We're here today to talk to Angela Duckworth, whose book, "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance"—today is the official publication day, right?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Today is the official publication day.

BEN FRIED: Congratulations.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

BEN FRIED: And incredibly gracious of her to fit time in at Google with a really, really busy publicity tour, which I was getting exhausted just hearing about it a few minutes ago.

So for those of you who aren't familiar with Angela Duckworth's work, I'll try to briefly read a biography.

Angela Duckworth is professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and the founder and scientific director of the Character Lab, a nonprofit whose mission is to advance the science and practice of character.
In 2013 Angela was named a MacArthur Fellow in recognition of her research on grit, self-control, and other non-IQ competencies that predict success in life. It's a very impressive resume. Prior to her career in research, Angela founded a summer school for low income children that was profiled as a Harvard Kennedy School case study. She's been a McKinsey management consultant, a math and science teacher in the public schools of New York City, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. She has degrees from Harvard, Oxford, and the University of Pennsylvania in neuroscience and in psychology. Did I mention she's a MacArthur Fellow, 2013 MacArthur Fellow? All right, I'll stop there. And "Grit" is her first book, it says. So welcome again, Angela. Thank you for coming. ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Ben.
Thank you for having me.
I'm delighted.
Thanks.

[BELLS]

BEN FRIED: So let's get right into it.
If you're not with her work-- the TED talk, the book--
I guess, hopefully it's fair for me to summarize the thesis
as that the power, as you put it,
the power of passion and perseverance
are at least as strong indicators and contributors
to success or achievement as things like IQ
and talent, which are what societally at least
we've traditionally focused on.
And that resonated enormously for me,
because I think at Google we spend
a lot of time thinking about talent, IQ, raw talent
It's kind of baked into this crazy hiring process
that we have.
And which brought me to the first question I had for you,
from what you know about Google-- do you think that we
or do you think that organizations in general
select for the wrong things in the hiring process?
And would organizations be better off
if they looked for grit plus fit,
as opposed to attempting to measure innate talent?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, I think the interests that we all
have in talent-- and it's not just Google, it's me too.
I wish I were more talented.
Talent's great.
And if you could give me five more IQ points, I'd take them.
So I don't think it's wrong to think about talent.
I don't think it's wrong to think about potential.
I do think it's useful to think about what we really mean
when we say the word talent.
And if you force yourself to write down
on a piece of paper in a sentence that
ends with a period, talent is, it's really hard
to actually fill in.
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
3:26
with effort.
3:27
Some people are going to increase their skills faster
3:30
than others.
3:31
And I think it's legitimate to say
3:33
those are the quick studies.
3:34
Those are the talented people.
3:36
I think it's legitimate for Google to look for them.
3:38
Why not?
3:39
Why not try to hire the more talented people?
3:41
But in my data I find two things.
3:44
One is that more talented individuals don't always
3:47
keep showing up.
3:49
Woody Allen famously once said, "Eighty percent of success
3:53
in life is just showing up."
3:55
He was later asked by William Safire of "The New York Times"
how he got to the number 80.

And Woody Allen, who is not exactly a scientist,
said, "Well, you know, I was going to say 70,
but it had one extra syllable."

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Nevertheless, 70, 80.

I think his point was is that his experience as a writer,
which was the context of the quote, there
are many people who could write a great book
or who are talented in the sense that when they write,
they get better faster, but they'd never
finish what they begin.

And so what I find in my data is that talent
is no guarantee of actually showing up and finishing
the things that you start.

The second thing is, characteristic
of high achievers really in any domain,
whether it's Google or outside Google,
is this kind of daily discipline of trying to get better.

BEN FRIED: Yes.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: In sometimes microscopic, infinitesimally trivial ways.

All those little details add up to excellence.

And it’s not always the people who are the quick studies who are willing to put in those hours and hours of behind the scenes unglamorous work.

So sure, Google should hire talented people.

But I do believe that you want people who are going to stick with things when they’re hard and who are going to daily submit themselves to the Japanese principal of kaizen, continuous improvement.

BEN FRIED: So on that subject, continuous improvement, you talk in the book about practice and the difference between-- I think you use the words directed practice versus regular undirected practice.

And it reminded me of in running there’s a phrase junk miles, which maybe indicate-- I’ve never actually been a runner, so I can only hypothesize what it means.
But I guess it means kind of running that doesn’t really contribute to your improved conditioning.

And what is the difference between direct practice and undirected practice in this spirit of kaizen and self-improvement?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So let’s keep running as actually the perfect example.

So when I started to try to understand the science of achievement beyond bumper sticker wisdom-- what do we really know as a science about experts and how they got that way-- I quickly found myself at the doorstep of Anders Ericsson, who’s the world expert on world experts. He studies what experts do that make them different from the rest of us.

It’s a great job.

He goes to the sudoku tournaments and he studies World Cup soccer players.

And he refers to it actually as deliberate practice.

BEN FRIED: Right.
Deliberate practice, yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And he would like to say that deliberate practice is different from anything else that we do in four important ways.

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

But the first thing when you're doing truly deliberate practice is that it's extremely intentional.

It's problem solving something in particular.

Not like I'm going to come into Google and be a better CEO, whatever it is.

It's like I'm going to say that the first 15 seconds of my presentations are going to be a little sharper.

I mean, it's extremely, extremely precise.

