.

4:00

And Woody Allen, who is not exactly a scientist,

4:02

said, "Well, you know, I was going to say 70,

4:04

but it had one extra syllable."

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BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

4:06

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Nevertheless, 70, 80.

4:09

I think his point was is that his experience as a writer,

4:13

which was the context of the quote, there

4:15

are many people who could write a great book

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or who are talented in the sense that when they write,

4:20

they get better faster but they'd never

4:22

finish what they begin.

4:23

And so what I find in my data is that talent

4:25

is no guarantee of actually showing up and finishing

4:28

the things that you start.

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The second thing is, characteristic

4:31

of high achievers really in any domain,

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whether it's Google or outside Google,

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is this kind of daily discipline of trying to get better.

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BEN FRIED: Yes.

field

4:39

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: In sometimes microscopic,

4:42

infinitesimally trivial ways.

4:45

All those little details add up to excellence.

4:47

And it's not always the people who

4:49

are the quick studies who are willing to put

4:51

in those hours and hours of behind the scenes unglamorous

4:53

work.

4:54

So sure, Google should hire talented people.

4:56

But I do believe that you want people

4:58

who are going to stick with things when they're hard

5:00

and who are going to daily submit themselves

5:02

to the Japanese principal of kaizen, continuous improvement.

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BEN FRIED: So on that subject, continuous improvement,

5:08

you talk in the book about practice

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and the difference between-- I think

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you use the words directed practice

5:13

versus regular undirected practice.

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And it reminded me of in running there's a phrase junk

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miles, which maybe indicate-- I've never actually

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been a runner, so I can only hypothesize what it means.

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But I guess it means kind of running that doesn't really

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contribute to your improved conditioning.

5:29

And what is the difference between direct practice

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and undirected practice in this spirit of kaizen

5:35

and self-improvement?

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ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So let's keep running as actually

5:38

the perfect example.

5:39

So when I started to try to understand

5:42

the science of achievement beyond bumper sticker

5:45

wisdom-- what do we really know as a science about experts

5:49

and how they got that way-- I quickly

5:51

found myself at the doorstep of Anders Ericsson, who's

5:54

the world expert on world experts.

5:56

He studies what experts do that make them

5:58

different from the rest of us.

5:59

It's a great job.

6:00

He goes to the sudoku tournaments

6:02

and he studies World Cup soccer players.

6:04

And he refers to it actually as deliberate practice.

6:09

BEN FRIED: Right.

6:10

Deliberate practice, yeah.

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ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And he would like

6:11

to say that deliberate practice is different from anything else

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that we do in four important ways.

6:16

And I'm going to come back to running as an example.

6:18

But the first thing when you're doing truly deliberate practice

6:21

is that it's extremely intentional.

6:23

It's problem solving something in particular.

6:26

Not like I'm going to come into Google

6:27

and be a better CEO, whatever it is.

6:30

It's like I'm going to say that the first 15

6:34

seconds of my presentations are going to be a little sharper.

6:36

I mean, it's extremely, extremely precise.

6:38

That's the first thing, a very specific goal

6:40

that you're working on.

6:41

And often it's a weakness, not a strength.

6:43

Second is 100% focus.

6:46

Or as some coaches would say-- like Pete Carroll

6:48

at the Seahawks-- practicing with great effort.

6:52

Third is feedback.

6:54

Ideally, right away and ideally information rich.

6:59

And fourth, the kind of refinement that you reflect on

7:04

and you try the whole thing over again.

7:06

In fact, these four things are incredibly straightforward.

7:08

And you might wonder why only world class experts do it.

7:11

But let's come back to running.

7:13

So when I heard about this research on deliberate

7:15

practice, I asked Anders, why is it

7:18

that I have gone running pretty much every day for years

7:23

and I'm not a second faster than I ever was?

7:26

Isn't that evidence that you're wrong,

7:28

that it's not thousands and thousands of hours of practice?

7:30

He started asking me questions like, well,

7:32

when you go out for a run, do you have a goal,

7:35

like a certain time?

7:36

Or are you trying to run hills?

7:39

No, no.

7:39

I'm taking the same route every time

7:41

I go out around my neighborhood.

7:43

And he said, OK well, that's great.

7:44

What do you do when you're running?

7:46

I was like, well I listen to NPR and any other podcasts

7:50

because I'm trying to distract myself.

7:52

And he said well, that's interesting.

7:53

Because people who are trying to improve

7:54

their running are actually concentrating

7:57

on their running and their strides and their breathing.

8:00

All right.

8:00

And he said, so how are you getting feedback

8:02

on your running?

8:03

I mean, are you keeping your times?

8:05

Are you measuring your heart rate?

8:06

Do you have a coach who's looking at your form?

8:09

No.

8:10

No.

8:10

And no.

8:11

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

8:12

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And then he said, are you

8:13

going back every time when you run

8:15

and thinking to yourself, what can I refine here?

8:17

Before this next repetition what is there

8:19

that I can do differently?

8:21

No.

8:21

And he said, well, then I can tell you why you're not

8:24

getting any better at running.

8:26

And that is, those thousands of hours

8:28

are not thousands of hours of deliberate practice.

8:30

So I think this idea that we should be getting better

8:33

at things, we can unpack that a little.

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It's not just going out and trying hard.

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It's actually trying hard in those four very specific ways.

8:41

BEN FRIED: So on the subject of deliberate practice

8:44

and coaching, I thought it's an interesting question.

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In the organization, do you have theories

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about what roles managers can play in helping

8:52

people develop in the same way?

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Or do you have opinions on how professional development works

8:57

in organizations versus how it should work?

8:59

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: One of the things

9:00

that's really important to know about human beings

9:03

is that it's not that we stop growing up when we're 18.

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And if you look at the etymology of the word parent,

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the word parent really means to bring forth.

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So after we leave our own parents who've

9:14

tried to bring forth our-- we leap

9:17

into other situations which frankly,

9:20

are parenting situations.

9:21

I mean, I had teachers, I had professors.

9:24

I still do, you know, mentors who, in a very authentic way,

9:29

are parenting me.

9:30

All right, now what does it really mean?

9:32

What does it look like?

9:33

I think that really, really great leaders

9:35

do a couple of things.

9:38

One is they model the character that they

9:40

want other people to emulate.

9:42

And there are two schools of thought about leadership.

9:44

Some people say the leader doesn't really matter.

9:46

Swap out one, put in the next one.

9:49

Really culture's going to happen without them.

9:51

I'm in the other school of thought.

9:52

I think that's absolutely wrong.

9:54

Everybody watches the leader.

9:55

The leader sets the pace for the entire organization.

9:58

And when the leader is nice to other people--

10:00

You know, when I go and visit famous people like you,

10:03

I watch them and I watch how they talk to the people who

10:06

aren't famous.

10:07

I watch them when they order their food.

10:09

Do they look the person in the eye?

10:10

And all those little things are being watched by all the people

10:14

who work for you.

