



COVER  
STORY





# PERSEVERANCE SELF-CONTROL PASSION GRIT PURPOSE DELIBERATE PRACTICE CHARACTER POWER

*Is having grit (pluck and perseverance) a key to achieving academic and career success? Costco member Angela Duckworth believes so. Duckworth is the author of the 2016 best-seller *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, which outlines how grit is highly predictive of achievement throughout life. Her TED Talk on the subject has been watched by more than 14 million people and translated into 49 languages.*

by ANDREA DOWNING PECK

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

Angela Duckworth at the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship (WSOS) Opportunity Talks breakfast in 2016.

GRACE LEE / I CANDI STUDIOS



III D

Duckworth, 48, traces the origins of her own grit to growing up with a father who triggered her “I’ll show you” mentality by frequently pointing out her intellectual limitations. Decades later, the child who was told she was “no genius” was awarded a “genius grant” from the MacArthur Foundation for her work on the roles grit and self-control play in educational achievement. Talent, it turns out, is overrated.

### Perseverance and passion

In her late 20s, Duckworth left a demanding job as a management consultant at McKinsey & Company to teach seventh-grade math in a New York City public school. Watching which students worked hard and did well and which students did not taught her that sustained passion and effort—not intelligence or income—formed a cornerstone for future success.

Later, upon entering graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, Duckworth focused her Ph.D. research in psychology on the relationship between grit and high achievement. Her research subjects included West Point cadets, National Spelling Bee contestants, rookie teachers in low-income school districts and corporate salespeople. Using her Grit Scale ([angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale](http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale)), she was able to determine who was more likely to win the National Spelling Bee or survive the U.S. Military Academy’s plebe summer training program.

“I define grit as a combination of both perseverance and passion for long-term goals,” Duckworth explains. “Not just working hard, but also loving what you do. Working hard on

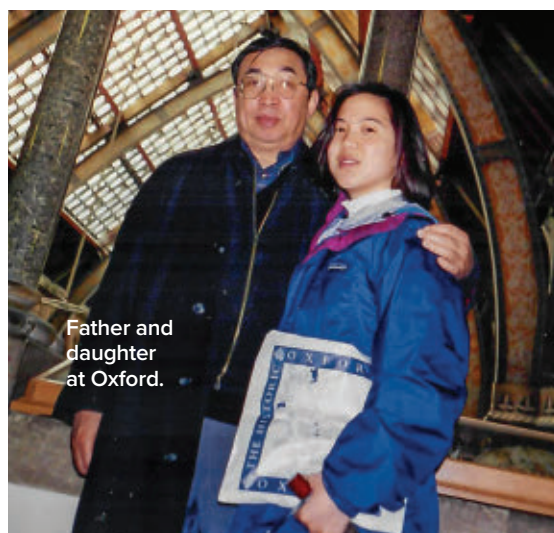


KIELINSKI PHOTOGRAPHERS LLC



GRACE LEE / I CANDI STUDIOS

Duckworth at the WSOS Opportunity Talks breakfast in Seattle, 2016.



Father and daughter at Oxford.



Angela Duckworth in class at the University of Pennsylvania.



KIELINSKI PHOTOGRAPHERS LLC

something you love. I study it because it's not the same thing as talent, which also helps you achieve great things in life but has hogged a disproportionate share of the spotlight in American culture."

Today, Duckworth holds the position of Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and is founder and CEO of the Character Lab, a non-profit dedicated to character development in students. Her groundbreaking studies have led Duckworth to challenge not only traditional thinking in education circles, where SAT scores, IQ tests and other measures are used to predict academic success, but also to reassess the character traits important for success and happiness in life.

### Paragons of grit

While talent grabs headlines, Duckworth's research shows grit is a better predictor of success in both the classroom and the workplace. It is a hallmark of high achievers in every field she studies. So-called paragons of grit have four traits in abundance: resilience, a willingness to engage in deliberate practice, passion and a sense of purpose toward achieving a top-level goal. Self-control is a bonus, but is not a prerequisite to developing grit.

