

GETTING

grit

the EVIDENCE-
BASED APPROACH
to CULTIVATING
PASSION,
PERSEVERANCE,
and PURPOSE

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, my oldest son, Haywood, graduated college with a degree in accounting. To select the right university for his strengths and interests, he followed his major consuming passion, swimming. He started at the University of Maryland on a partial scholarship and transferred halfway through, to the University of Cincinnati, so that his best swimming events matched the holes in their roster. His final GPA was okay – not phenomenal – so I was a bit surprised when he was asked to interview at almost every major accounting firm in the country.

In the midst of a difficult job market and the lingering effects of the recession, we were prepared for Haywood to have to move home, like so many of his peers. The word on the street was that he'd be stymied in getting a job that would allow him to live independently and begin to attack his student loans – or to get any job at all. I was happily taken aback when my son immediately landed a job at one of the best accounting firms in the country with a starting salary that made his living alone more than doable.

Curious, I asked him what he thought had made him a winning candidate when the media had painted a picture of a job market so bleak that we all assumed only the cream of the crop from the very top schools would find employment. Haywood mused for a moment, and then answered: "I think it was the swimming. The only questions I was really asked to elaborate on were about how many years I'd spent practicing,

whether it was once or twice a day, the fact that I'd competed through college, and that I was elected captain of my college team despite transferring in my junior year." He continued, "I think they just wanted to know if I had a work ethic, leadership qualities, and the ability to get along with people," and then added with a laugh, "My GPA obviously wasn't the deciding factor!"

I shouldn't have been too surprised by his good news in light of the work I do with high-performance individuals around the world on goal-setting and emotional flourishing, but as an anxious mom, I still worried that Haywood's decision to focus on swimming in college may not have been the best idea for his employment future. In this case, though, his desirability mirrored what has increasingly occurred in today's job market, and what I wrote about in my book *Creating Your Best Life*. In it, I noted that many in the generation of Millennials, raised on mountains of trophies and self-esteem-building ceremonies, were turning out to be a disaster in the working world, and that employers were hiring consultants to coach them on how to work diligently and take feedback when their performance was anything other than "awesome."

To avoid these types of problems, firms were increasingly coming up with unique ways to discern which candidates would bring a strong work ethic, good sense of teamwork, and likeability to their company, and not problems that would necessitate firing these employees later. Instead of focusing on GPAs and summer internships, they wanted people like my son, who had nursed a passion for years, and stuck with the activity even when it was difficult and, often, the only reward was the satisfaction of

not giving up. The thinking is that if these types of job applicants have already learned how to work hard, overcome disappointment, and persist in the absence of constant praise, then they'll be the kind of employees who can be trained to do almost anything.

My interest in the topic of grit was hugely aroused during the year I spent at the University of Pennsylvania, from 2005 to 2006, earning one of the first master's of applied positive psychology (MAPP) degrees in the burgeoning field of applied positive psychology – the science of happiness. There, I was introduced to the work of Angela Duckworth, who was pursuing her doctorate under Dr. Martin Seligman on a quality she was calling “grit,” which she defined as “passion and perseverance in pursuit of long-term goals.” As someone who had spent several decades writing about and coaching others on how to set and achieve difficult goals, I was mesmerized by the scientific findings I learned at Penn concerning what it takes to be a “winner” in some of life's most challenging arenas. I became steeped in concepts like goal-setting theory, self-efficacy theory, and social contagion, and I began to link all of these ideas together in a new way, which morphed from my capstone project into my book *Creating Your Best Life*. In that book, I included a chapter on Angela's research and findings, which weren't generally known outside of academia at that time.

I wrote that Angela's twelve-item Grit Scale had been found to be the leading predictor of who drops out at West Point during the first summer known as “Beast Barracks.” It had also worked with preteens, determining who would reach the finals of the National Spelling Bee. Since *Creating Your Best Life* was published, the Grit Scale has

been found to predict tenacity in other difficult situations, too: which men remain married, inner-city students who complete high school, acceptance into the United States Special Operations Forces, and even which economically disadvantaged students will graduate from college.

In the intervening years since I graduated from the MAPP program, I've worked with thousands of individuals as a professional coach, speaker, and educator. What I have heard and seen, including what I witnessed in my children's lives as they grew from infancy to adulthood in the middle of the now-maligned "self-esteem movement," has convinced me to add my voice and thoughts to the burgeoning field of grit commentary. I am also emboldened to speak up because I see youth and adults who are desperate to learn how to cultivate more grit in themselves, their workplaces, their families, and their communities. They want to help change the current standards of banal mediocrity back to rigorous excellence, but they say they don't know where to start or what to do to make that happen.