10:14

No pressure.

10:17

And they're emulating you and especially if they respect you.

10:22

And that brings me to the next thing that leaders do.

10:24

I mean, a leader is respected when

10:26

they provide both the kind of demanding, challenging,

10:30

it's not good enough, it's still not good enough,

10:32

I need you to do this differently, bring it

10:34

back to me again.

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It's that in combination with support.

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And it brings me all the way back to the parenting metaphor

10:41

because that's what great parents do.

10:44

They're demanding.

10:45

They're challenging.

10:45

It's not good enough.

10:46

I'm occasionally disappointed in you.

10:48

But at the same time, genuinely care about you.

10:52

I want you to be successful, and I respect you.

10:56

BEN FRIED: So on the subject of mentoring and parenting,

10:58

I thought it was-- I don't know where I read it--

11:01

but that you share your peer review.

11:04

When you submit papers, you share the negative peer reviews

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and grant proposal rejections with the people

11:09

in your lab and your students.

11:11

Is that true?

11:12

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It is all true.

11:13

And here's the thing about it.

11:15

When you interview someone whose-- whatever, they

11:17

win an award, or you just you read off someone's resume,

11:21

and by the way, you only usually read the good parts.

11:23

Like how about the time that you completely screwed up and made

11:26

this wrong decision?

11:27

I didn't put that on my resume, so you couldn't read it.

11:29

But I think a lot of my work is about demystifying things

11:33

like excellence.

11:34

People who succeed fail all the time.

11:38

In fact, I think they fail more than anyone else.

11:40

That's what makes them so successful,

11:42

because failure provides an opportunity for information.

11:45

In academia when you submit an article,

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even when you're very good, odds are it's going to get rejected.

11:51

And in my world, rejection comes with a 13 page

11:54

single spaced review letter about exactly how you suck.

11:59

Like, I can't believe how badly written this is.

12:01

Like, oh my god, does this person not

12:03

know the meta-analysis done in 2000?

12:05

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

12:06

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And I send those letters out as

12:08

soon as I get them to everybody who's working in my lab,

12:11

so that they can see all the imperfection that eventually

12:15

will lead to some kind of achievement.

12:17

I want them to know the truth as opposed

12:19

to the shiny, polished myth that I think is easy to fall into.

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BEN FRIED: Which feeds into the myth of talent.

12:27

There's some people who are just so good,

12:29

they appear on stage one day never

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having thought about what they might say and perform

12:34

"King Lear" flawlessly or whatever the case may be.

12:37

Whereas in reality, it was direct practice and failure

12:39

and so on that got them there.

12:41

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And again, that person

12:42

may have been-- so take your favorite actor, Judi Dench, I

12:46

mean, take whoever you want to think

12:48

of as somebody who's a paragon of masterful performance.

12:52

It's not that I'm saying that anybody

12:54

could have been that person.

12:56

I'm not saying that we all could have been Einstein.

12:58

But even Einstein wasn't born knowing anything about physics.

13:01

Even Judi Dench had to learn how to be an actress.

13:04

Skills, because we are human and we are not

13:07

horses or other lower order animals who

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are born with a lot of stuff hardwired-- horses don't really

13:13

have to learn how to run.

13:14

Hours after they're born, they run.

13:17

Human beings are born knowing nothing.

13:19

The only thing that we're born knowing is how to learn.

13:22

And so skills are acquired over a lifetime.

13:25

Sure, the talented progress faster if they stay with things

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and if they continue to work at it.

13:31

BEN FRIED: On the subject of learning,

13:36

do you think that the educational system is set up

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to support and recognize grit, perseverance?

13:44

It seems like the academic cycle is

13:47

short with immediate feedback.

13:49

And it's easy, for example, to move on

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from one subject to another after three or six

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months of study if things don't go well.

14:00

Are the standards we've set for academic success

14:03

hurting our ability to develop grit in people, obviously

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all of whom could benefit?

14:07

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Well, if you think

14:08

about younger kids, the kids who are still in elementary school

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or middle school and high school,

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one way in which our system doesn't

14:16

do a great job of encouraging grit

14:18

is there's a kind of a narrowing of the focus on what it means

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to be successful to essentially mean

14:24

what are your scores on the annual standardized tests

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of math and reading?

14:28

That's incredibly narrow.

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It not only leaves out a lot of things

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that I care about-- grit, for example-- for something

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you find meaningful.

14:35

And I haven't yet met the 16 year-old

14:36

who finds their standardized test scores

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a meaningful life goal.

14:40

It also leaves out the kind of interest

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where a lot of us probably in this room

14:45

would say that that's what they really did care about.

14:48

Their sports team, being on the baseball team,

14:51

writing for the school paper.

14:53

The things that kids do outside of the classroom that

14:55

are unmeasured, that policymakers-- not only are

14:59

they not measuring and caring about them,

15:00

these things are getting cut from schools left and right.

15:05

Then we talk about university education.

15:07

Well, you do have to have a major in most schools.

15:10

So that's gritty in the sense that grit

15:13

means doing something in-depth, as opposed

15:15

to being scattershot.

15:17

But I'll tell you a story.

15:18

I was once on a committee to decide

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who was going to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

15:22

And as you may recall, this is the honor society

15:26

that there are people like me, faculty

15:29

who say OK well, this kid's really

15:31

extraordinary as a budding academic,

15:33

and this kid maybe not so.

15:34

So the first kid gets on Phi Beta Kappa, the second kid--

15:37

So I remember looking at this one kid's record.

15:40

And it was very clear to me that it was grit

15:43

and the passion for this kid was biochemistry.

15:47

You could see in his transcript that all of his classes

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were taken in biochem at the med school.

15:52

Every summer he was doing internships.

15:53

And even before he was going to graduate,

15:55

he was going to be a published author, which

15:57

is a very hard thing to do for any kind

15:59

of scientific publication.

16:01

Committee gets to discussion, and people are like,

16:03

oh you know, I don't really see much humanities here.

16:06

Oh you know, this isn't a very good grade

16:08

in his writing class.

16:10

I was like, look, this kid's going to win the Nobel Prize.

16:13

OK, I exaggerate.

16:14

But this kid has a passion.

16:16

Let's reward that.

16:17

And I argued hard enough that he did get Phi Beta Kappa.

16:20

But I think that there is this kind of averaging.

16:23

People don't care about the average ability

16:25

that you have across all things.

16:27

Most of us in life are going to become,

16:29

if we're lucky, good at something.

16:31

And it's that one thing that actually

16:33

matters and not the other things that you didn't invest in.

16:38

BEN FRIED: Do you have a favorite grit story?

16:41

I mean, your book is full of great stories

16:44

of people who demonstrated so many facets of passion

16:48

and perseverance and interest and commitment over time.

16:51

Is there a favorite one?

16:52

Is there a--

16:53

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, it's a great job that I have.

16:56

So like Anders Ericsson, I go around studying experts.

