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BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEW

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance *and* Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things

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Book Title: Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance; Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things

Authors: Angela Duckworth, Adam Grant

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Successfully completing medical training requires both intelligence and perseverance. Angela Duckworth's *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* and Adam Grant's *Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things* offer two views on the question of how a person's ultimate success relates to their innate ability, perseverance, and practice strategies. Duckworth and Grant, who both teach at the Wharton School of Business[1] at the University of Pennsylvania, have sold millions of copies of their books. Both have given enormously successful TED talks. Their books are rich in examples from all walks of life, including interviews with athletes, innovators, and educators. The primary assignment for this review was to determine which book would be most helpful to family medicine residents and faculty.

Angela Duckworth began researching and publishing about what she termed "grit" in 2007.[2] Her work garnered praise, earning her a MacArthur Genius grant. She published her bestselling book *Grit* in 2016. Her recommendations were embraced in the academic community, with educators developing *grit* curricula and measuring students' grit by means of character score cards to help students become *grittier*. Enthusiastic adopters assumed that grit was a crucial element for success in life and that it could be nurtured in students.

A subsequent meta-analysis[3] revealed that the predictive power of grit is less than Duckworth stated. For example, she reported that grittier military cadets at West Point were "99% more likely to complete summer training"; but on closer inspection, it turned out that they were only 2.6% more likely to succeed.[3] Research has indicated that Duckworth's grit may simply be another name for a personality trait psychologists call conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is assumed to have a significant genetic component, though it can be increased with training. That would mean that people high in conscientiousness are more likely to succeed than those without that trait, which is intuitively accurate. Other common concerns with Duckworth's work are how readily moral judgments can become infused into the concept of grit.[4] The most common critiques indicate that focusing on individual student grittiness misses how deeply flawed our school systems can be.

Adam Grant, who is also highly influential, is not promoting new psychological constructs. In his many bestselling books, he's a consummate synthesizer and popularizer of research on cognition, systems, performance, and teamwork. He mines well-established scientific findings, and he addresses systemic, organizational, and individual factors that have a bearing on the ultimate success of a person or a team. In *Hidden Potential*, he provides evidence-based guidance on how to improve one's individual performance and study efficiency, and he also discusses how to reconfigure schools and educational systems at the national level. A significant and compelling portion of his book

examines how schools in Finland promote excellence in their students through innovation and investment.

Turning to the key question of which book provides the best guidance for family physicians, trainees, and educators, my unequivocal answer is *Hidden Potential*. While both Duckworth and Grant provide valuable insights, Grant's book is a lot more fun to read. His tone is warm and engaging, he provides numerous helpful and humorous illustrations that shed light on his recommendations, and less perfectionism is baked into the book. The lack of perfectionism in the tone and suggestions is interesting, because Grant is transparent about his own highly effective strategies for achieving the best possible results.

For those who are not already high in grit by virtue of innate traits, both Duckworth and Grant do a nice job of selling the idea of cultivating positive habits and routines that make unwanted tasks automatic and therefore less challenging. Another excellent resource in this genre for physicians and patients working on lifestyle changes is Fogg's *Tiny Habits*.[5]

Whereas *Grit* leaves the reader feeling somewhat discouraged and sheepish about one's lack of achievements, *Hidden Potential* has a more energizing quality to it and provides more grace to those who are having disappointments in their life pursuits. I would hesitate to recommend *Grit* to a colleague who is struggling with burnout or life stressors, but I would have no hesitation in recommending *Hidden Potential*.

Given that so many physicians-in-training and practicing physicians struggle with imposter syndrome and perfectionism,[6] Grant's book, with its playful tone and practical suggestions for improving performance while avoiding the traps of burnout and self-doubt, is the easy choice.

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