I think we can all agree that the world is facing challenges that are daunting and even unprecedented, and that a call for resilience of the highest order is facing us. Roiling international economic markets, random terrorist attacks, and global climate challenges are exacerbated by the twenty-four-hour news cycle that keeps negative news at the forefront at all times. U.S. college students are reporting epidemic levels of anxiety and depression, and on top of that, they are often mired in student-loan debt

and negative prognoses about their future earning possibilities. Without grit, how can anyone survive or thrive?

What's in this book?

In this book, I share research and ideas about how we can boost the character strengths and behaviors that we see in gritty people. I've even come up with a term that I use to describe the type of grit I think elicits the greatest results: "authentic grit." I define this as "the passionate pursuit of hard goals that awes and inspires others to become better people, flourish emotionally, take positive risks, and live their best lives."

The book is divided into two parts. The first is about different types of grit – both good and bad – and how our nation came to embrace and amplify mediocrity in many arenas and what that has left us to work with. The second section covers my observations, experience, and some of the research on how we can build the strengths and actions that comprise authentic grit, such as passion, goal-setting, self-regulation, confidence, risk-taking, and patience, among others. You'll also find exercises throughout these chapters, some for you to use on your own and many you can use in a variety of settings with others, to set goals, develop a resilient mind-set, create winning strategies, assemble supportive teams and communities, and raise standards that awe and inspire others to their own greatness. These are user-friendly ideas and resources that you can use again and again.

My overarching goal in this book is to demonstrate that building authentic grit isn't just possible but that it's our duty to do so if we want to live in a world that upholds standards of excellence and shuns quitting. We need resilience, optimism, and determination to overcome setbacks that threaten our flourishing and peace, and we need to arm the next generation – the first in U.S. history predicted not to have the same standard of living as their parents – with the science of happiness and the tools to persevere toward their best and most meaningful lives.

With the information I share here, and the ongoing research findings from places like Angela Duckworth's Character Lab, the Greater Good Science Center, the Center for Healthy Minds, and the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center, I believe we can begin to imagine and create a world that makes us proud and that uplifts us to be bolder, more tenacious, and more inspirational. When we learn how to set the right goals and see them through to the finish line, become comfortable with discomfort, and use setbacks as springboards, we can live with passion, purpose, and perseverance. When that happens, having the right kind of grit won't be a fantasy. It will be the reality that more of us live and share with others so that we can all become better versions of ourselves.

Let's get started!

CHAPTER 1

Can You Spell G-R-I-T?

Every spring in Washington, DC, there are two occurrences we look forward to: the cherry blossoms that explode in frothy white beauty around the National Mall, and the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Founded in 1925, the Bee is a popular nationwide contest open to students as young as six and as old as fourteen, hundreds of whom descend on the city after winning regional bees in their state. Contestants are winnowed down through preliminary rounds, and the final rounds are televised live.

A sports channel, ESPN covers the nerve-wracking competition with as much diligence and thoroughness as they bring to other athletic contests. It's easy to understand why they do so after watching the Bee for just a few minutes. The same kinds of stresses and mental demands that mature athletes face in competition are on display here, but among boys and girls, most of whom haven't hit puberty yet. One at a time, kids in braces, kids with acne, and girls with jaunty bows on top of their heads come silently to the front of the stage, some needing to stand on a chair to reach the microphone, and they're asked to spell some of the most arcane words on the planet. They have to do all of this under hot lights and the pressure of time, one letter at a time, while millions of viewers watch them and the children's parents gulp, perspire, and pray from the audience. Because of the contestants' excellent preparation, this can go on

for hours and hours, round after round, sometimes late into the night, as it has for the last several years. Starting in 2014, the Bee has had to name co-champions because they couldn't stump some relentless finalists, who hung on through fourteen rounds until the Bee ran out of words to quiz them on.

Time magazine did a story on some of the Bee's former winners in a "Where Are They Now?" feature, in May 2016, and found that many had gone on to be successful professionals, often blazing pathways in the fields of education, investment, journalism, medicine, and economics. They credited their years of spelling competition with lifelong benefits, especially their preparation for and participation in the nerve-racking National Spelling Bee. Wendy Guey Lai said that studying for the Bee taught her how to be "resilient, detail-oriented, and exhibit grace under pressure." Pratyush Buddiga said that he'd become good at "pattern recognition" and "trusting my gut instincts." Balu Natarajan, who won the Bee on his third try, noted that the competition is more like "a marathon and not a sprint," and said that his professional career in sports medicine had been impacted by the Bee: "It takes years for most of the kids to hold up that trophy or make it to the national competition. That's what allowed me to have an appreciation for endurance athletes and enjoy taking care of them."

When Angela Duckworth was beginning to refine her study of the personality trait she called "grit" at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005, she wondered if the resilient and determined kids she and everyone else saw on television possessed the quality she was defining as "passion and perseverance in pursuit of long-term goals."