16:58

And you see it everywhere, by the way.

17:01

It's not just that you have to go to the Olympics

17:03

or to a chess tournament.

17:05

You go into a great restaurant-- and this

17:06

is a very trivial example, but I think

17:08

it resonates for me-- you go into a restaurant,

17:11

you ever had a great waiter or waitress?

17:13

I mean, they're just considerate.

17:15

And I was like, that is a pro.

17:17

That is somebody who loves what they do

17:19

and who seems to be trying to get better at it,

17:22

and that is grit just as much as a famous story.

17:26

I do have a story that I've recently been re-reading,

17:29

and that is Julia Child and her autobiography.

17:33

And you may or may not know that Julia Child took

17:35

until her late 30s to really figure out

17:38

that she wanted to do anything at all related to food.

17:41

She grew up in a wealthy family that had a cook.

17:44

She said she had, and I quote, "Zero interest in the kitchen."

17:48

When she was a young woman going to college,

17:51

she thought she might want to be a writer, a novelist.

17:53

Then World War II happened, so she went to-- I mean,

17:56

this is not a story of grit so far.

17:59

She marries Paul Child, and for his job, not for hers,

18:02

they go to France.

18:03

And she has a really memorable meal.

18:05

It was sole meuniere in a little restaurant outside of Paris.

18:09

And that was the beginning of a journey.

18:12

Not by the way, an epiphany that she

18:15

knew that she was going to revolutionize the way Americans

18:17

cook and introduce them to French cuisine.

18:20

But one step in a journey where, in the next meal,

18:24

she noticed that was also different than anything she'd

18:26

ever eaten.

18:27

Then there was a bistro they went to.

18:28

She started wandering around Paris

18:30

and looking at this beautiful produce and this bread

18:33

that she had never tasted before.

18:34

She got more interested.

18:36

Somebody gave her a cookbook.

18:37

Her husband gave her her second French cookbook.

18:40

She found out that there were classes

18:42

that she could walk to and learn French cooking.

18:44

What I want to say about these stories of grit

18:47

is that one, that is accessible.

18:50

When you actually dig down into the details of how people

18:53

became great, suddenly it becomes something

18:55

that you might actually aspire to.

18:58

And it's never really a snapshot.

19:00

It's always a movie.

19:01

And it's a long movie.

19:02

And you might not want to see all

19:04

of the scenes that could be edited out to make more drama.

19:07

But in a very real sense, I think

19:09

excellence is a long story that has parts that are not

19:14

suspenseful, parts are mundane.

19:17

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

19:18

It's like practice.

19:19

It happens every day.

19:20

You do it all the time, it gets better.

19:24

So how measurable is grit?

19:27

I mean, you actually did a bunch of pioneering work

19:29

to measure it in West Point cadets.

19:31

But I mean, when we think about talent and IQ

19:35

and so on, there's a rich, if somewhat

19:37

colored history in the measurement of intelligence.

19:39

Is grit equally measurable in your opinion?

19:41

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think scientists

19:43

have a much better grip on how to measure intelligence

19:46

than they do how to measure grit or so many

19:48

other things that you could say are under this broad umbrella

19:51

called character.

19:53

And we've had these IQ tests really for over a century

19:56

continually being refined.

19:58

And in 45 minutes, I can give you your IQ score.

20:01

Well, in two minutes, I can give you your grit scale score.

20:04

So what's the difference?

20:06

The difference is that my questionnaire

20:08

is completely fakeable.

20:10

My questionnaire-- I mean really.

20:11

Like, I'm a hard worker?

20:12

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

20:13

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It's not hard to think

20:16

about what the answer is to that if you want a higher score.

20:19

In an IQ test, you can't really fake it.

20:21

I mean, you can't say, I'm going to guess C 'cause

20:23

I know it's the right answer.

20:24

But I don't really know, but I'm faking.

20:26

You know, that doesn't work.

20:28

Second thing is when you're taking an IQ test,

20:30

there's no subjectivity.

20:31

There's no judgment.

20:33

You take the test, you get a score.

20:35

With the grit scale, if I gave it to you

20:37

and you said to yourself, hmm, am I hard worker,

20:40

I can only imagine the people that you

20:42

would be comparing yourself to.

20:44

When I talk about finishing whatever I begin on the scale,

20:47

you're going to compare yourself to your peers, who are all

20:50

probably extremely gritty.

20:52

So in addition to faking, there's

20:53

what in science is called the frame of reference bias.

20:56

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

20:57

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And that is your standard

20:58

for comparison can vary.

21:00

And here's one concrete example.

21:01

In high performing charter schools like KIPP--

21:05

these are schools that are in New York,

21:07

but all over the country-- kids are,

21:10

like in many other schools, brought to a very high standard

21:13

of excellence.

21:14

When kids rate themselves on items like I just read you,

21:17

their mental frame is different from kids

21:19

who could be just down the block at a different school that

21:22

doesn't have those standards.

21:24

So that distorts the scores to some extent.

21:28

As a researcher, I know about that.

21:30

I know how to adjust for that when I run statistics

21:32

and so forth.

21:33

I also know that there's error.

21:35

I know that there's the possibility of faking.

21:37

What I worry about is employers or schools

21:41

or government agencies who make the mistake of thinking

21:45

that you can take a grit scale score

21:48

and make those high stakes decisions that the grit

21:50

scale was never designed for.

21:52

Don't hire with the grit scale.

21:54

BEN FRIED: No, I'm not proposing--

21:54

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

21:55

OK, good.

21:55

BEN FRIED: I'm not proposing that we--

21:56

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Didn't want that to be the headline.

21:57

Didn't think it was going to be.

21:59

BEN FRIED: But I do wonder.

22:01

I mean, it seems to me like we've

22:04

perfected a lot of ways of measuring a bunch of talent

22:07

in computer science.

22:07

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you want me to tell you my best ideas that

22:09

haven't been tested yet?

22:10

BEN FRIED: Well, please.

22:11

Please.

22:11

Yes.

22:11

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: OK, so I have one idea that has been tested.

22:13

When you look at the resumes of people

22:15

who want to be Googlers-- which I can also tell you

22:17

I think that's interesting that you use that term Googler,

22:19

and I think I know why you do.

22:21

But that can be for another question.

22:23

BEN FRIED: I would love to know why we do [INAUDIBLE].

22:25

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I'm going to tell you.

22:25

I'm going to tell you.

22:26

I think it's actually not trivial.

22:28

So I'll tell you.

22:29

But when you look at the resume of somebody who

22:31

wants to get in here, what I would look for

22:33

is evidence of grit.

22:35

I'm not saying that it has to be in exactly this domain

22:37

or even for the job that that person-- ideally, yes.

22:40

But sometimes it can be like wow,

22:42

this kid was on the tennis team for three or four

22:44

years in college and went from A to B in their accomplishments.

22:48

Who, this kid worked-- you know,

22:49

I'll tell you about my own husband.