That's the first thing, a very specific goal that you're working on.

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

Second is 100% focus.

Or as some coaches would say-- like Pete Carroll at the Seahawks-- practicing with great effort.

Third is feedback.
Ideally, right away and ideally information rich.

And fourth, the kind of refinement that you reflect on and you try the whole thing over again.

In fact, these four things are incredibly straightforward.

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

But let's come back to running.

So when I heard about this research on deliberate practice, I asked Anders, why is it that I have gone running pretty much every day for years and I'm not a second faster than I ever was?

Isn't that evidence that you're wrong, that it's not thousands and thousands of hours of practice?

He started asking me questions like, well, when you go out for a run, do you have a goal, like a certain time?

Or are you trying to run hills?

No, no.

I'm taking the same route every time I go out around my neighborhood.

And he said, OK well, that's great.
What do you do when you’re running?

I was like, well I listen to NPR and any other podcasts because I’m trying to distract myself.

And he said well, that’s interesting.

Because people who are trying to improve their running are actually concentrating on their running and their strides and their breathing.

All right.

And he said, so how are you getting feedback on your running?

I mean, are you keeping your times?

Are you measuring your heart rate?

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

No.

No.

And no.

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And then he said, are you going back every time when you run and thinking to yourself, what can I refine here?
Before this next repetition what is there that I can do differently?

No.

And he said, well, then I can tell you why you're not getting any better at running.

And that is, those thousands of hours are not thousands of hours of deliberate practice.

So I think this idea that we should be getting better at things, we can unpack that a little.

It's not just going out and trying hard.

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

BEN FRIED: So on the subject of deliberate practice and coaching, I thought it's an interesting question.

In the organization, do you have theories about what roles managers can play in helping people develop in the same way?

Or do you have opinions on how professional development works in organizations versus how it should work?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: One of the things that's really important to know about human beings
is that it’s not that we stop growing up when we’re 18.
And if you look at the etymology of the word parent,
the word parent really means to bring forth.
So after we leave our own parents who’ve tried to bring forth our-- we leap into other situations which frankly,
are parenting situations.
I mean, I had teachers, I had professors. I still do, you know, mentors who, in a very authentic way,
are parenting me.
All right, now what does it really mean?
What does it look like?
I think that really, really great leaders do a couple of things.
One is they model the character that they want other people to emulate.
And there are two schools of thought about leadership.
Some people say the leader doesn’t really matter.
Swap out one, put in the next one.
Really culture’s going to happen without them.
I’m in the other school of thought.

I think that’s absolutely wrong.

Everybody watches the leader.

The leader sets the pace for the entire organization.

And when the leader is nice to other people—

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

I watch them and I watch how they talk to the people who aren’t famous.

I watch them when they order their food.

Do they look the person in the eye?

And all those little things are being watched by all the people who work for you.

No pressure.

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

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

I mean, a leader is respected when they provide both the kind of demanding, challenging,

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

I need you to do this differently, bring it back to me again.
It’s that in combination with support.

And it brings me all the way back to the parenting metaphor because that’s what great parents do.

They’re demanding.

They’re challenging.

It’s not good enough.

I’m occasionally disappointed in you.

But at the same time, genuinely care about you.

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

Ben Fried: So on the subject of mentoring and parenting,

I thought it was-- I don’t know where I read it-- but that you share your peer review.

When you submit papers, you share the negative peer reviews and grant proposal rejections with the people in your lab and your students.

Is that true?

Angela Duckworth: It is all true.

And here’s the thing about it.

When you interview someone whose-- whatever, they win an award, or you just read off someone’s resume,
and by the way, you only usually read the good parts.
Like how about the time that you completely screwed up and made this wrong decision?
I didn't put that on my resume, so you couldn't read it.
But I think a lot of my work is about demystifying things like excellence.
People who succeed fail all the time.
In fact, I think they fail more than anyone else.
That's what makes them so successful, because failure provides an opportunity for information.
In academia when you submit an article, even when you're very good, odds are it's going to get rejected.
And in my world, rejection comes with a 13 page single spaced review letter about exactly how you suck.
Like, I can't believe how badly written this is.
Like, oh my god, does this person not know the meta-analysis done in 2000?
BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And I send those letters out as soon as I get them to everybody who's working in my lab,
so that they can see all the imperfection that eventually
will lead to some kind of achievement.
I want them to know the truth as opposed
to the shiny, polished myth that I think is easy to fall into.
BEN FRIED: Which feeds into the myth of talent.
There's some people who are just so good,
they appear on stage one day never
having thought about what they might say and perform
"King Lear" flawlessly or whatever the case may be.
Whereas in reality, it was direct practice and failure
and so on that got them there.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And again, that person
may have been-- so take your favorite actor, Judi Dench, I
mean, take whoever you want to think
of as somebody who's a paragon of masterful performance.
It's not that I'm saying that anybody
could have been that person.
I'm not saying that we all could have been Einstein.
But even Einstein wasn't born knowing anything about physics.
Even Judi Dench had to learn how to be an actress.
Skills, because we are human and we are not horses or other lower order animals who are born with a lot of stuff hardwired—horses don't really have to learn how to run. Hours after they're born, they run.

Human beings are born knowing nothing. The only thing that we're born knowing is how to learn. And so skills are acquired over a lifetime.

Sure, the talented progress faster if they stay with things and if they continue to work at it.