So she was permitted access to the 273 participants in the 2005 Bee, over half of whom agreed to fill out forms and submit to questions about their work habits, intelligence, and number of years competing in spelling contests. She also administered her newly developed Grit Scale, which contained questions such as “I often choose a goal but later decide to pursue a different one,” and “I have overcome setbacks to accomplish an important challenge.” After the results were crunched, self-control was an important success factor, but when the age of the participants was factored out, the Grit Scale was the leading predictor of who reached the finals of the Bee. Later parsing of the data showed that much of what nurtured the grit was failing to advance one year, which meant that those students went home and studied even harder, doing much of it on weekends in solitary study.

One year later, Duckworth and her colleagues administered the Grit Scale, as well as a battery of other tests, to 976 incoming West Point freshmen. After teasing out factors like self-control, IQ, and other measures of excellence, the Grit Scale more accurately predicted the cadets who dropped out of Beast Barracks – the hellish first summer of training – than previously used measures such as the Whole Candidate Score, composed of things like academic honors, leadership recommendations, and grade-point averages. Although the difference was small, it was noteworthy, and when added to the National Spelling Bee findings, people suddenly wanted to know more about what was going on in Angela’s lab at Penn.

The quality du jour

No matter where you turn now, grit has become the quality du jour. Grit is the “X” factor that people long to understand and nurture in themselves and others. Honored with a 2013 MacArthur “Genius Grant,” Duckworth and her presentations about grit are staples at education, leadership, and psychology conferences, and one of her speeches, “The Power of Passion and Perseverance,” is one of the most popular TED talks ever posted online. Her book, *Grit*, published in 2016, rocketed to the top of the bestseller lists the week it came out, and President Obama mentioned it in two State of the Union addresses; he also made the cultivation of grit in the classroom his Department of Education’s top priority in 2013.

As promising as her work is, Duckworth has concerns about how some have rushed ahead to use grit in ways that she doesn’t think are ready to be implemented. For example, some schools are eagerly rolling out tests for grit, saying that students and teachers will be evaluated on their grit, even though it’s not clear how to do that in schools or if it’s even the right measure for every student in every setting. Low-income students who have to overcome daily obstacles just to go to school may not benefit from having their grit evaluated, and instead may get more value from building up their self-efficacy and hope. Paul Tough, who has studied grit and written *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, finds that it might be more rewarding for these students to have family interventions that help parents learn how to manage frustration and anger, which could spawn cultures of love, acceptance, and warmth at home.

Still, there's no question that Duckworth is on to something. Her study of legions of successful men and women across multiple domains, including investment banking, swimming, football, and chess, has found that there are common denominators in all of these people that are worth unpacking so that we can learn how to emulate their approach to their goals. She found that the people who had distinguished themselves in overcoming multiple challenges over many years to sustain the pursuit of something that was important to them had several critical qualities in common, namely:

- **Passion.** They were lit up from within by a cause or an activity that electrified and energized them, sometimes from a young age. They weren't guided by what others wanted; instead, they were single-mindedly focused on something that crowded out other interests, gave their lives meaning, and filled them with a sense of purpose.
- **Perseverance.** They weren't just resilient in the short run. They had a bounce-back quality that existed throughout years of emotional droughts, physical and financial setbacks, and discouragements that would cause many people to give up.
- **Long-term goals.** They attached a goal to their passion that might have seemed unrealistic to some, but that became their immovable North Star. In some cases, this led to world-renown or Olympic fame, but for others, the results were quieter, from regaining the ability to walk after a crippling injury, to maintaining

the hope of being exonerated after wrongful incarceration, to remaining clean and sober in the hardest of circumstances.

Old wine in a new bottle?

Duckworth, who worked with her mentor, Marty Seligman – widely referred to as “the father of positive psychology” – to create the Grit Scale, believes that she has found a way to measure a unique, coveted quality that separates those who want to succeed at difficult goals from those who actually do it. The test teases out a variety of motivations and personality traits that are either related or unrelated to the qualities associated with being gritty. For example, someone can be tenacious and hardworking but not have a passion that translates into a deeply valued goal. By the same token, a person can be the epitome of passion but be unable to sustain focus on a hard goal through years of setbacks. Alternatively, someone might be hardworking and passionate but need external validation for achievement, and thus be unable to be resilient in the absence of trophies and renown.

Although similar to the quality called conscientiousness, which also predicts diligence, grit speaks to the type of behavior needed to be dutiful and disciplined in pursuit of a goal. Some of the criticism of the concept of grit has claimed that it is simply a restatement of conscientiousness - “old wine in a new bottle” – which Duckworth has ably defended as a very different construct with different outcomes.

Among other points, she notes that conscientiousness isn't infused with the emotional fire that is so central to grit.