22:50

This kid worked for Domino's Pizza as a delivery--

22:52

but they got promoted.

22:54

That there's progression and there's continuity

22:58

in a high grit resume.

22:59

Conversely, don't hire the people

23:02

who have these dilettante resumes of sort of a little bit

23:05

here, a little bit there.

23:06

You know, where is the evidence of passion and perseverance

23:09

applied to something before they got to my doorstep?

23:13

So I think you can look for the residue of grit, as it were,

23:16

in people's resumes.

23:18

What I don't think you should do is use the grit scale.

23:20

And also I don't think you can rely on interviews.

23:23

I am of the opinion that you can interview for charisma.

23:28

You can interview for social intelligence.

23:31

You can interview for confidence.

23:33

You can interview even for chemistry.

23:34

Like am I going to like to sit next to this person

23:36

and work with them?

23:37

But how are you going to interview

23:39

for that quality of a person where

23:41

the next day they're going to get up

23:42

and they're going to be the first into the office

23:44

or the last-- you know, when you give them the feedback that

23:47

says this isn't good enough, is that person going to genuinely

23:50

reflect on that and try to improve?

23:52

That's really hard to get out of any kind of short interaction.

23:56

And my best idea, which hasn't been tested,

23:59

is if there is something that people

24:01

are going to have to do at Google

24:02

and its particular obvious to their job, that is really

24:07

hard, where you can set up a mini grit experiment

24:11

where you're going to let them perform and learn,

24:15

get feedback, see whether they take that feedback,

24:18

see whether they come back for a second try,

24:21

see whether they come back for a third try,

24:23

I think that would be fascinating.

24:24

BEN FRIED: So assessment as opposed to interview.

24:26

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Exactly.

24:27

But you know, it's like you're piloting the person.

24:29

I mean, give them a chance to display their grit,

24:32

as opposed to trying to guess at it.

24:34

Do you want me to tell you why I think you use the word Googler?

24:36

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

24:36

I would love to know why we use Googler.

24:38

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So my dad worked

24:40

for DuPont his whole life.

24:42

He actually retired with a gold watch.

24:44

I thought that was just a metaphor.

24:46

He got one, and it said, "DuPont, better things

24:48

for better living" on it.

24:50

He spent his entire adult life there

24:52

in automotive refinishing products, which

24:55

was his passion, by the way.

24:57

And you know, my dad did not talk about working at DuPont.

25:01

He talked about being a DuPonter.

25:03

BEN FRIED: Really?

25:03

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

25:04

And people who go to West Point, graduate from West Point,

25:08

they call themselves West Pointers.

25:10

Kids who go to KIPP, they're not students, they're Kippsters.

25:14

At the Seattle Seahawks, you're not just a football player,

25:17

you're a Seahawk.

25:19

These are nouns.

25:20

They're not adjectives.

25:21

BEN FRIED: Right, right.

25:21

Yeah.

25:21

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And when people have an extremely strong

25:24

cultural identity, they're usually

25:26

able to express that as a noun.

25:29

You know, I'm a Googler.

25:31

I'm not working for any other company.

25:32

There's a way that we do things here.

25:34

There's a language that we use here.

25:36

You probably don't use it where you are

25:39

'cause you're not a Googler.

25:40

BEN FRIED: 'Cause you know, we also have an adjective, Googly.

25:43

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh, what does that mean?

25:44

Just in the spirit of Googleness?

25:46

BEN FRIED: Well, I've been spending

25:46

eight years trying to figure out what it means, personally.

25:48

[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

25:48

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Yeah!

25:49

I think you should stick with Googler.

25:51

Googly sounds like those little eyeballs that go--

25:53

BEN FRIED: Yeah, yeah.

25:54

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah, yeah.

25:55

I mean, that's not--

25:55

BEN FRIED: Conan O'Brien on stage once made that comment.

25:57

"Oh, he's so Googly."

25:59

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Right?

25:59

Googly!

25:59

Yeah, I don't think that's the-- look, let the marketing

26:02

department decide.

26:03

But I don't think that's what you're going for.

26:04

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

26:05

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

26:06

BEN FRIED: So sadly, Googly is pretty baked in already.

26:08

But I'm still not sure what it means.

26:10

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Well, that does happen with culture too.

26:11

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

26:12

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: But it probably--

26:12

but really, these words that you--

26:14

I don't know how many vocabulary,

26:15

'cause I'm not a Googler, so I wouldn't know.

26:17

But at West Point they have this entire glossary.

26:19

BEN FRIED: Really?

26:20

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And there are all these words

26:21

that you wouldn't know unless you go to West Point.

26:23

So a plebe, right?

26:24

A plebe, you know, a plebe and a firstie and a yearling.

26:27

What are those?

26:28

And booyah.

26:29

So at West Point they exclaim booyah,

26:31

which doesn't have an easy translation

26:33

but you say it when somebody does something really good.

26:35

It's like, booyah.

26:36

And then the whole crowd of cadets that you're in

26:39

will erupt in these words that you've never

26:42

heard in the English language.

26:43

And that's very important, because that's what

26:45

it means to be a West Pointer.

26:47

Every company has a culture.

26:50

And when that culture is really strong,

26:52

people identify with it in a noun form.

26:55

They speak the language.

26:58

They often wear the colors.

27:00

They follow the rituals.

27:01

It becomes part of your identity.

27:04

And when I heard about Googlers, I

27:06

thought immediately of all these other very strong cultures that

27:09

are very-- I'm not saying intentional in that one

27:12

person's writing the handbook-- but it really

27:14

is part of what makes the company great.

27:18

BEN FRIED: Now is there is there a connection between that kind

27:20

of cultural identity and grit?

27:23

Or non-IQ correlates with success?

27:26

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I absolutely think so.

27:28

So you can identify with an organization or a culture

27:31

that itself is gritty.

27:32

I'll give you a national example.

27:35

Country of Finland has actually fewer citizens than New York

27:39

City has inhabitants.

27:41

It's small, it's cold.

27:44

What is there to know about Finland that

27:47

could be of interest to us?

27:48

There is a word in Finnish called sisu, which very roughly

27:51

translates to grit.

27:53

But quite literally translates to your insides, to your guts.

27:56

And if you're Finnish, you have the identity of someone

27:58

who when things are really hard and you've

28:01

given all you can and you still are falling short,

28:06

you reach down inside and you use your sisu

28:09

and you do it anyway.

28:11

Now it's anatomically impossible that the Finns

28:14

are walking around with this extra battery pack in them.

28:18

And if they did have that, why don't the Swedes have that?

28:21

'Cause it's not that far and it's Scandinavia.

28:23

BEN FRIED: The Swedes invaded Finland, I think.

28:25

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

28:25

They had this little bit of rivalry there going back.

28:28

But you know, I think what's important to learn

28:30

there is that you have an identity as a Finnish person,

28:33

and Finnish people do things that are hard.