BEN FRIED: On the subject of learning, do you think that the educational system is set up to support and recognize grit, perseverance?

It seems like the academic cycle is short with immediate feedback. And it's easy, for example, to move on from one subject to another after three or six months of study if things don't go well.

Are the standards we've set for academic success hurting our ability to develop grit in people, obviously...
all of whom could benefit?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Well, if you think about younger kids, the kids who are still in elementary school or middle school and high school, one way in which our system doesn’t do a great job of encouraging grit is there’s a kind of a narrowing of the focus on what it means to be successful to essentially mean what are your scores on the annual standardized tests of math and reading? That’s incredibly narrow. It not only leaves out a lot of things that I care about-- grit, for example-- for something you find meaningful. And I haven’t yet met the 16 year-old who finds their standardized test scores a meaningful life goal. It also leaves out the kind of interest where a lot of us probably in this room would say that that’s what they really did care about.
Their sports team, being on the baseball team, writing for the school paper.

The things that kids do outside of the classroom that are unmeasured, that policymakers— not only are they not measuring and caring about them, these things are getting cut from schools left and right.

Then we talk about university education.

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

So that’s gritty in the sense that grit means doing something in-depth, as opposed to being scattershot.

But I’ll tell you a story.

I was once on a committee to decide who was going to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

And as you may recall, this is the honor society that there are people like me, faculty who say OK well, this kid’s really extraordinary as a budding academic, and this kid maybe not so.

So the first kid gets on Phi Beta Kappa, the second kid--
So I remember looking at this one kid's record. And it was very clear to me that it was grit and the passion for this kid was biochemistry. You could see in his transcript that all of his classes were taken in biochem at the med school. Every summer he was doing internships. And even before he was going to graduate, he was going to be a published author, which is a very hard thing to do for any kind of scientific publication. Committee gets to discussion, and people are like, oh you know, I don't really see much humanities here. Oh you know, this isn't a very good grade in his writing class. I was like, look, this kid's going to win the Nobel Prize. OK, I exaggerate. But this kid has a passion. Let's reward that. And I argued hard enough that he did get Phi Beta Kappa. But I think that there is this kind of averaging.
People don't care about the average ability that you have across all things. Most of us in life are going to become, if we're lucky, good at something. And it's that one thing that actually matters and not the other things that you didn't invest in.

BEN FRIED: Do you have a favorite grit story? I mean, your book is full of great stories of people who demonstrated so many facets of passion and perseverance and interest and commitment over time. Is there a favorite one?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, it's a great job that I have. So like Anders Ericsson, I go around studying experts. And you see it everywhere, by the way. It's not just that you have to go to the Olympics or to a chess tournament. You go into a great restaurant-- and this is a very trivial example, but I think it resonates for me-- you go into a restaurant,
you ever had a great waiter or waitress?
I mean, they’re just considerate.
And I was like, that is a pro.
That is somebody who loves what they do
and who seems to be trying to get better at it,
and that is grit just as much as a famous story.
I do have a story that I've recently been re-reading,
and that is Julia Child and her autobiography.
And you may or may not know that Julia Child took
until her late 30s to really figure out
that she wanted to do anything at all related to food.
She grew up in a wealthy family that had a cook.
She said she had, and I quote, "Zero interest in the kitchen."
When she was a young woman going to college,
she thought she might want to be a writer, a novelist.
Then World War II happened, so she went to-- I mean,
this is not a story of grit so far.
She marries Paul Child, and for his job, not for hers,
they go to France.
And she has a really memorable meal.
It was sole meuniere in a little restaurant outside of Paris.
And that was the beginning of a journey.
Not by the way, an epiphany that she knew that she was going to revolutionize the way Americans cook and introduce them to French cuisine.
But one step in a journey where, in the next meal, she noticed that was also different than anything she’d ever eaten.
Then there was a bistro they went to.
She started wandering around Paris and looking at this beautiful produce and this bread that she had never tasted before.
She got more interested.
Somebody gave her a cookbook.
Her husband gave her her second French cookbook.
She found out that there were classes that she could walk to and learn French cooking.
What I want to say about these stories of grit is that one, that is accessible.
When you actually dig down into the details of how people
became great, suddenly it becomes something
that you might actually aspire to.
And it's never really a snapshot.
It's always a movie.
And it's a long movie.
And you might not want to see all
of the scenes that could be edited out to make more drama.
But in a very real sense, I think
excellence is a long story that has parts that are not
suspenseful, parts are mundane.
BEN FRIED: Yeah.
It's like practice.
It happens every day.
You do it all the time, it gets better.
So how measurable is grit?
I mean, you actually did a bunch of pioneering work
to measure it in West Point cadets.
But I mean, when we think about talent and IQ
and so on, there's a rich, if somewhat
colored history in the measurement of intelligence.
Is grit equally measurable in your opinion?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think scientists have a much better grip on how to measure intelligence than they do how to measure grit or so many other things that you could say are under this broad umbrella called character.

And we've had these IQ tests really for over a century continually being refined.

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

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

So what's the difference?

The difference is that my questionnaire is completely fakeable.

My questionnaire— I mean really.

Like, I'm a hard worker?

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It's not hard to think about what the answer is to that if you want a higher score.