As a credentialed performance coach who works daily with people to help them understand and cultivate the type of energy and dedication needed to stick with and accomplish very difficult, life-changing goals, I agree wholeheartedly that conscientiousness simply doesn't cut it when you're talking about what it takes to set, pursue, and accomplish challenging and meaningful goals that profoundly change people's lives. Conscientiousness isn't the thing that keeps dreams alive when hope is fading, nor is it what is needed when you have to suddenly change course to adapt to new circumstances. In fact, I've seen conscientiousness overused to a person's detriment, which I call "stubborn grit."

How does the research help you and me?

I constantly sift through reams of research to figure out what I can do with it so that my clients have the right tools for change and success. Research is just research until someone like me comes along and extracts practical applications from it that people can readily understand and use in positive ways. To do what I do, and make a living at it, I have had to learn how to make an immediate difference in people's lives with whatever tools, motivation, and knowledge they need to get where they want to go. And when people state their most desired outcome for our work together, the development of more resilience and grit is often at the top of their list.

As a result, I have had to go far beyond the research on what people who are already gritty think and do in order to come up with a game plan for people who aren't there yet. I have to know what is *missing* in my clients' lives and why. I need to understand what happened in their family of origin that impacted their outlook, who currently supports their goals, what occurs around them now in their work and personal environments, and much more. If I don't know those variables, I can't diagnose the situation correctly and bring the right research and tools to our work.

So, while practitioners like me don't usually do academic research, we are accelerating the breakthroughs on grit as we work one on one with real people in many varied scenarios – from athletic fields to corporate offices – to see what works and what doesn't when it comes to changing for the better. And I believe that our results are as important to the study of grit as are the findings coming from academia, because without feedback from people like us, it's hard for the average person to take advantage of the statistic-laden research coming from universities and research labs all over the world.

For that reason, I pore through the research on grit, as well as the findings on such areas as passion, risk-taking, willpower, kindness, humility, savoring, goal-setting, and positive relationships, so that I can use the information effectively and efficiently with men and women, young and old, wherever they are in the change process. That's how I came up with my own definition of "authentic grit" – the passionate pursuit of hard goals that awes and inspires others to become better people, flourish emotionally,

take positive risks, and live their best lives. For me, grit isn't a positive unless it is a force for good. I think my definition captures the quality that I've seen produce excellent results and leave behind a worthwhile legacy. I'll say more about the elements that make up authentic grit in upcoming chapters to make it easier to understand how to cultivate it in new and unexpected ways.

Why does grit matter so much in the twenty-first century?

In recent years, a chorus of voices has gotten louder in the United States, lamenting the character and work ethic of many in the generation known as the Millennials, those born between the years 1980 and 2000. Dubbed the "Me Me Me Generation" by *Time* magazine, they have been roundly excoriated as the products of the misguided self-esteem movement, which encouraged parents to be friendly with their children and warmly praise them whenever possible. Although this movement was well intended and meant to result in personal initiative and higher self-esteem, it has been a bust by every measure.

Exceptions are everywhere (I have raised three Millennials whom I admire very much), but psychologists say that by and large this generation is entitled and easily wounded by feedback or criticism, and that instead of having higher self-esteem and a sense of responsibility, they are fragile and narcissistic. Many value fame and money over meaning and purpose, seek shortcuts over hard work, and fold in the face of setbacks. Awash in creature comforts and quick fixes, they aren't likely to understand how to read maps or write properly without spell-check. And adults aren't viewed as

guides but as equals, to whom they need not defer, partly because it's become acceptable to call teachers by their first name in many schools.

Anecdotal and evidence-based stories about the impact of this behavior are everywhere, and cause for grave concern in some quarters. Some psychologists note that the "dumbing down" of playgrounds into plastic contraptions surrounded by pillows of wood chips, so that children can avoid injuries and skinned knees, has created a generation of anxious adults who grew up afraid to climb trees or to take risks. Some have even traced a drop in entrepreneurial activity in recent years to this phenomenon, noting that the age group that used to create new businesses and spark innovation has played it safer than previous generations, even after factoring in recessionary factors and a smaller middle class.

The emphasis on nothing but high praise and perfect GPAs has also led to grade inflation in high school, university, and graduate-level settings, to the point that many companies say they can't rely on GPAs and degrees from elite schools to guarantee hardworking employees. Self-control has gone AWOL with dire consequences – a factor in American obesity rates that continue to skyrocket to all-time highs. The U.S. military has actually issued a report noting that American youth are "Too Fat to Fight." Sports coaches of professional teams lament that it's hard to get their well-paid athletes to pay attention at team meetings without taking away their smartphones, and some coaches have even quit their profession altogether, noting that the lack of a work ethic and willingness to sacrifice for the team have made many of the new players "uncoachable."

