

GRIT: The Secret Sauce of Success, If Preceded by Passion

What do Heather Whitestone, Bradie Tennel, and Chris Mazdzer have in common? GRIT, also known as perseverance or tenacity. More and more research has recently identified this characteristic as one of the most common traits of those who succeed. We call them talented, but that description misses the primary ingredient that has led to the accomplishments of these champions. For Heather Whitestone, it was learning the steps to her dance performance while not being able to hear the music. Deaf since childhood, her desire to win Miss Alabama – which took three attempts – required hours and years of GRIT to overcome her hearing impairment. And that was just a stepping stone so she could compete for Miss America, which she won in 1995 as the first winner with a physical disability.

Bradie Tennel, the Olympic skater and current US National Women's Figure Skating Champion sat out three months of training in both 2015 and 2016 with different back injuries. Today she's competing at the 2018 Olympics in South Korea. When asked if she ever entertained the idea of calling it quits in the midst of injuries and setbacks, she responded, "Absolutely not." Bradie's grit served her through all forms of adversity in the same way grit served Heather Whitestone. The presence of grit is most obvious over the long-haul when people stick with an endeavor over years of hard work.

We are often distracted by people's talent. We either attribute other's success to their talent or excuse ourselves because we were not blessed with that talent. We fail to recognize the element of effort. According to the work of Angela Duckworth, Ph.D., effort counts twice as much as talent. In her book, *Grit, The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, she shares this formula: "talent x effort = skill" AND "skill x effort = achievement." This means that effort factors into the equation twice.

The trap for parents is that while acknowledging the importance of effort, it's easy to forget that no one works hard at something they don't find intrinsically interesting. Play always comes before work. All Olympians had early days cultivating their interest. They were first of all "unserious beginners" says Duckworth. Interests are discovered and developed in early years. Keeping sports fun and full of adventure, small victories, and discovery will eventually open the door to development and the need for grit. Unfortunately, too many parents have pushed the message of hard work prematurely, instead of allowing true passion to drive the necessary grit.

Teach grit to your children by displaying your passion and perseverance for your life goals. Remember you first acquired a keen interest during the early years. It's not likely that you "worked hard" immediately. Someone encouraged you with positive feedback and the message "We believe in you." Grit is a journey. Just ask Chris Mazdzer who spent the last sixteen years moving toward the silver medal he just won in the single luge at the 2018 Olympics. Fascination with the sport came along first, then grit took him the distance