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

I mean, you can't say, I'm going to guess C 'cause
I know it's the right answer. But I don't really know, but I'm faking.
You know, that doesn't work.
Second thing is when you're taking an IQ test, there's no subjectivity.
There's no judgment.
You take the test, you get a score.
With the grit scale, if I gave it to you and you said to yourself, hmm, am I hard worker,
I can only imagine the people that you would be comparing yourself to.
When I talk about finishing whatever I begin on the scale, you're going to compare yourself to your peers, who are all probably extremely gritty.
So in addition to faking, there's what in science is called the frame of reference bias.
BEN FRIED: Yeah.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And that is your standard for comparison can vary.
And here's one concrete example.
In high performing charter schools like KIPP--
these are schools that are in New York,
but all over the country-- kids are,
like in many other schools, brought to a very high standard
of excellence.

When kids rate themselves on items like I just read you,
their mental frame is different from kids
who could be just down the block at a different school that
doesn't have those standards.

So that distorts the scores to some extent.

As a researcher, I know about that.

I know how to adjust for that when I run statistics
and so forth.

I also know that there's error.

I know that there's the possibility of faking.

What I worry about is employers or schools
or government agencies who make the mistake of thinking
that you can take a grit scale score
and make those high stakes decisions that the grit
scale was never designed for.
Don’t hire with the grit scale.

BEN FRIED: No, I’m not proposing--

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

OK, good.

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

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

Didn’t think it was going to be.

BEN FRIED: But I do wonder.

I mean, it seems to me like we’ve perfected a lot of ways of measuring a bunch of talent in computer science.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you want me to tell you my best ideas that haven’t been tested yet?

BEN FRIED: Well, please.

Please.

Yes.

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

When you look at the resumes of people who want to be Googlers-- which I can also tell you

I think that’s interesting that you use that term Googler,
and I think I know why you do.

But that can be for another question.

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

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I'm going to tell you.

I'm going to tell you.

I think it's actually not trivial.

So I'll tell you.

But when you look at the resume of somebody who

wants to get in here, what I would look for

is evidence of grit.

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

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

But sometimes it can be like wow,

this kid was on the tennis team for three or four

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

Whoo, this kid worked-- you know,

I'll tell you about my own husband.

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

but they got promoted.

That there's progression and there's continuity
in a high grit resume.

Conversely, don't hire the people who have these dilettante resumes of sort of a little bit here, a little bit there. You know, where is the evidence of passion and perseverance applied to something before they got to my doorstep? So I think you can look for the residue of grit, as it were, in people's resumes. What I don't think you should do is use the grit scale. And also I don't think you can rely on interviews. I am of the opinion that you can interview for charisma. You can interview for social intelligence. You can interview for confidence. You can interview even for chemistry. Like am I going to like to sit next to this person and work with them? But how are you going to interview for that quality of a person where the next day they're going to get up and they're going to be the first into the office
or the last– you know, when you give them the feedback that says this isn't good enough, is that person going to genuinely reflect on that and try to improve?

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

And my best idea, which hasn't been tested, is if there is something that people are going to have to do at Google and its particularly obvious to their job, that is really hard, where you can set up a mini grit experiment where you're going to let them perform and learn, get feedback, see whether they take that feedback, see whether they come back for a second try, see whether they come back for a third try, I think that would be fascinating.

BEN FRIED: So assessment as opposed to interview.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Exactly.

But you know, it's like you're piloting the person. I mean, give them a chance to display their grit, as opposed to trying to guess at it.

Do you want me to tell you why I think you use the word Googler?
BEN FRIED: Yeah.
I would love to know why we use Googler.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So my dad worked
for DuPont his whole life.
He actually retired with a gold watch.
I thought that was just a metaphor.
He got one, and it said, "DuPont, better things
for better living" on it.
He spent his entire adult life there
in automotive refinishing products, which
was his passion, by the way.
And you know, my dad did not talk about working at DuPont.
He talked about being a DuPonter.

BEN FRIED: Really?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.
And people who go to West Point, graduate from West Point,
they call themselves West Pointers.
Kids who go to KIPP, they’re not students, they’re Kippsters.
At the Seattle Seahawks, you’re not just a football player,
you’re a Seahawk.
These are nouns.

They're not adjectives.

BEN FRIED: Right, right.

Yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And when people have an extremely strong cultural identity, they're usually able to express that as a noun.

You know, I'm a Googler.

I'm not working for any other company.

There's a way that we do things here.

There's a language that we use here.

You probably don't use it where you are 'cause you're not a Googler.

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

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh, what does that mean?

Just in the spirit of Googleness?

BEN FRIED: Well, I've been spending eight years trying to figure out what it means, personally.

[AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Yeah!
I think you should stick with Googler.

Googly sounds like those little eyeballs that go--

BEN FRIED: Yeah, yeah.

I mean, that’s not--

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

"Oh, he’s so Googly."

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Right?

Googly!

Yeah, I don’t think that’s the-- look, let the marketing department decide.

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

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

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

But I’m still not sure what it means.