"People who really are gritty often can, in a sentence of 10 words or fewer, articulate what everything they are doing is all about. If that is what grit is, then the lack of it is not having that kind of superordinate guiding North Star and being easily discouraged by setbacks," Duckworth says. "Self-control, on the other hand, is that internal conflict between what you want to get done—a goal—and anything more fun or pleasing in the moment, like Snapchat, binge-watching *Downton Abbey* or a doughnut. I'm sure we all know people who are gritty and self-controlled, but there are [also] people [who are] one but not the other."

### Picking your pursuits

While a sense of purpose is a key component of grit, Duckworth urges parents not to rush the process with their children. She says young children should "sample widely" activities and sports "in the spirit of play and not worry too much about practicing to become an expert or making a commitment that could last a lifetime."

She adds, "Young children should play and



### COSTCO CONNECTION

*Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Item #1272265) is available now in most Costco warehouses. The audiobook is also available now, along with other motivational titles (Item #1275448).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

## Teaching tips

Angela Duckworth recommends that teachers:

### Provide feedback that is demanding and supportive.

Hold students to high standards, but when they fall short provide criticism that implies "I think you can do better" or "I know we can do it together better."

**Model grit.** If you make a misstep while presenting a math problem or say the wrong thing during a lecture, acknowledge the error and display a resilient response.

**Encourage curiosity in students.** Set aside time each day for students to ask questions about anything that interests them, no matter the topic.—ADP



# “Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare.”

—Angela Duckworth

ANGELA LEE DUCKWORTH, “GRIT: THE POWER OF PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE.”  
TO WATCH THE FULL TALK, VISIT TED.COM.



Duckworth's TED Talk has garnered 14 million views.

explore, adolescents should begin to explore a little more seriously and then, in adulthood, I would say it is not an immoral thing to not have a specialty. If you don't have gritty pursuits, I don't look down on you, but I do think there is a kind of special satisfaction that comes from doing something really well and loving it. It is wonderful to have something you might even call a calling.”

That may be why Duckworth's research uncovered a strong, positive correlation between grit and happiness. “It doesn't mean every gritty person is happy or every happy person is gritty, but it does mean that, on average, gritty people are happier and happier people are gritty,” she says.

## Personal path

Duckworth's own story provides a case study in developing grit. When she was a child, her father routinely questioned her natural talent. Duckworth says she reacted to those barbs with a stiffening of the spine and chin-first attitude best embodied in artist Edgar Degas' famous ballerina statue.

“Whether that made me grittier or it was a sign that I was gritty, I can't say for sure,” says Duckworth, who has a bachelor's degree from Harvard and a master's degree from Oxford. “But it is fascinating to me that there are so many athletes, professors, CEOs that have this ‘I'll show you' response. It partly comes from feeling you are right and these people telling you otherwise are wrong.”

Although Duckworth aced the perseverance half of the grit equation early in life, her grittiness didn't fully evolve until she was in her 30s, when she changed careers and found her calling as a researcher investigating ways to help students develop grit and other positive character traits.

“I can't even remember a time in my life when I didn't work hard, but I didn't have a focused passion like I do now,” she says. “I struggled to find that North Star that would keep me in the same direction. Now I do have that.”

## Your personal grit

When Duckworth gave her TED Talk in 2013, she was uncertain if grit could be built



or taught. Since then, her research, as well as the research of others, such as Lauren Eskreis-Winkler, has convinced her that grit can be cultivated.

"I think everyone can get grittier," she says. "I believe that is true about pretty much every characteristic other than your height or eye color. Of course, there are limits, but human nature is much more malleable than people think."

One way to increase your own grittiness is by mentoring others to be persistent and hang in there during challenging times. Duckworth believes cultivating grit in others strengthens your own grittiness by reminding you of lessons you may otherwise have forgotten.

"A lot of us have the insights. We've heard things before that we've forgotten. We're focusing on what we can't do," she says. "When we're given the prompt of advising and encouraging someone else, we draw our attention to what we can do."

#### The role of teachers and parents

Because of the important role that mentoring plays in character development, teachers are uniquely positioned to help children cultivate grit, but they must live what they preach.

"The first and most important thing any teacher can do is to be an example of the kind of character strength, grit and many other things we want in our kids," Duckworth says. "If you are a hypocrite—you tell kids to work hard, but you don't get the exams back when you promise or don't bother to write comments on kids' essays—

then everything you lecture kids about will go in one ear and out the other."

