

Why Grit is the New Degree



“U.S. adults who consider a college degree very important”

2010: 75%

2025: 35%

“Americans who agree that a 4-year degree is not worth the cost”

2013: 40%

2024: 56%

**“High school senior who believe a degree is
critical to future success”**

2020: 87%

2025: 59%

“U.S. hiring managers that plan to eliminate 4-year degree requirements for entry-level and mid-level roles”

45%

Intelligent.com Survey of Hiring Managers

Duckworth's research across West Point, Ivy League, and Spelling Bee finalists

X SAT Scores & Class Rank

Did not predict who would succeed or drop out

X IQ Alone

Zero predictive power for achievement outcomes

X Physical Fitness

Not a reliable predictor at West Point

X Conscientiousness Alone

Working hard without sustained direction falls short

✓ Grit

Best predictor of success across all three studies

Source: [Duckworth \(2007\)](#) — [Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals](#)

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"Grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. Grit is having stamina. Grit is sticking with your future, day in, day out."

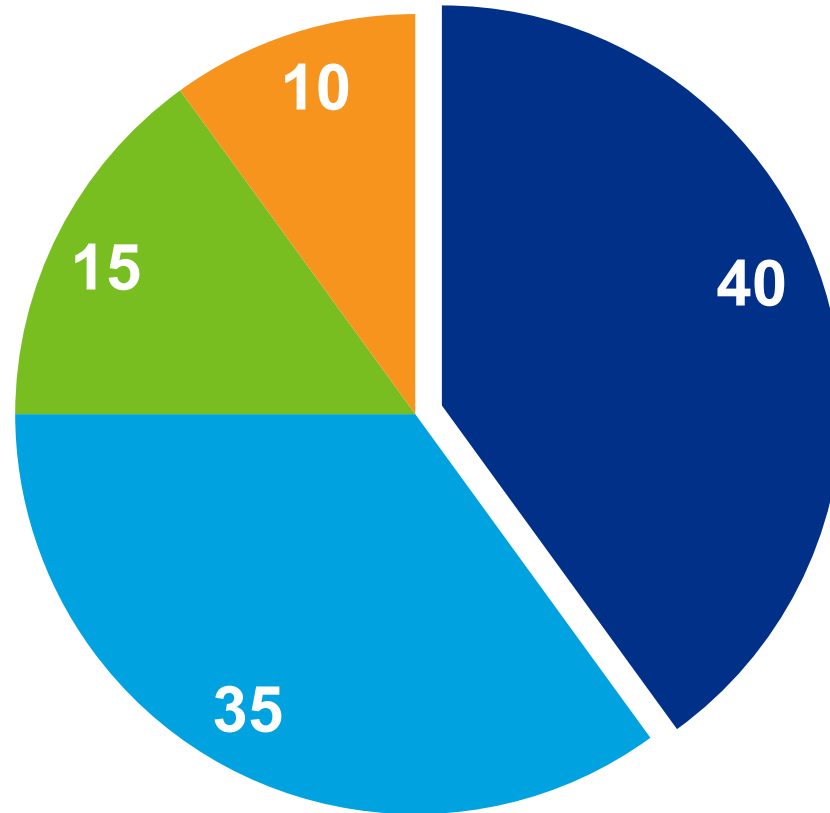
— Angela Duckworth

People willing to put in the work . . .

People with staying power . . .

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Components of Long-Term Success



■ **Grit & Perseverance** ■ Experience & Judgment ■ Formal Education ■ Natural Talent

Source: [Angela Duckworth](#)

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Education	Elite, masters in finance	Community College, vocational
Work History	None	Employed since 16
Business Exposure	Academic	Real-world (sales & farm)
Financial Knowledge	Strong	Weak
Polishing	High	Less refined
Customer Interaction	Unknown	Proven (sales role)
Accountability Experience	Minimal	High (worked young, earned income)
GRIT	Unproven	Strong indicators

How to Identify Grit in Interviews

Ask

Tell me about your most challenging project and how you maintained motivation throughout



Listen

Look for ownership of failures, lessons learned, and what they'd do differently



Probe

What's the longest you've worked on a single goal – what kept you going



Validate

Share a time when everyone else gave up but you persisted

- Don't ask if they "never give up" - ask for specific examples of persisting through repeated setbacks over extended periods
- Listen for evidence of long-term commitment despite obstacles, multi-year project focus, and constructive failure responses
- The best candidates reflect deeply on failures, view them as growth opportunities, and have clear improvement plans

Green Flags : Red Flags

Green Flags

- Describe pursuing a long-term goal for years despite setbacks
- Own their failures and explain how each one made them better
- Show consistent interest and dedication to their field over time
- Articulate what kept them going when progress was slow or invisible

Red Flags

- Can't name a specific goal they pursued for more than a year
- Blame others for setbacks or describe failures without lessons learned
- Pattern of starting strong then pivoting when things get hard
- Describe success in terms of talent or luck rather than effort and deliberate practice

Referral Focus

Cultural Alignment

- Referrals are more likely to understand key components of your department
 - ✓ Company Values
 - ✓ Leadership
 - ✓ Performance Expectations

Access to Passive Talent

- Opportunity to find employees who demonstrate GRIT and are not looking/needing a job
- Referrals are often already familiar with your industry

Trainee Focus

Leadership Potential

- Many future leaders start at a company with minimal experience, but show a high level of GRIT

New Habits

- Trainees allow an opportunity to teach habits that translate well into your department and values

Retention

- Studies show that early career development programs lead to stronger career engagement and overall retention

Hervelin, J. Firm retention and productivity of apprentices. Empir Econ 68, 1265–1280 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-024-02667-z>

Actions taken

- Removed degree requirements and add trade experience
- Developed standard grit assessment questions for hiring managers to use consistently
- Built partnerships with community and junior colleges to find
- Identified high performers and learned what made them successful

Revise

Update job postings to emphasize experience and perseverance

Train

Equip hiring managers with behavioral questions assessing grit

Partner

Source candidates from industry and “gritty” backgrounds

Measure

Track grit-based hires versus credential-based hires

Questions?

- **Grit interview guide – entry level**
- **Grit interview guide – experienced**
- **Grit interview scorecard**

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