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

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: But it probably--

but really, these words that you--
I don't know how many vocabulary, 'cause I'm not a Googler, so I wouldn't know. But at West Point they have this entire glossary. BEN FRIED: Really? ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And there are all these words that you wouldn't know unless you go to West Point. So a plebe, right? A plebe, you know, a plebe and a firstie and a yearling. What are those? And booyah. So at West Point they exclaim booyah, which doesn't have an easy translation but you say it when somebody does something really good. It's like, booyah. And then the whole crowd of cadets that you're in will erupt in these words that you've never heard in the English language. And that's very important, because that's what it means to be a West Pointer. Every company has a culture.
And when that culture is really strong, people identify with it in a noun form. They speak the language. They often wear the colors. They follow the rituals. It becomes part of your identity. And when I heard about Googlers, I thought immediately of all these other very strong cultures that are very— I'm not saying intentional in that one person's writing the handbook— but it really is part of what makes the company great.

BEN FRIED: Now is there is there a connection between that kind of cultural identity and grit? Or non-IQ correlates with success?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I absolutely think so. So you can identify with an organization or a culture that itself is gritty. I'll give you a national example. Country of Finland has actually fewer citizens than New York City has inhabitants.
It’s small, it’s cold.

What is there to know about Finland that could be of interest to us?

There is a word in Finnish called sisu, which very roughly translates to grit.

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

And if you’re Finnish, you have the identity of someone who when things are really hard and you’ve given all you can and you still are falling short, you reach down inside and you use your sisu and you do it anyway.

Now it's anatomically impossible that the Finns are walking around with this extra battery pack in them. And if they did have that, why don't the Swedes have that? 'Cause it's not that far and it's Scandinavia.

BEN FRIED: The Swedes invaded Finland, I think.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

They had this little bit of rivalry there going back. But you know, I think what’s important to learn there is that you have an identity as a Finnish person,
and Finnish people do things that are hard.
And we have sisu and we prevail.
And I think that when you are part
of an organization like West Point
or on a team like the Seahawks or the Celtics–
they’re another very gritty team with another very
gritty leader-- or you work at a company like Google,
that identity is very much part of why you often struggle
through when in a different context
with a different cultural identity, you might not.

BEN FRIED: Now I mean, expanding it to national identities
and national cultures is fascinating in itself.
Are there particular cultures or immigrant groups
that are grittier than others?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I'm sure there are.
I'm sure there are.

There are lots of countries and cultures in the world.

BEN FRIED: I'm not trying to race bait, you
by the way, or anything like that.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah, no, no, no.
Well, I haven't looked at the question directly.

But let me tell you why.

First, let me just acknowledge, I mean anybody who wants to say that all cultures are the same, that's naive.

I don't have any impulse to say that.

But it's really hard to ask the question are the Americans grittier than the French?

And are the French less gritty than the Japanese?

And here's why.

When I give my grit scale to you, you're going to answer it as you would with your comparison group.

When I give it in Japan, they're going to answer it with those cultural standards, not only of their company and their family and their neighborhood, but the whole country.

I want to tell you about a study that was done of over 60 countries where they asked people to fill out personality questionnaires.
They didn't give the grit scale, but they gave a scale of conscientiousness.
Related, it's in the family.
Dependability, orderliness, I'm punctual, et cetera.
So now you have data on dozens of countries around the world.
And you can ask the question, which countries are the most conscientious and which ones are the least?
Well, I'll tell you what the findings are.
The three least gritty areas in the world were Japan-- this is conscientiousness, by the data-- Japan, Korea, and China.
Really?
They're messy people.
They're not dependable.
They don't work hard.
Really?
BEN FRIED: Yeah.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So the researchers in that study concluded that perhaps these data were being
influenced by the very high standard that exists in those countries.

BEN FRIED: Right, right.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: That's why it's so, so hard to make these comparisons.

Because two things go into your score-- what you really are and then the frame of reference, the standard to which you’re holding yourself.

BEN FRIED: We should probably try to open up to questions in the room.

And on the Dory.

I think it's given time.

We have about 15, 20 minutes left.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah, I’d love that.

BEN FRIED: Does that make sense?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.

BEN FRIED: Do we have live questions?

AUDIENCE: Can you use peer assessments, especially cross cultural or ethnic boundaries to then get a more baseline grit comparison?
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So the problem with the peer assessments when you're talking about the cross-cultural work in particular, is that who are your peers?

Other people who also live in the same culture.

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

But I do think that-- and you know, I know Google is always trying to hire better-- you know, triangulation is a great strategy.

In psychology we call it the principle of aggregation.

Whenever you have imperfect data from one source and imperfect data from another source, what you do is you put more and more imperfect data together.

The error cancels out, or the unsystematic variance, the error.

And you get a stronger signal.

So yeah, get a peer rating and a teacher rating and a performance task and look at their resumes.

You could even throw the grit scale in if it's only one thing among many.

And when you get a consistent signal
that everybody thinks this person is gritty,
then you actually have a good bet that they are.

AUDIENCE: Thank you for coming, first of all.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

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

AUDIENCE: And also guys, she read it herself.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I did.

AUDIENCE: Which is really sweet, yeah.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: It was really fun.

AUDIENCE: I'm going to listen to it like sped up anyway, but--
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] OK!

Oh really?
Like chipmunk?
AUDIENCE: Yeah.
Yeah.
Three times.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: OK, good.