Creating your best life requires grit

I have been working as a credentialed coach with high-performing individuals throughout the world for several decades, with a specialty in goal accomplishment. When I studied with Marty Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005, I was one of the first thirty-four people in the world to earn a master's in applied positive psychology (a MAPP degree, as you might recall from the introduction), also known as the science of happiness. As I noted earlier, that's when I was introduced to Angela Duckworth's fledgling research on grit, which I wove into my capstone project that year and which then became my book *Creating Your Best Life*. That book was the first to give readers ways to define and pursue meaningful paths to success and happiness that were grounded in research and academic theories – a feat Marty praised in his book *Flourish*, saying I'd added a “major missing piece” to the literature on success and goal accomplishment.

I've come across a great deal of evidence that points toward the imperative of doing difficult things in order to live a satisfying, high-quality life filled with optimal achievement. For starters, I learned from Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, whose research has led to Goal Setting Theory, which holds that “challenging and specific” goals are required if someone wants to attain the highest levels of performance. (Easy goals, or “low goals,” don't just result in mediocrity, they say, but also leave people feeling mediocre.) From a theory of self-determination, proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, I discovered that people aren't happy doing nothing. We are driven to

master our environments in order to feel related, autonomous, and competent, and when given the choice to do nothing over something, people overwhelmingly choose to be busy and productive.

Newer research has found that at night we all scan our day for its highlights, especially noting what we are most proud of. As you might expect, the things that give us authentic self-esteem are never the activities or behaviors that are easy and inside our comfort zone. It's the difficult, challenging, and sometimes painful moments that leave us flush with a sense of pride and that make us more confident and hopeful about our capabilities and future. And which two qualities have been found to most reliably predict success with our goals? Grit and curiosity.

What will you regret?

When people come to me for help, they are often at a crossroads in life. Young or old, they are, in my observation, usually facing an important choice and want to proceed with support, accountability, and the guidance of a grounded professional. They aren't hesitating because they are contemplating doing something easy; it's always because there is something they want to do that is so far outside their comfort zone they have to be thoughtful and prepared about the plunge they're poised to take. And although they understand how hard the path will be, they also know that they won't ever be truly happy unless they give that goal a shot.

I can say without hesitation, after thousands of sessions with all kinds of men and women all over the world, that the people who are most satisfied with our coaching outcomes, and with themselves, are the ones who picked difficult goals and grew their grit to make a run for the brass ring. They leave our coaching as different people. I often tell friends that I feel like I work on the labor and delivery floor of a hospital because everyone is happy after they see the fruits of their labor. They are not just more confident after they cultivate grit and use it in a purposeful way; they are also more fulfilled.

Sometimes I get calls and pleas for help from people who, though they aren't 100 percent sure what they want to do, know that something is missing from their lives and that they can't continue on contentedly without exploring what else might be out there for them. At times like this, my go-to question is always, "When you are looking back on your life at the moment of death, what will you regret if you don't make any changes starting now?" The answers to that question have always borne fruit, and the goals that have emerged from those conversations have always been big ones that often involve inevitable upheavals, discomfort, and change. And in order to pursue and get to the finish line of those goals, it's been obvious that my clients need the elixir that Duckworth has now determined to be the unquestioned sign of elite excellence in punishing conditions: grit!

What if you don't have grit? Can you develop it?

The burning question in the psychology world right now is this very question: Can we cultivate grit? And if so, how? Early results and studies are pointing in some promising directions, not the least of which is the work by Stanford University social-psychology researcher Carol Dweck, the author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Dweck has found that when children grow up with praise for their innate intelligence – when things like solving a puzzle, drawing a picture, winning a race, or getting a good report card are met with responses like “You’re so smart!” “You are awesome!” and “You deserve it!” – these children develop a “fixed mind-set,” believing that their strengths and talents are fixed at birth. This leads them to avoid situations in which they might fail because they need to maintain the image and belief that they are special. Without that, it’s hard for them to feel worthwhile.

On the other hand, children who grow up with praise for their effort, irrespective of outcome, develop a “growth mind-set.” This means they learn to believe that even if they don’t know something yet, with enough effort and persistence they can over time learn what doesn’t come easily to them at first. These children develop more of a gritty approach to life and don’t give up, even relishing the challenges put in front of them. They are also the ones who don’t fold at the sign of discouragement or failure and who believe that outcomes are mostly under their control if they have enough persistence to keep going.

In her research on grit, Duckworth has also found that it is contagious, like many other behaviors, such as quitting smoking, gaining weight, and being happy. In fact, she

says, West Point has found that cadets with lower grit scores have been found to benefit when they room with cadets who have higher grit scores, possibly because seeing someone work through frustration, find clever ways to delay gratification, or be resilient when faced with setbacks can rub off in positive ways. Most promising is that Duckworth and others note that grit has been found to increase over our lifespan, suggesting that it *is* a quality that benefits from specific interventions as well as the life experiences that result in wisdom.