28:35

And we have sisu and we prevail.

28:38

And I think that when you are part

28:40

of an organization like West Point

28:42

or on a team like the Seahawks or the Celtics--

28:45

they're another very gritty team with another very

28:47

gritty leader-- or you work at a company like Google,

28:50

that identity is very much part of why you often struggle

28:54

through when in a different context

28:57

with a different cultural identity, you might not.

28:59

BEN FRIED: Now I mean, expanding it to national identities

29:03

and national cultures is fascinating in itself.

29:05

Are there particular cultures or immigrant groups

29:09

that are grittier than others?

29:11

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I'm sure there are.

29:13

I'm sure there are.

29:14

There are lots of countries and cultures in the world.

29:16

BEN FRIED: I'm not trying to race bait, you

29:17

by the way, or anything like that.

29:18

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah, no, no, no.

29:19

Well, I haven't looked at the question directly.

29:20

But let me tell you why.

29:21

First, let me just acknowledge, I

29:23

mean anybody who wants to say that all cultures are

29:25

the same, that's naive.

29:27

I don't have any impulse to say that.

29:30

But it's really hard to ask the question are the Americans

29:33

grittier than the French?

29:34

And are the French less gritty than the Japanese?

29:37

And here's why.

29:38

When I give my grit scale to you,

29:39

you're going to answer it as you would with your comparison

29:42

group.

29:42

When I give it in Japan, they're going

29:44

to answer it with those cultural standards,

29:46

not only of their company and their family

29:48

and their neighborhood, but the whole country.

29:50

I want to tell you about a study that

29:52

was done of over 60 countries where they asked people to fill

29:55

out personality questionnaires.

29:56

They didn't give the grit scale, but they gave

29:58

a scale of conscientiousness.

30:00

Related, it's in the family.

30:02

Dependability, orderliness, I'm punctual, et cetera.

30:06

So now you have data on dozens of countries around the world.

30:10

And you can ask the question, which countries

30:12

are the most conscientious and which ones are the least?

30:15

Well, I'll tell you what the findings are.

30:17

The three least gritty areas in the world

30:20

were Japan-- this is conscientiousness,

30:24

by the data-- Japan, Korea, and China.

30:29

Really?

30:31

Really?

30:31

They're messy people.

30:33

They're not dependable.

30:34

They don't work hard.

30:36

Really?

30:37

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

30:37

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So the researchers

30:39

in that study concluded that perhaps these data were being

30:43

influenced by the very high standard that

30:45

exists in those countries.

30:46

BEN FRIED: Right, right.

30:47

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: That's why it's so, so

30:49

hard to make these comparisons.

30:51

Because two things go into your score-- what you really

30:54

are and then the frame of reference,

30:56

the standard to which you're holding yourself.

30:58

BEN FRIED: We should probably try to open up

31:00

to questions in the room.

31:02

And on the Dory.

31:04

I think it's given time.

31:05

We have about 15, 20 minutes left.

31:07

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah, I'd love that.

31:08

BEN FRIED: Does that make sense?

31:08

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

31:09

BEN FRIED: Do we have live questions?

31:13

AUDIENCE: Can you use peer assessments,

31:15

especially cross cultural or ethnic boundaries

31:17

to then get a more baseline grit comparison?

31:19

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So the problem with the peer assessments

31:22

when you're talking about the cross-cultural work

31:24

in particular, is that who are your peers?

31:26

Other people who also live in the same culture.

31:29

So I don't think peer ratings get you out of that.

31:32

But I do think that-- and you know,

31:34

I know Google is always trying to hire better-- you know,

31:36

triangulation is a great strategy.

31:39

In psychology we call it the principle of aggregation.

31:42

Whenever you have imperfect data from one source and imperfect

31:44

data from another source, what you do

31:46

is you put more and more imperfect data together.

31:48

The error cancels out, or the unsystematic variance,

31:52

the error.

31:52

And you get a stronger signal.

31:54

So yeah, get a peer rating and a teacher

31:56

rating and a performance task and look at their resumes.

31:59

You could even throw the grit scale

32:01

in if it's only one thing among many.

32:03

And when you get a consistent signal

32:06

that everybody thinks this person is gritty,

32:08

then you actually have a good bet that they are.

32:13

AUDIENCE: Thank you for coming, first of all.

32:15

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

32:15

AUDIENCE: Also, I saw you have an audio book, so props to you.

32:18

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I do.

32:18

AUDIENCE: And also guys, she read it herself.

32:20

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I did.

32:21

AUDIENCE: Which is really sweet, yeah.

32:22

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It was really fun.

32:23

AUDIENCE: I'm going to listen to it like sped up anyway, but--

32:25

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] OK!

32:26

Oh really?

32:27

Like chipmunk?

32:27

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

32:28

Yeah.

32:28

Three times.

32:29

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: OK, good.

32:31

AUDIENCE: No, but so my question is,

32:32

you talk about this example of the biochem

32:36

kid who is really, really, really deep into biochem.

32:39

I would call him pointy, so to speak.

32:41

He dug into that thing really hard.

32:44

And you're talking about how you can use grit-- the grit

32:47

property gets you to do that.

32:49

So people who can do that.

32:51

So I had a question that maybe it's

32:53

outside of the scope of the grit, but my friends and I,

32:57

we're actually very gritty people.

32:59

We dig into things very, very deeply.

33:02

But recently particularly after graduating college,

33:05

we had trouble figuring out what to actually be gritty into.

33:09

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Mm, yeah.

33:10

AUDIENCE: Right?

33:10

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: What to be gritty about, yeah.

33:12

AUDIENCE: Right.

33:12

In college it's very easy.

33:13

Or even in school, because you know, the metric is there.

33:17

You get good grades.

33:19

Maybe you pick a major, you do well in it, fine.

33:21

But then in the real world, I find

33:23

that my friends in particular, they have trouble being gritty.

33:26

Not because they can't be gritty,

33:28

but because they want to be pointy

33:30

but they don't know what to pick.

33:32

And then you can be really pointy in Russian literature

33:35

and then it turns out you need to make money or something.

33:37

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

33:39

AUDIENCE: You know, no offense.

33:40

I'm just joking.

33:41

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: No offense to Russian lit majors.

33:43

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

33:43

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: If there are any here.

33:45

AUDIENCE: But yeah.

33:45

So how do you actually go about deciding

33:47

what to be pointy in, especially when the cost of picking

33:50

incorrectly can be high?

33:52

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think that one

33:53

of the things that makes it so hard

33:55

is that we know the cost is high.

33:57

It can make us freeze up a little bit.

33:59

I was at McKinsey, and there are a lot of people at McKinsey

34:02

who like me, had basically spent their entire life opening

34:06

doors of opportunity.

34:07

If I do this internship, I can do anything.

34:10

And then if I go to McKinsey, anybody will hire me.

34:12

Well, you get to a certain point in life

34:14

where you realize that that's not the game anymore.