AUDIENCE: No, but so my question is,
you talk about this example of the biochem
kid who is really, really, really deep into biochem.
I would call him pointy, so to speak.
He dug into that thing really hard.
And you’re talking about how you can use grit— the grit
property gets you to do that.
So people who can do that.
So I had a question that maybe it’s
outside of the scope of the grit, but my friends and I,
we’re actually very gritty people.
We dig into things very, very deeply.
But recently particularly after graduating college,
we had trouble figuring out what to actually be gritty into.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Mm, yeah.
AUDIENCE: Right?
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: What to be gritty about, yeah.
AUDIENCE: Right.
In college it’s very easy.
Or even in school, because you know, the metric is there.
You get good grades.
Maybe you pick a major, you do well in it, fine.
But then in the real world, I find that my friends in particular, they have trouble being gritty. Not because they can't be gritty, but because they want to be pointy but they don't know what to pick. And then you can be really pointy in Russian literature and then it turns out you need to make money or something.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

AUDIENCE: You know, no offense. I'm just joking.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: No offense to Russian lit majors.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: If there are any here.

AUDIENCE: But yeah.

So how do you actually go about deciding what to be pointy in, especially when the cost of picking incorrectly can be high?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think that one of the things that makes it so hard is that we know the cost is high.
It can make us freeze up a little bit.

I was at McKinsey, and there are a lot of people at McKinsey who like me, had basically spent their entire life opening doors of opportunity.

If I do this internship, I can do anything.

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

Well, you get to a certain point in life where you realize that that's not the game anymore. It's not opening doors of opportunity, it's actually walking through.

And it's walking through and hearing the other doors slam shut.

Now that's even more paralyzing in terms of the anxiety that would produce when you don't have this really strong inner compass. You're like OK, follow my passion? Where do I get one?

And here's my advice about that.

I do think that really really gritty, passionate people have two sources of motivation.
And these are two questions to ask yourself when you're going to ask yourself what to do the rest of your life. One is what are my real interests? And they're still emerging. You know, they develop over years. But for many of you, there were things that you were interested and things that you were less interested in that were kind of boring for you around the time that you were hitting adolescence. So many gritty people will remember that they started liking to do something at 12 or 13. There are exceptions, like Julia Child. But interestingly, her interest at that early adolescent stage was writing. Now if you think about who Julia Child really grew up to be, it was not just a chef, but equally, if not more so, a writer of cookbooks. So first to think back down memory lane to when you were a young teenager.
What are the things that you absolutely hated doing?
But what are the things that you kind of started wanting to do spontaneously?
That's a clue.
That's a thread.
The second major motivational drive of passion is purpose.
You know, importance.
It really is almost moral for some people.
It's like what is the greater mission that my work serves?
And if you think about your values,
it can be I really want to help people become their best selves.
Or I really care about the environment.
I mean, whatever it is that is for you of value
that you think is deeply meaningful
and isn't going to change.
If you can follow that and figure out where
it overlaps with interest.
You finally mentioned not becoming an impoverished professional Russian literature critic.
You know, I don't know how many jobs there are like that.
You probably do need a third circle, which is reality
and trying to make a living.
But at least starting with the first two-- my interests
and my purpose or my values.
I think that's more helpful than just
saying like oh, well, go follow your passion.
Because most of us don't know what
that even means until we actually find one.
AUDIENCE: Cool, thanks.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.
BEN FRIED: All right, why don't we go--
AUDIENCE: OK, great.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Hi.
AUDIENCE: I certainly enjoyed the topic and the presentation.
Clearly grit has a lot of value both in professional life
and personal life.
A different podcast I've been listening to recently-- maybe
you heard it on one of your runs--
by the "Freakonomics" authors was
about the power of quitting, and failing fast
we might say in engineering circles.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think I was on that podcast.
AUDIENCE: Oh!
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I can't remember.
AUDIENCE: [LAUGHS]
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I don't remember.
Maybe.
I don't really listen to them afterwards.
But go on.
Yeah.
And I love that podcast.
It's a great one.
Yeah, yeah.
AUDIENCE: So I was trying to figure out how to combine them.
Like from a personal life, taking off that last question,
you could try a lot of things until you find something
you choose as a passion.
Do you have any advice in the corporate world
of how to combine choosing when to fail
and when to stick to it?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: You know, let me use the metaphor of dating. Because I am personally really happy that I did not end up marrying my first boyfriend. And so I quit on him. I mean, every time you break up with someone, you're quitting. And you know, is that a good thing? Is it a bad thing? I think that for me anyway, I was dating to find my life partner. I guess people can date for other reasons. But I was like, oh we're not going to get married, over. And it took a few dates and guys to kind of find the guy that I'm with, that's my husband. But I think it's actually exactly what we do in our careers too. I mean, you're exploring. But there are some people who are exploring with intention. And I was dating to get married. I mean, I wasn't really ever intending to stay
dating forever.
I think that makes all the difference.
So sure, quit.
But for me quitting the White House speech writing gig and McKinsey and being a teacher,
it was sort of a groping toward something that I wanted to stick with.
I was only quitting those things so that I could find something that I would never want to quit.
And when I was 32, finally after much exploration,
I figured that out, and it was to have the career I have.
But it's not a predictable, efficient process.
So quitting in the service of not quitting is, I guess, my answer.

AUDIENCE: Thank you very much.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.
AUDIENCE: Thanks Angela, so much for coming.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.
AUDIENCE: This is really great.
There's something about grit that
seems very intrinsic or natural, almost unlearnable.