Newer research: mirror neurons and virtual reality

Research on personality traits shows that some of our top strengths can be used to pursue goals in better and more strategic ways, maximizing our chances of getting past the tedium of learning something new as we develop “harmonious passion” for it, whether that’s swimming or solving math problems. And research on self-regulation is finding myriad new ways we can cultivate willpower, from mindfulness practices to working with virtual avatars. In fact, I believe that the field of virtual reality is the most exciting field that has yet to be fully developed around grit cultivation, a topic I write more about later in the book.

There is also a wealth of data about how the brain works that wasn’t available until recently, as well as batteries of tests that can “unpack” resilience. For example, research on mirror neurons is finding that it’s easier to learn something new when we watch others do it. We also know from endurance tests that the body gives up only after the brain tells it to do so, opening the door to creative solutions that can help people

“change the channel” in their brains when tempted to throw in the towel. We also know that strategically located prompts, or cues – such as pictures or inspirational words – can make people either more disciplined or more lax in their efforts. Agreeing to an “if-then” contract with yourself also triples your chances of accomplishing tough goals.

What else contributes to building the grit muscle?

Since grit is contagious, can grow throughout a person’s lifetime, and can be developed in the process of pursuing a big dream, it makes sense that its components can be isolated and then nurtured into flourishing abilities. Duckworth’s definition of grit gives us clues about what we need to cultivate, including passion, resilience, and determined focus. But I believe we also need to take a look at the quality of our relationship skills, the prevalence of positive emotions in our lives, and our storehouse of willpower, among other elements, to develop the more well-rounded authentic grit. In my studies of gritty people, I’ve noticed that many of them have other critical qualities such as patience and curiosity, not to mention humility, an endearing quality that can attract the enthusiastic support of those who help them with their dreams over many years.

Why do I care so much? My own story of getting grit

One of the reasons I feel so compelled to work in the field of motivation, goals, happiness, and grit is because I had the formula for finding success all wrong in the

earlier part of my life, and suffered greatly as a result. Through failure and an early-adulthood reboot, however, I learned how to do what was necessary to find the right goals and summon up the perseverance to achieve them – and I developed grit in the process. My experience taught me that grit is definitely not a quality reserved for the select few; it is available to anyone who wants something so badly that they won't let anyone stop them until they've gone as far as they can, often achieving or coming close to that which they sought.

As a young girl in a privileged setting in the suburbs of Washington, DC, I was smart and talented according to IQ and other outward measures of success. That got me into the right schools with the right bumper stickers, but between the emphasis on appearing perfect in my family and the increasing pressures to perform in a variety of academic and extracurricular areas, I tried to protect myself from failure and the appearance of imperfection at all costs. As a result, I took shortcuts, most notably with food. Instead of being disciplined in my habits and training, I became bulimic, which was running rampant in my private school and my chosen sport of swimming.

As you may well know, bulimia is an eating disorder characterized by gorging on huge amounts of food followed by behaviors ranging from self-induced vomiting to laxative overdoses. For seven years, I lived a life of overeating, lying, hiding, and never really paying the full price for my binges, while maintaining a passable exterior. If I was persistent, it was only in making sure that my behavior remained secret and ongoing. Any attempts to stop or seek help were half-hearted, partly because there were no

professionals who really knew how to “cure” it, and partly because it felt like a hopeless situation with no end anyway.

I graduated from Harvard University in 1983, and one week later plunged right into marriage. It was only when I realized that attaining *magna cum laude* from an Ivy League school and marrying the handsome man of my dreams wasn't going to make me happy enough to overcome bulimia that I hit my last bottom. But in the depth of that misery in early 1984, I found the ingredients I needed to become a “paragon of grit,” as Duckworth has kindly noted about my journey, which is chronicled in my TEDx talk “The Moments that Make Champions.”

I decided I wanted to live more than I wanted to self-destruct, that I'd do whatever it took to get better, and that I wasn't going to stop until I found the right formula. Grit starts with passion, and I embraced a passion for living, for finding happiness outside of trying to have a perfect body, and for giving back to others instead of trying to figure out how I could come out the sole winner. “You can't keep what you don't give away” was the phrase I heard at my twelve-step group for compulsive eaters. If I had even one day of maintaining my abstinence from compulsive eating, I had something of value that could help someone else, which gave me purpose and humility.

For the first time, I learned how to persevere through temptation, emotional swings, setbacks, relapses, interpersonal challenges, and life's unending curveballs. I didn't resort to anything mood-altering during hard times, including food, alcohol, and

recreational drugs; instead, I found ways to just sit with the uncomfortable feelings that I'd always buried. I shielded myself from people and places that weren't aligned with my goal of full health, and although I had no specific end date in mind, I just got up every day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and finally decade after decade, and did whatever I needed to do to get better.