But teachers can't single-handedly ensure children develop grit. Duckworth says it is important for parents to echo the lessons their children receive in school. "When you have a culture that is gritty and the messages are reinforced—the same message you hear from your teachers, you hear from your parents and extended family and your friends—that's when those influences most powerfully shape your identity," she says.

Duckworth says a new school year brings an opportunity for students to make positive changes in their lives. She proposes children create a "reverse time capsule" by writing a letter in the fall that predicts what they will have achieved by the end of the school year. She says this letter to themselves encourages children to "gain clarity about their future. We don't often ask them to envision that."

When parents ask what else they can do to build grit in their children, Duckworth suggests doing less. "The ritual is to ask yourself what you cannot do. What is it I am doing for my kids that I cannot do, like run to school when they forget a book, fold their clothes for them when they haven't, rush to meet them at the door with their lunch?" says the mother of two. "I'm guilty of all of these things. As parents, we always want to think what more can I do, but for some parents, it is also what you can't do." ■

Andrea Downing Peck is a freelance writer in Bainbridge Island, Washington.

## Beyond grit

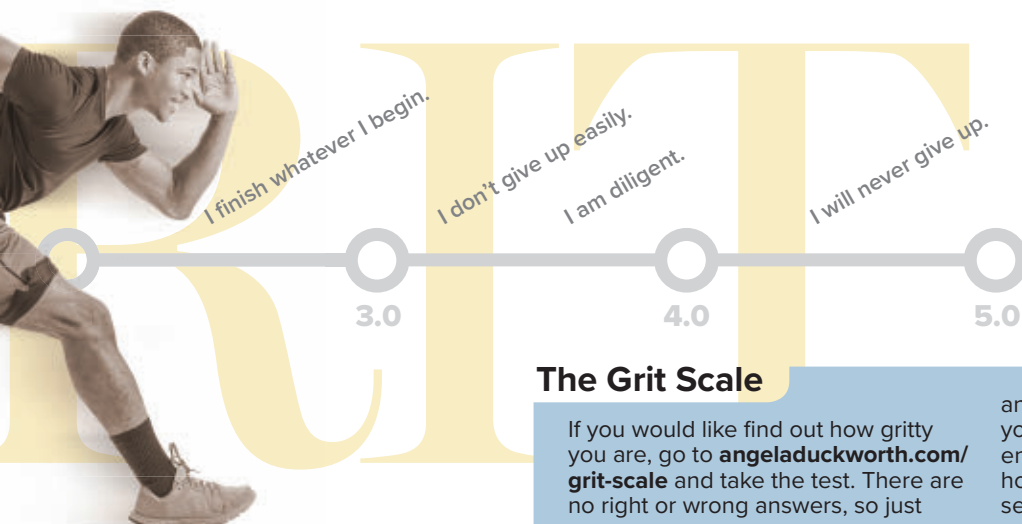
# Caring, doing and thinking

Angela Duckworth may be the nation's No. 1 cheerleader for grit, but she knows it is just one aspect of a person's character. Students need a variety of character strengths encompassing caring, doing and thinking if they are to thrive in all areas of their lives.

Duckworth is the CEO of the Character Lab, located on the University of Pennsylvania campus in Philadelphia, where she is advancing the science and practice of character development. She and her team are perfecting "Playbooks" for educators that translate scientific research into daily classroom practice and activities. Playbooks include videos, lesson plans and worksheets that help students learn character-building strengths and strategies.

"Commonsense advice is one thing, but advice that is based on rigorous scientific research is better," says Duckworth. "We take research on things like optimism or curiosity or grit and we make teacher resources."

Targeted for high school and middle school students, the Character Lab's first three Playbooks—*Build Connections*, *WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan: a Strategy for Self-Control)* and *Expert Practice*—are available for download at [characterlab.org/playbooks](http://characterlab.org/playbooks).—ADP



## The Grit Scale

If you would like find out how gritty you are, go to [angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale](http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale) and take the test. There are no right or wrong answers, so just

answer honestly, considering how you compare to most people. At the end, you'll get a score that reflects how passionate and persevering you see yourself to be.—ADP