GRIT

THE POWER of PASSION
and PERSEVERANCE

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If grit can grow, how does that happen?

I get emails and letters almost every day from people who wish they had more grit. They lament that they never stuck with anything in order to get really good at it. They feel they've squandered their talents. They desperately want a long-term goal, and they want to pursue that goal with passion and perseverance.

But they don’t know where to begin.
A good place to start is to understand where you are today. If you’re not as gritty as you want to be, ask yourself why.
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The most obvious answer people come up with goes something like this: "I guess I’m just lazy."
Here’s another: “I’m just a flake.”
Or: “I’m congenitally incapable of sticking with things.”
All of these answers, I think, are wrong.
In fact, when people drop out of things, they do so for a reason. Actually, they do so for different reasons. Any of the following four thoughts might go through your head right before you quit what you’re doing:

“I’m bored.”
“The effort isn’t worth it.”
“This isn’t important to me.”
“I can’t do this, so I might as well give up.”

There’s nothing wrong—morally or otherwise—with thoughts like these. As I tried to show in this chapter, paragons of grit quit goals, too. But the higher the level of the goal in question, the more stubborn they are about seeing it through. Most important, paragons of grit don’t swap compasses: when it comes to the one, singularly important aim that guides almost everything else they do, the very gritty tend not to utter the statements above.

A lot of what I’ve learned about how grit grows comes from interviewing men and women who epitomize the qualities of passion and perseverance. I’ve included snippets of those conversations throughout this book so that you, too, can peer inside the mind and heart of a grit paragon and see whether there’s a belief, attitude, or habit worth emulating.

These stories of grit are one kind of data, and they complement the more systematic, quantitative studies I’ve done in places like West Point and the National Spelling Bee. There are four. They count, they tend to develop, over time.

First comes interest. It’s what you do. Every gritty individual in their work; they’re captivated by the excitement and childlike curiosity that they call I do!"

Next comes the capacity for the daily discipline of trying. So, after you’ve discovered a particular area, you must devote your challenge-exceeding-skill practice. Whatever it takes in on your weaknesses, another 40 hours a day, week after month of placidity. “Whatever it takes” paragons of grit, no matter how excellent they already are.

Third is purpose. What work matters. For most people, impossible to sustain for a purposefully identify your work as both integral to what is connected to the most heightens after a the development practice. Regardless, fully “My work is important—be it for me.

And, finally, hope. Hope. In this book, I discu
Point and the National Spelling Bee. Together, the research reveals the psychological assets that mature paragons of grit have in common. There are four. They counter each of the buzz-killers listed above, and they tend to develop, over the years, in a particular order.

First comes interest. Passion begins with intrinsically enjoying what you do. Every gritty person I’ve studied can point to aspects of their work they enjoy less than others, and most have to put up with at least one or two chores they don’t enjoy at all. Nevertheless, they’re captivated by the endeavor as a whole. With enduring fascination and childlike curiosity, they practically shout out, “I love what I do!”

Next comes the capacity to practice. One form of perseverance is the daily discipline of trying to do things better than we did yesterday. So, after you’ve discovered and developed interest in a particular area, you must devote yourself to the sort of focused, full-hearted, challenge-exceeding-skill practice that leads to mastery. You must zero in on your weaknesses, and you must do so over and over again, for hours a day, week after month after year. To be gritty is to resist complacency. “Whatever it takes, I want to improve!” is a refrain of all paragons of grit, no matter their particular interest, and no matter how excellent they already are.

Third is purpose. What ripens passion is the conviction that your work matters. For most people, interest without purpose is nearly impossible to sustain for a lifetime. It is therefore imperative that you identify your work as both personally interesting and, at the same time, integrally connected to the well-being of others. For a few, a sense of purpose dawns early, but for many, the motivation to serve others heightens after the development of interest and years of disciplined practice. Regardless, fully mature exemplars of grit invariably tell me, “My work is important—both to me and to others.”

And, finally, hope. Hope is a rising-to-the-occasion kind of perseverance. In this book, I discuss it after interest, practice, and purpose—
but hope does not define the last stage of grit. It defines every stage. From the very beginning to the very end, it is inestimably important to learn to keep going even when things are difficult, even when we have doubts. At various points, in big ways and small, we get knocked down. If we stay down, grit loses. If we get up, grit prevails.

Without the meddling of a psychologist like me, you may have figured grit out all on your own. You may already have a deep and abiding interest, a ready appetite for constant challenge, an evolved sense of purpose, and buoyant confidence in your ability to keep going that no adversity could sink. If so, you're probably close to 5 out of 5 on the Grit Scale. I applaud you!

If, on the other hand, you're not as gritty as you wish you were, then there's something for you in the chapters that follow. Like calculus and piano, you can learn the psychology of grit on your own, but a little guidance can be a tremendous help.

The four psychological assets of interest, practice, purpose, and hope are not You have it or you don't commodities. You can learn to discover, develop, and deepen your interests. You can acquire the habit of discipline. You can cultivate a sense of purpose and meaning. And you can teach yourself to hope.

You can grow your grit from the inside out. If you'd like to know how, read on.