34:16

It's not opening doors of opportunity,

34:18

it's actually walking through.

34:19

And it's walking through and hearing the other doors

34:23

slam shut.

34:24

Now that's even more paralyzing in terms

34:26

of the anxiety that would produce

34:28

when you don't have this really strong inner compass.

34:30

You're like OK, follow my passion?

34:32

Where do I get one?

34:34

And here's my advice about that.

34:37

I do think that really really gritty, passionate people have

34:41

two sources of motivation.

34:43

And these are two questions to ask yourself

34:45

when you're going to ask yourself

34:46

what to do the rest of your life.

34:48

One is what are my real interests?

34:50

And they're still emerging.

34:52

You know, they develop over years.

34:54

But for many of you, there were things that you were interested

34:56

and things that you were less interested in that

34:58

were kind of boring for you around the time

35:01

that you were hitting adolescence.

35:03

So many gritty people will remember

35:05

that they started liking to do something at 12 or 13.

35:09

There are exceptions, like Julia Child.

35:12

But interestingly, her interest at that early adolescent stage

35:15

was writing.

35:16

Now if you think about who Julia Child really grew up to be,

35:19

it was not just a chef, but equally, if not more so,

35:22

a writer of cookbooks.

35:24

So first to think back down memory lane

35:27

to when you were a young teenager.

35:29

What are the things that you absolutely hated doing?

35:31

But what are the things that you kind of started

35:33

wanting to do spontaneously?

35:35

That's a clue.

35:36

That's a thread.

35:37

The second major motivational drive of passion is purpose.

35:41

You know, importance.

35:42

It really is almost moral for some people.

35:44

It's like what is the greater mission that my work serves?

35:50

And if you think about your values,

35:52

it can be I really want to help people become their best

35:55

selves.

35:56

Or I really care about the environment.

35:58

I mean, whatever it is that is for you of value

36:01

that you think is deeply meaningful

36:03

and isn't going to change.

36:05

If you can follow that and figure out where

36:08

it overlaps with interest.

36:10

You finally mentioned not becoming

36:12

an impoverished professional Russian literature critic.

36:17

You know, I don't know how many jobs there are like that.

36:19

You probably do need a third circle, which is reality

36:22

and trying to make a living.

36:24

But at least starting with the first two-- my interests

36:27

and my purpose or my values.

36:29

I think that's more helpful than just

36:32

saying like oh, well, go follow your passion.

36:34

Because most of us don't know what

36:35

that even means until we actually find one.

36:40

AUDIENCE: Cool, thanks.

36:41

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

36:43

BEN FRIED: All right, why don't we go--

36:46

AUDIENCE: OK, great.

36:46

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Hi.

36:47

AUDIENCE: I certainly enjoyed the topic and the presentation.

36:49

Clearly grit has a lot of value both in professional life

36:52

and personal life.

36:53

A different podcast I've been listening to recently-- maybe

36:56

you heard it on one of your runs--

36:57

by the "Freakonomics" authors was

37:00

about the power of quitting, and failing fast

37:02

we might say in engineering circles.

37:03

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think I was on that podcast.

37:05

AUDIENCE: Oh!

37:05

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I can't remember.

37:06

AUDIENCE: [LAUGHS]

37:06

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I don't remember.

37:08

Maybe.

37:09

I don't really listen to them afterwards.

37:10

But go on.

37:11

Yeah.

37:11

And I love that podcast.

37:12

It's a great one.

37:13

Yeah, yeah.

37:13

AUDIENCE: So I was trying to figure out how to combine them.

37:15

Like from a personal life, taking off that last question,

37:18

you could try a lot of things until you find something

37:20

you choose as a passion.

37:21

Do you have any advice in the corporate world

37:23

of how to combine choosing when to fail

37:24

and when to stick to it?

37:26

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, let me use the metaphor of dating.

37:29

Because I am personally really happy that I did not end up

37:32

marrying my first boyfriend.

37:34

And so I quit on him.

37:35

I mean, every time you break up with someone, you're quitting.

37:38

And you know, is that a good thing?

37:41

Is it a bad thing?

37:42

I think that for me anyway, I was

37:45

dating to find my life partner.

37:47

I guess people can date for other reasons.

37:49

But I was like, oh we're not going to get married, over.

37:52

And it took a few dates and guys to kind of find the guy

37:57

that I'm with, that's my husband.

37:59

But I think it's actually exactly what we

38:00

do in our careers too.

38:01

I mean, you're exploring.

38:03

But there are some people who are exploring with intention.

38:06

And I was dating to get married.

38:09

I mean, I wasn't really ever intending to stay

38:13

dating forever.

38:14

I think that makes all the difference.

38:15

So sure, quit.

38:16

But for me quitting the White House speech writing

38:19

gig and McKinsey and being a teacher,

38:22

it was sort of a groping toward something

38:25

that I wanted to stick with.

38:27

I was only quitting those things so

38:29

that I could find something that I would never want to quit.

38:32

And when I was 32, finally after much exploration,

38:37

I figured that out, and it was to have the career I have.

38:40

But it's not a predictable, efficient process.

38:45

So quitting in the service of not quitting is, I guess,

38:48

my answer.

38:50

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much.

38:51

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

38:53

AUDIENCE: Thanks Angela, so much for coming.

38:55

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

38:56

AUDIENCE: This is really great.

38:57

There's something about grit that

38:59

seems very intrinsic or natural, almost unlearnable.

39:02

Do you have any recommendations for how people

39:04

can increase their grittiness?

39:06

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So I want everybody in this room

39:08

to watch their own language in the next day

39:10

or so for the word just.

39:13

Whenever we say, oh, they just have it.

39:16

Oh, they just are a natural.

39:18

Or he's just extroverted.

39:20

How does he do that?

39:22

He's just kind of a math guy.

39:24

We use that language, I think, when

39:26

we can't explain something.

39:28

I mean, that's when we use the word just.

39:29

Actually, when Nancy Reagan said "Just don't do it,"

39:32

or when Nike says "Just Do It," I always

39:35

find that deeply unhelpful.

39:37

Could you please tell me how?

39:38

Or are you just going to--

39:40

So this idea that when we see someone do something fluently,

39:47

particularly when we can't do it-- I mean,

39:49

somebody who dances really well if we can't dance, or plays

39:52

music really well-- we start to use words like just,

39:55

and we say things like they're a natural.

39:57

And I was actually giving a talk.

39:59

It was the pre-book tour.

40:00

Today's the first day of book tour.

40:02

But you know, I gave a talk.

40:03

And I give talks all the time.

40:04

I'm sure you do too.

40:06

And you get practice, you get feedback,

40:08

you make these little refinements, tiny little ones.

40:11

Like oh, that fourth slide, I totally

40:13

have to change the background color.

40:14

I mean, it's really that trivial.

40:16

I get off the stage and I'm talking to the person who's

40:20

handling it.

40:20

She's like, you are just a natural.

