

When you consider individuals of equal talent,

In the scale that we developed in research studies to measure grit (www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/gritscale.htm), only half of the questions are about responding resiliently to situations of failure and adversity or being a hard worker. The other half of the questionnaire is about having consistent interests—focused passions—over a long time. That doesn't have anything to do with failure and adversity. It means that you choose to do a particular thing in life and choose

which graduates about 25 percent of the officers in the U.S. Army. Admission to West Point depends heavily on the Whole Candidate Score, which includes SAT scores, class rank, demonstrated leadership ability, and physical aptitude. Even with such a rigorous admissions process, about 1 in 20 cadets drops out during the summer of training before their first academic year.

We were interested in how well grit would predict who would stay. So

Candidate Score actually had no predictive relationship with whether you would drop out that summer (although it was the best predictor of later grades, military performance, and physical performance).

Woody Allen once quipped that 80 percent of success in life is just showing up. Well, it looks like grit is one thing that determines who shows up.

We've seen echoes of our West Point findings in studies of many other groups, such as National Spelling Bee contestants and first-year teachers in tough schools. Grit predicts success over and beyond talent. When you consider individuals of equal talent, the grittier ones do better.

What research finding on grit has been most surprising to you?

Probably the finding that most surprised me was that in the West Point data set, as well as other data sets, grit and talent either aren't related at all or are actually inversely related.

That was surprising because rationally speaking, if you're good at things, one would think that you would invest more time in them. You're basically getting more return on your investment per hour than someone who's struggling. If every time you practice piano you improve a lot, wouldn't you be more likely to practice a lot?

We've found that that's not necessarily true. It reminds me of a study done of taxi drivers in 1997.¹ When it's raining, everybody wants a taxi, and taxi drivers pick up a lot of fares. So if you're a taxi driver, the rational thing to do is to work more hours on a rainy day than on a sunny day because you're always busy so you're making more money per hour. But it turns out that on rainy days, taxi drivers work the fewest hours. They seem to have

to give up a lot of other things in order to do it. And you stick with those interests and goals over the long term.

So grit is not just having resilience in the face of failure, but also having deep commitments that you remain loyal to over many years.

Tell us about one of your studies that showed the relationship between grit and high achievement.

One of the first studies that we did was at West Point Military Academy,

we had cadets take a very short grit questionnaire in the first two or three days of the summer, along with all the other psychological tests that West Point gives them. And then we waited around until the end of the summer.

Of all the variables measured, grit was the best predictor of which cadets would stick around through that first difficult summer. In fact, it was a much better predictor than the Whole Candidate Score, which West Point at that time thought was their best predictor of success. The Whole



© TED SPIEGEL/CORBIS

the grittier ones do better.

some figure in their head—“OK, every day I need to make \$1,000”—and after they reach that goal, they go home. And on a rainy day, they get to that figure really quickly.

It's a similar thing with grit and talent. In terms of academics, if you're just trying to get an A or an A-, just trying to make it to some threshold, and you're a really talented kid, you may do your homework in a few minutes, whereas other kids might take much longer. You get to a certain level of proficiency, and then you stop. So you actually work less hard.

If, on the other hand, you are not just trying to reach a certain cut point but are trying to maximize your outcomes—you want to do as well as you possibly can—then there's no limit, ceiling, or threshold. Your goal is, “How can I get the most out of my day?” Then you're like the taxi driver who drives all day whether it's rainy or not.

When I look at people whom I really respect and admire, like psychology professor Walter Mischel or economist Jim Heckman, these people are extremely talented. For every hour that they put into research, they're getting a lot out of it. Still, they work 17 hours a day. Jim Heckman won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2000, and if he were working to get to a cut point, he should now be coasting. But he's not. I think he wants to win another Nobel!

The people who are, for lack of a better word, “ambitious”—the kids who are not satisfied with an A or even an A+, who have no limit to how much they want to understand, learn, or succeed—those are the people who are both talented *and* gritty.

So the inverse relationship between talent and grit that we've found in some of our studies doesn't mean that all talented people are un-gritty. That's certainly not true. The most successful



© ANVIL/REXUS/ISTOCKPHOTO

people in life are both talented and gritty in whatever they've chosen to do. But on average—and I think many teachers would resonate with this—there are a lot of fragile gifted and talented kids who don't know how to fail. They don't know how to struggle, and they don't have a lot of practice with it. Being gifted is no guarantee of being hardworking or passionate about something.

Earlier, you said that grit depends on having focused, long-term passions. In a 2009 TED Talk, you spoke about

how you moved frequently from job to job during your 20s, even though you were successful in each one, before you finally committed to your passion for education research. How did that transformation happen?

Several things happened. One was that I had this realization—a reflective, midlife crisis moment of, “Gee, let me take stock here.” I realized that I wasn't actually going to be really good at anything unless I stuck with one thing for a long time, and I had never done that.