Do you have any recommendations for how people can increase their grittiness?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: So I want everybody in this room to watch their own language in the next day or so for the word just. Whenever we say, oh, they just have it. Oh, they just are a natural. Or he's just extroverted. How does he do that? He's just kind of a math guy. We use that language, I think, when we can't explain something. I mean, that's when we use the word just. Actually, when Nancy Reagan said "Just don't do it," or when Nike says "Just Do It," I always find that deeply unhelpful.

Could you please tell me how? Or are you just going to-- So this idea that when we see someone do something fluently,
particularly when we can't do it-- I mean,
somebody who dances really well if we can't dance, or plays
music really well-- we start to use words like just,
and we say things like they're a natural.
And I was actually giving a talk.
It was the pre-book tour.
Today's the first day of book tour.
But you know, I gave a talk.
And I give talks all the time.
I'm sure you do too.
And you get practice, you get feedback,
you make these little refinements, tiny little ones.
Like oh, that fourth slide, I totally
have to change the background color.
I mean, it's really that trivial.
I get off the stage and I'm talking to the person who's
handling it.
She's like, you are just a natural.
And I thought about the irony that I just
wrote a book about-- I should say I recently wrote
a book instead of I just wrote.
I recently wrote a book about the fact
that that is such an attractive myth.
That's like a seductive myth.
And I think the answer is this.
We can say that people-- you know,
Jerry Seinfeld would say that some people are
born to be comedians and some people are not.
I think there is a sense in which people
are born with different inclinations, things
that they find fun to do, things that hold their interest.
But if you ask the question of how they eventually
became Jerry Seinfeld, if they eventually wrote a book that's
halfway decent or they gave a talk that's reasonably fluent,
it's not just anything.
Except if you want to say it is just hours and hours
and hours of iteration with feedback
to get better at something which maybe I did just
like when I was a little kid.

AUDIENCE: My question is what conditions do you--
for a child, you’re talking about kids—
do you set in order to breed grittiness?
So to give an example—
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you have kids?
AUDIENCE: I don’t have kids.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.
AUDIENCE: Thinking about them though.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] OK, good.
I recommend them.
AUDIENCE: So I’m a Colombian immigrant to the United States.
I came here when I was five years old.
Eventually graduated West Point.
Low income household in New York City— four
of us living in one bedroom.
Mom, Dad, sister, et cetera.
So I still don’t know what conditions
were set for me to persevere.
’Cause I could have been easily in that demographic
of Hispanics that end up in jail or whatever it is.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.
AUDIENCE: Especially in this city.
So what conditions, what makes me different,
or people like me different than my peers
that I went to high school with that perhaps did not?
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Do you have any hypotheses?
Do you have any guesses?
AUDIENCE: I mean, I think parenting definitely
had a lot to do with it as an example
of the hard working immigrant parents, et cetera.
But then outside of that, in the classroom,
it may have been teachers.
But at the end of the day, I still had to do the work.
And I just-- I don't know.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And you probably
see people who grew up in maybe not identical, but such similar
circumstances, and they didn't end up anywhere
close to where you are.
That is itself I think my life's work,
is to answer your question.
And I only have an incomplete answer.
But I will say this.

First of all, you did inherit DNA from your mom and dad, and so when you see gritty little kids who have gritty parents, you have to at least pause and acknowledge the fact that half their genes came from mom, half came from dad, they got shuffled up, and in part, we are like our parents because of our shared genetic heritage.

At the same time, it’s absolutely unequivocal that parents model certain behaviors. It’s usually the case-- not always, there are exceptions-- but it’s usually the case that kids are modeling the work ethic and the passion of their parents. If it’s not their parents, often there’s another strong role model like a particular teacher who had a big effect, or a coach and so forth. So that’s maybe part of the equation.

I also think that a lot of grit comes down to these virtuous cycles. You start to find that you have a thing for a certain sport.
That becomes a source of pride and success.
People begin encouraging you.
It's an upward feedback cycle of motivation, effort, and achievement, and it feeds itself.
I think there are people who then are on the opposite spiral, which is they get a little down about themselves, they stop trying, they prove themselves right because things don't go well, and they kind of spiral in the opposite direction.
And Einstein is quoted— and I am not sure I can verify this, but somebody at Google can— as saying that compound interest is what we all really need to understand.
It's like, that is the mystery of the universe.
And I think this compounding of a little bit of grit, a little bit of effort, a little bit of success, a little more grit, a little more effort, a little more success, if we could understand that compounding, then maybe we could understand why kids like you ended up where you are.
But we could also maybe understand why so many other don’t. And I would like Google to help me figure that out, by the way.

So it would be, yeah.

AUDIENCE: Do you need a volunteer?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [LAUGHS] Great.

Thank you.

BEN FRIED: How are we doing for time?

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

FEMALE SPEAKER: Five more minutes.

BEN FRIED: Five more minutes.

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

Oh, at the end?

OK, all right.

So we have five more minutes.

Shall we do a question on the Dory?

This is somewhat confrontational.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh yes.

BEN FRIED: I don’t mean to be rude.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Oh, that’s OK.
Yeah, yeah.
No, it's good.
BEN FRIED: I'll go back.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Wait!
BEN FRIED: I'll read it.
I'll read it.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Let's do the hard one.
Yeah.
BEN FRIED: Yeah. "There was a study--"
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: I think there was a study, yeah.
BEN FRIED: "Of 4,000 UK students published back in February in "The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" in which grit was not shown to be that predictive of academic success."
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: "Instead intelligence and conscientiousness were key.
Do you do any thoughts on that study?"
Yes, I do have thoughts on that study.
Actually one of the co-authors of that study sent me the report before it was published.
And here’s what I said to him.