40:23

And I thought about the irony that I just

40:25

wrote a book about-- I should say I recently wrote

40:29

a book instead of I just wrote.

40:30

I recently wrote a book about the fact

40:33

that that is such an attractive myth.

40:36

That's like a seductive myth.

40:38

And I think the answer is this.

40:41

We can say that people-- you know,

40:42

Jerry Seinfeld would say that some people are

40:44

born to be comedians and some people are not.

40:47

I think there is a sense in which people

40:49

are born with different inclinations, things

40:51

that they find fun to do, things that hold their interest.

40:56

But if you ask the question of how they eventually

40:58

became Jerry Seinfeld, if they eventually wrote a book that's

41:02

halfway decent or they gave a talk that's reasonably fluent,

41:05

it's not just anything.

41:07

Except if you want to say it is just hours and hours

41:10

and hours of iteration with feedback

41:14

to get better at something which maybe I did just

41:16

like when I was a little kid.

41:24

AUDIENCE: My question is what conditions do you--

41:28

for a child, you're talking about kids--

41:30

do you set in order to breed grittiness?

41:34

So to give an example--

41:35

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you have kids?

41:37

AUDIENCE: I don't have kids.

41:38

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

41:38

AUDIENCE: Thinking about them though.

41:39

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] OK, good.

41:41

I recommend them.

41:42

AUDIENCE: So I'm a Colombian immigrant to the United States.

41:44

I came here when I was five years old.

41:45

Eventually graduated West Point.

41:47

Low income household in New York City-- four

41:50

of us living in one bedroom.

41:52

Mom, Dad, sister, et cetera.

41:54

So I still don't know what conditions

41:58

were set for me to persevere.

41:59

'Cause I could have been easily in that demographic

42:01

of Hispanics that end up in jail or whatever it is.

42:04

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

42:05

AUDIENCE: Especially in this city.

42:06

So what conditions, what makes me different,

42:09

or people like me different than my peers

42:11

that I went to high school with that perhaps did not?

42:14

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you have any hypotheses?

42:15

Do you have any guesses?

42:17

AUDIENCE: I mean, I think parenting definitely

42:20

had a lot to do with it as an example

42:21

of the hard working immigrant parents, et cetera.

42:25

But then outside of that, in the classroom,

42:28

it may have been teachers.

42:31

But at the end of the day, I still had to do the work.

42:33

And I just-- I don't know.

42:35

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And you probably

42:36

see people who grew up in maybe not identical, but such similar

42:39

circumstances, and they didn't end up anywhere

42:42

close to where you are.

42:44

That is itself I think my life's work,

42:48

is to answer your question.

42:49

And I only have an incomplete answer.

42:52

But I will say this.

42:53

First of all, you did inherit DNA from your mom and dad,

42:56

and so when you see gritty little kids who

42:58

have gritty parents, you have to at least pause

43:01

and acknowledge the fact that half their genes came from mom,

43:05

half came from dad, they got shuffled up,

43:07

and in part, we are like our parents because

43:09

of our shared genetic heritage.

43:12

At the same time, it's absolutely unequivocal

43:15

that parents model certain behaviors.

43:17

It's usually the case-- not always, there are exceptions--

43:20

but it's usually the case that kids

43:22

are modeling the work ethic and the passion of their parents.

43:26

If it's not their parents, often there's

43:28

another strong role model like a particular teacher who

43:31

had a big effect, or a coach and so forth.

43:33

So that's maybe part of the equation.

43:35

I also think that a lot of grit comes down

43:39

to these virtuous cycles.

43:41

You start to find that you have a thing for a certain sport.

43:45

That becomes a source of pride and success.

43:48

People begin encouraging you.

43:50

It's an upward feedback cycle of motivation, effort,

43:54

and achievement, and it feeds itself.

43:57

I think there are people who then

43:58

are on the opposite spiral, which

44:00

is they get a little down about themselves, they stop trying,

44:03

they prove themselves right because things don't go well,

44:05

and they kind of spiral in the opposite direction.

44:08

And Einstein is quoted-- and I am not sure I can verify this,

44:11

but somebody at Google can-- as saying

44:13

that compound interest is what we all really need

44:15

to understand.

44:15

It's like, that is the mystery of the universe.

44:17

And I think this compounding of a little bit of grit,

44:21

a little bit of effort, a little bit of success,

44:24

a little more grit, a little more effort, a little

44:26

more success, if we could understand that compounding,

44:30

then maybe we could understand why kids like

44:32

you ended up where you are.

44:33

But we could also maybe understand why so many other

44:36

don't.

44:38

And I would like Google to help me figure that out, by the way.

44:41

So it would be, yeah.

44:42

AUDIENCE: Do you need a volunteer?

44:43

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Great.

44:44

Thank you.

44:44

BEN FRIED: How are we doing for time?

44:45

I think we only have til 1:00, right?

44:47

FEMALE SPEAKER: Five more minutes.

44:47

BEN FRIED: Five more minutes.

44:48

And is Angela expected to sign books at the end too?

44:51

Oh, at the end?

44:51

OK, all right.

44:52

So we have five more minutes.

44:53

Shall we do a question on the Dory?

44:55

This is somewhat confrontational.

44:56

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh yes.

44:56

BEN FRIED: I don't mean to be rude.

44:57

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh, that's OK.

44:58

Yeah, yeah.

44:58

No, it's good.

44:59

BEN FRIED: I'll go back.

44:59

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Wait!

45:00

BEN FRIED: I'll read it.

45:00

I'll read it.

45:00

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Let's do the hard one.

45:01

Yeah.

45:01

BEN FRIED: Yeah. "There was a study--"

45:03

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think there was a study, yeah.

45:04

BEN FRIED: "Of 4,000 UK students published back in February

45:05

in "The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology"

45:08

in which grit was not shown to be that predictive

45:10

of academic success."

45:11

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: "Instead intelligence

45:14

and conscientiousness were key.

45:16

Do you do any thoughts on that study?"

45:19

Yes, I do have thoughts on that study.

45:22

Actually one of the co-authors of that study

45:24

sent me the report before it was published.

45:27

And here's what I said to him.

45:29

So I'll tell you the full study.

45:31

So there are thousands of British kids,

45:34

about 16 years old, I think, who are

45:38

going through the British school system.

45:39

And there are grit scores on these kids

45:42

and there are also their standardized math and reading

45:44

scores on the UK test.

45:45

BEN FRIED: The A-levels or something?

45:47

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It's something like that, I guess.

45:49

Yeah.

45:50

Not British enough to know.

45:51

But it's a standardized achievement test,

45:53

and we've all taken them so we know what they are.

45:55

The finding is this.

45:56

Grit does predict their standardized test scores,

45:59

but not quite as well as a measure of conscientiousness,

46:02

which we were already talking about.

46:03

Dependability, being able to control your impulses,

46:07

that sort of thing.

46:08

So yes, grit predicted but maybe not quite as much.