In that process, I wrote two books about my path to complete recovery, *My Name Is Caroline* and *Positively Caroline*, which were the first autobiographies by anyone who had overcome bulimia and who had reached thirty years of recovery, respectively. Although I didn't have grit when I started on my journey, there's no question that I have it now. And because I know that life is sweeter and richer because I chose a difficult road and didn't quit until I reached a goal that mattered so much to me, I have a commitment to work with people on selecting and pursuing the goals that will light up their lives, and to help them cultivate grit, too. I believe that if I've been able to develop grit, others can, too, and that if I don't "give it away" and help others, I won't be able to "keep" what I've found and fully enjoy it.

Breast in Show

A few years ago on a languid August afternoon, a woman called me for help. She'd seen therapists and come to the realization that she didn't need to contemplate her childhood, her divorce, or whether she'd been a good mother. Instead, she needed to feel that her life was purposeful and meaningful – and her doctor suggested she call me because I would help her be accountable, to make the necessary changes for greater

happiness and peace. The doctor knew that my approach would be different from anything this woman had encountered.

“What might you regret not doing when you’re looking back on your life one day?” I asked her over the phone.

Her immediate answer: “I want to create the world’s first musical about breast cancer.”

I have been coaching for long enough to know that everyone has an unerring sense of what they lack or desire, and that my role is simply to challenge them in a variety of ways to unearth those facts and help them bring their aspirations to life. Besides, it would be ridiculous to implant dreams or hopes in others because it’s impossible to be lit up by something that isn’t intrinsically motivating. In fact, my clients’ goals are so unique and personally galvanizing to them that I know I’d never be able to cook up anything more rewarding or satisfying than what I’ve been privileged to hear from them directly for so many years.

Two years later, that client, Eileen Mitchard, debuted *Breast in Show*, which garnered numerous awards, standing ovations, and raised thousands of dollars for cancer research. Although she was lit up with enthusiasm and energy from the success of the show, Eileen was set back with emergency heart surgery – but not for long. Within a year, she learned to row and started running, and when I last heard from her,

she was routinely finishing 5K, 10K, and even half-marathon runs as she burst into her sixties, reborn with passion and focused on making each day count.

Eileen is a textbook example of what happens when people decisively choose a moment of change that separates their feeling ho-hum from their going for the gusto. Regardless of when that time comes – it could come after bottoming out with an eating disorder while young, failing at something in your middle age, or feeling purposeless in the empty nest – taking stock of your life and deciding to turn in a new direction can bear fruit that is life changing. And instead of running out of time to do this, we are now being gifted with another thirty years, on average, to make our retirement years richer than ever. Allianz Life Insurance has noted that the extra time many people now have is being used to “take a second chance at those life decisions you now regret.”

Over the years, I’ve had clients tell me they wanted to ride bareback in Mongolia along the Great Wall of China, become Olympic competitors, rise to be among the top one hundred people in their profession, ditch a lucrative career in computing to create a home-cooked-meals delivery service, go from couch potato to Ironman finisher, transform a life of suburban motherhood into a life of urban entrepreneurialism, leave a stable accounting job to nurse the ailing in overseas tent villages, and much more. The goals haven’t just been about checking off bucket-list items; they’ve been about staking a claim on becoming someone bolder and more authentic, whether in the boardroom, on the world’s biggest athletic stage, in their community, or in their private lives.

The number-one regret of those in hospice care is that they lived someone else's life, and not the one they felt they should have lived. We know from research that the main reason people don't pursue their most valued goals is fear – fear of everything from success, to change, to failure. And from where I sit and coach, the happiest people are those who take risks to be uncomfortable in the face of fear and find the grit to hang in there until they've given their goals every possible effort.

Grit is necessary across the lifespan

There's no question that grit has been established as an important strength in determining student outcomes; achieving excellence in rigorous settings, such as the military and elite athletic endeavors; and in professional settings, where maintaining focus and persistence during difficult times is the hallmark of inspirational leadership. But I believe we need grit no matter where we live, who we are, or what we want to do. We need to be resilient in overcoming addictive behaviors so that we can have happy lives. If we have children or loved ones with special needs, we need to be up to the challenge of long-term, constant care and vigilance they require. We cannot shrink in the face of economic uncertainties, growing terrorism, and pervasive unhappiness. We must persevere if we are going to thrive, reinvent ourselves after midlife, and model courage for generations to come.