So I’ll tell you the full study.

So there are thousands of British kids, about 16 years old, I think, who are going through the British school system.

And there are grit scores on these kids and there are also their standardized math and reading scores on the UK test.

BEN FRIED: The A-levels or something?

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

Yeah.

Not British enough to know.

But it's a standardized achievement test, and we've all taken them so we know what they are.

The finding is this.

Grit does predict their standardized test scores, but not quite as well as a measure of conscientiousness, which we were already talking about.

Dependability, being able to control your impulses, that sort of thing.
So yes, grit predicted but maybe not quite as much. And also intelligence was a better predictor in that study. I don't find that all that surprising. I also don't question those findings for one moment. I think they're very real. For me, my complaint is that if you're going to equate your standardized test scores when you're 16 and things that, frankly most 16 year-olds are not invested in— it's not a meaningful personal goal— if you're going to equate that with success or even with academic achievement, grades for example do not send all the same signal as your test scores. Grades are a better predictor of college persistence than your standardized test scores. So they're not interchangeable. There's information that's carried by grades that's not carried by test scores. There's information carried by your extracurricular activities that's not embedded in your test scores. My complaint is not with the finding itself, but the idea
that is everything that we would need to know about success for those kids.
So I guess that's the major thing that I'll say about that study.
And I think that it's very important to recognize that grit isn't the only important thing in the world.
I study high achievement in challenging circumstances. It's in those circumstances where the goal also matters to you that I think re-emerges as the most reliable predictor and not just a moderately predictive one.

BEN FRIED: Shall we go back to a live question?
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Hi.
Yeah.
AUDIENCE: I got a live question.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.
AUDIENCE: What if you're applying your amazing grit to the wrong thing?
Let's say I wanted to be a film star
but I have no grasp of what the world actually
wants from a film star.
When should I just say I should probably
stop trying to do that and apply my grit to something else
where I might actually be more successful?
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Yeah.
So for example, what if you’re trying to be a film star
and you’re just disastrously untalented?
There’s nothing that you could do that you would ever be--
AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Right.
So that’s one way that you could be wrong.
The other thing that you could be wrong in
is that you’re picking an industry that is going
to melt like the polar icecaps.
The whole industry’s going to go away.
And you know, that happens these days,
in ways that are faster than before.
So there’s lots of ways that grit can get you into trouble.
I think the question is this.
You gotta take risks in life.
There's no getting away really.
Even if you do nothing, you're taking a risk.
What grit means is to put your left foot in front of your right foot and then your left foot again and keep heading in a certain direction.
And you're absolutely right that you might end up somewhere that you didn't want to be.
But you can guarantee yourself that you'll never get anywhere by switching direction every few paces, or not walking forward at all.
So yeah, there's absolutely risk in being a paragon of grit.
But I'd say there's a guarantee of failure at not being passionate and persevering.

BEN FRIED: So a related question to the one he just asked is is grit in a continuum with obsession? Is there a bright line between grit and obsession?

Or are they unrelated?

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: No, I think there is actually a strong family resemblance between grit and obsession.
One of the individuals that I interviewed but I didn't put her into the book, partly because I forgot to push record when I was interviewing her, was Temple Grandin. And I don't know if you know her work--

BEN FRIED: Yeah, of course.

Yeah.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: But she's famously autistic.

And she writes about her autism.

And in her words, "A little bit of obsession gets a hell of a lot of work done."

BEN FRIED: [LAUGHS]

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: And you know, this idea that you wake up--I mean, I'm obsessive.

If you woke me up at 3:00 in the morning, which sometimes just happens to me, like you wake up and you have to go to the bathroom, you know what I'm thinking about?

I'm thinking about grit.

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

It's so interesting.
Like where did they get the--

I think about it all the time.

I think about it in the shower.

I think about it in yoga when I'm supposed to not be thinking about anything, but I'm thinking about grit.

Like Savasana pose, you're supposed to be doing nothing and I'm like, I wonder where that, you know, is gonna--

It is an obsession.

The difference maybe between the way most people think about obsessions and the way gritty people think about obsessions is when they say, I love what I do, they love that they love what they do.

There's no sense in which they would trade that life for any other.

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

BEN FRIED: Yeah.

I think we have time for one more question.

Should we?

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.
And my very well-meaning teaching assistant, my TA said, you really should withdraw from this course because you’re going to get an F on your transcript. And you don’t know this yet because you’re 18, that’s not a good thing to have. And I felt a kind of a hot anger. I mean, I marched out of that office to the registrar’s office and I not only didn’t drop the course, I declared my major in neurobiology that very day. What the hell is that?

The I’ll show you response I think is fascinating. I don’t fully understand it. But it’s fascinating that the same exact experience can either lead people to feel like I’m a loser, I give up, or the precisely opposite psychological reaction. And I think it’s not necessary, but it’s very, very common to paragons of grit.

BEN FRIED: I think we’re out of time.
Hey Angela, thank you so much.
ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Ben.

BEN FRIED: That was fascinating and phenomenal.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: [INAUDIBLE] I really enjoyed it.

BEN FRIED: Thank you.

ANGELA DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]