46:11

And also intelligence was a better predictor in that study.

46:15

I don't find that all that surprising.

46:18

I also don't question those findings for one moment.

46:21

I think they're very real.

46:24

For me, my complaint is that if you're

46:26

going to equate your standardized test scores when

46:28

you're 16 and things that, frankly most 16 year-olds

46:32

are not invested in-- it's not a meaningful personal goal--

46:36

if you're going to equate that with success or even

46:38

with academic achievement, grades for example

46:40

do not send all the same signal as your test scores.

46:44

Grades are a better predictor of college persistence

46:46

than your standardized test scores.

46:47

So they're not interchangeable.

46:49

There's information that's carried by grades that's

46:51

not carried by test scores.

46:53

There's information carried by your extracurricular activities

46:56

that's not embedded in your test scores.

46:58

My complaint is not with the finding itself, but the idea

47:02

that that is everything that we would need to know

47:04

about success for those kids.

47:06

So I guess that's the major thing

47:08

that I'll say about that study.

47:10

And I think that it's very important

47:12

to recognize that grit isn't the only

47:14

important thing in the world.

47:15

I study high achievement in challenging circumstances.

47:18

It's in those circumstances where the goal also

47:21

matters to you that I think re-emerges

47:24

as the most reliable predictor and not just

47:27

a moderately predictive one.

47:30

BEN FRIED: Shall we go back to a live question?

47:33

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Hi.

47:34

Yeah.

47:34

AUDIENCE: I got a live question.

47:35

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

47:36

AUDIENCE: What if you're applying your amazing grit

47:38

to the wrong thing?

47:39

Let's say I wanted to be a film star

47:41

but I have no grasp of what the world actually

47:43

wants from a film star.

47:44

When should I just say I should probably

47:46

stop trying to do that and apply my grit to something else

47:49

where I might actually be more successful?

47:50

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

47:51

So for example, what if you're trying to be a film star

47:53

and you're just disastrously untalented?

47:55

There's nothing that you could do that you would ever be--

47:58

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

47:58

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Right.

47:59

So that's one way that you could be wrong.

48:00

The other thing that you could be wrong in

48:02

is that you're picking an industry that is going

48:04

to melt like the polar icecaps.

48:07

The whole industry's going to go away.

48:08

And you know, that happens these days,

48:11

in ways that are faster than before.

48:13

So there's lots of ways that grit can get you into trouble.

48:16

I think the question is this.

48:18

You gotta take risks in life.

48:20

There's no getting away really.

48:22

Even if you do nothing, you're taking a risk.

48:24

What grit means is to put your left foot

48:27

in front of your right foot and then your left foot again

48:29

and keep heading in a certain direction.

48:31

And you're absolutely right that you

48:32

might end up somewhere that you didn't want to be.

48:35

But you can guarantee yourself that you'll never get anywhere

48:39

by switching direction every few paces,

48:42

or not walking forward at all.

48:43

So yeah, there's absolutely risk in being a paragon of grit.

48:47

But I'd say there's a guarantee of failure

48:49

at not being passionate and persevering.

48:51

BEN FRIED: So a related question to the one

48:54

he just asked is is grit in a continuum with obsession?

48:57

Is there a bright line between grit and obsession?

49:00

Or are they unrelated?

49:01

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: No, I think there is actually

49:03

a strong family resemblance between grit and obsession.

49:06

One of the individuals that I interviewed

49:08

but I didn't put her into the book,

49:10

partly because I forgot to push record when I was interviewing

49:13

her, was Temple Grandin.

49:14

And I don't know if you know her work--

49:15

BEN FRIED: Yeah, of course.

49:16

Yeah.

49:16

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: But she's famously autistic.

49:18

And she writes about her autism.

49:20

And in her words, "A little bit of obsession

49:22

gets a hell of a lot of work done."

49:24

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

49:25

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And you know, this idea that you wake up--I

49:27

mean, I'm obsessive.

49:28

If you woke me up at 3:00 in the morning, which sometimes just

49:30

happens to me, like you wake up and you

49:32

have to go to the bathroom, you know what I'm thinking about?

49:35

I'm thinking about grit.

49:36

I'm thinking about why did that person do that?

49:38

It's so interesting.

49:39

Like where did they get the--

49:41

I think about it all the time.

49:42

I think about it in the shower.

49:43

I think about it in yoga when I'm

49:45

supposed to not be thinking about anything,

49:46

but I'm thinking about grit.

49:48

Like Savasana pose, you're supposed to be doing nothing

49:50

and I'm like, I wonder where that, you know, is gonna--

49:53

It is an obsession.

49:55

The difference maybe between the way most people think

49:57

about obsessions and the way gritty people think

49:59

about obsessions is when they say, I love what I do,

50:04

they love that they love what they do.

50:06

There's no sense in which they would

50:08

trade that life for any other.

50:10

And that's how I feel about my own work.

50:12

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

50:14

I think we have time for one more question.

50:18

Should we?

50:19

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

50:20

Hi.

50:20

AUDIENCE: Hi.

50:20

So a lot of your examples of people

50:23

that have shown great grit, like Julia Child, she starts at 30

50:25

and then becomes this great success,

50:27

they all seem to be underdogs that then succeed.

50:30

Do they have to be?

50:31

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, you don't have to be an underdog.

50:33

But I am fascinated by underdog psychology.

50:36

And I'll say these words to you and I

50:38

wonder if they'll resonate.

50:39

There is characteristic of many, many grit paragons

50:43

that I've studied a sort of I'll show you rebel-- you know,

50:48

you know what?

50:48

I don't think you're really cut out to be a programmer.

50:50

[GROWLS]

50:51

Just this fear.

50:52

It's an aggression almost.

50:54

And I felt that when I was failing my neurobiology class

50:58

my freshman year of college.

50:59

And my very well-meaning teaching assistant, my TA

51:03

said, you really should withdraw from this course

51:05

because you're going to get an F on your transcript.

51:08

And you don't know this yet because you're 18, that's

51:11

not a good thing to have.

51:13

And I felt a kind of a hot anger.

51:17

I mean, I marched out of that office

51:19

to the registrar's office and I not only

51:21

didn't drop the course, I declared my major

51:24

in neurobiology that very day.

51:27

What the hell is that?

51:28

The I'll show you response I think is fascinating.

51:31

I don't fully understand it.

51:32

But it's fascinating that the same exact experience

51:35

can either lead people to feel like I'm a loser, I give up,

51:39

or the precisely opposite psychological reaction.

51:42

And I think it's not necessary, but it's very, very common

51:46

to paragons of grit.

51:50

BEN FRIED: I think we're out of time.

51:52

Hey Angela, thank you so much.

51:54

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Ben.

51:54

BEN FRIED: That was fascinating and phenomenal.

51:55

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [INAUDIBLE] I really enjoyed it.

51:56

BEN FRIED: Thank you.

51:57

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

51:58

[APPLAUSE]