Given what I hear, both from clients and the feedback I get after my speeches, the problem isn't that people don't know that grit is important or don't want to be more emotionally resilient. The problem is that they just don't know how to do it and where

to start. They don't know how to fight the tide of permissive parenting or the societal influences that lead to "good enough" standards. They don't know how to summon up enough willpower in a quick-fix, remote-controlled world, where everything is a click away and our attention span is now one second less than that of the average goldfish. They also don't know that real science can assist them in changing their brains, their emotions, and their behaviors for the better. But if you are holding this book and you keep reading, you will soon know all of these things, and you will have the tools to change your life for the better.

"Don't ever, ever ring the bell"

In 2014, at the University of Texas at Austin commencement, Admiral William McRaven brought the house down with his inspirational eighteen-minute talk, "Ten Ways to Change the World." In it, he described the ordeals of SEAL trainees, including punishing runs in freezing cold weather, navigating underwater in pitch-black conditions, and being forced to do extra calisthenics after multi-hour endurance sessions. Admiral McRaven said if you want to change the world, you have to "sing when you are up to your neck in mud," "go down obstacles headfirst," and "punch the shark in the snout" when you are underwater, alone, and scared. He finished his speech with the last of his ten change-the-world points, noting that everyone in SEAL training wants to quit at some point because they don't believe they have what it takes to persevere:

Finally, in SEAL training there is a bell, a brass bell that hangs in the center of the compound for all the students to see. All you have to do to quit is ring the bell. Ring the bell and you no longer have to wake up at five o'clock. Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the freezing-cold swims. Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the runs, the obstacle course, the PT – and you no longer have to endure the hardships of training. Just ring the bell. If you want to change the world, don't ever, ever ring the bell.

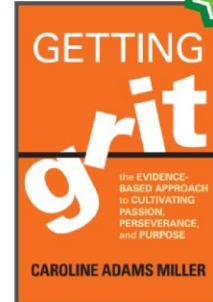
If you want to learn how not to ring the bell, this book is for you, regardless of where you're starting in life or what you want to accomplish. The stories and research here will give you hope, confidence, and strategies to approach life in a new, more powerful way and to become your best and grittiest self. You will also see that when you get grit, you will inspire others to overcome obstacles, and that together we can bring the "awe" back into "awesome." Before we do that, though, let's take a look at how we got to this place, because if we understand how we got here and recognize how all of us may have played a role in reducing grit, then I believe we will be better equipped to turn it around and go in the right direction.

If you enjoyed this excerpt from “Getting Grit,” please pre-order your copy at www.authenticgrit.com or Amazon. I wrote the book to be used by individuals in companies, families, communities, schools, non-profits, sports teams, and anywhere that people want to cultivate more of the right kind of grit: authentic grit. The book contains worksheets on persistence, self-regulation, habit creation, best future selves, and much, much more, so be prepared to be wowed and excited about your opportunities to get more grit in 2017 and beyond so that you can create a life that is meaningful, purposeful and positive!

Pre-Order "Getting Grit" Now!

Advance praise is already pouring in for Getting Grit: The evidence-based approach to cultivating passion, perseverance and purpose by best-selling author and Positive Psychology expert, Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP. This book breaks new ground with a research-based perspective on why the quality of grit has gone missing in families, sports, schools, companies and communities in recent years, and how we can build the most important behaviors and mindset that contribute to getting it back. Miller weaves together stories from history, current events, personal experiences and client feedback in compelling ways to make her points, and there are exercises throughout the book that help readers understand how to start making immediate changes in their lives for maximum impact and flourishing.

Pre-order at authenticgrit.com or amazon.com.



Available
June 2017!

"An amazing and compelling book that is the ultimate guide to living life with grit and without regret."

Tom Rath, author of StrengthsFinder 2.0 & Are You Fully Charged?

"Ever meet someone who is that magical combination of wise yet humble, strong yet sensitive, inspiring yet down-to-earth? That's Caroline Miller. I know nobody who's thought more about how to apply the scientific research on grit and achievement to our own lives!"

Angela Duckworth, PhD, Founder, Character Lab and author of Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance

"It's one thing to value grit—it's another to develop it. Caroline Miller has made that her life's work, and in this book she shares a series of useful steps for increasing your persistence for the right reasons in the right ways."

Adam Grant, author of Originals and Give and Take

"Caroline Miller has captured the latest research on behavior change and personality strengths to come up with new, practical ways to add grit to your personal and professional life. This is a really innovative book, and companies, sports teams, schools, families and communities will all benefit from the stories and research."

Scott Barry Kaufman, Scientific Director, The Imagination Institute and author of Ungifted & co-author, Wired to Create

"Caroline Miller articulates the science and importance of character strengths as important pathways to help cultivate grit in this groundbreaking book. Readers will benefit greatly from her extensive experience coaching people towards pursuing and achieving meaningful success with personal goals."

Neal H. Mayerson, Ph.D. Founder/Chairman VIA Institute on Character

To book Caroline for a speech or presentation, contact Michele Lucia at 214-543-0844 or michele@carolinemiller.com.