

## How to Hire for Grit

In an age of nonstop innovation, it's easy to assume that the most important skills are technical. But [research](#) shows the biggest predictor of professional success isn't intelligence, technical known-how or even natural ability. The key quality for success? Grit.

Angela Duckworth, psychologist and author of the bestseller [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](#), defines grit as the combination of perseverance and passion. Duckworth's work on the [science of high achievement](#) shows that highly successful people share this ability to keep trying in the face of failure or struggle, combined with a passion for the work and the bigger goals ahead.

Of course, the concept of grit connects closely to many soft skills that are already on recruiters' radars. [Resilience](#) is critical for entrepreneurs, [persistence](#) is necessary for creativity and innovation, and a [strong mission and purpose](#) can make or break a company.

Whether it goes by grit or another name, the message is clear and it's time to pay attention. But why are these soft skills so important and how can recruiters bring them to the center of hiring?

### Why does grit predict success?

Grit connects closely to creativity and, in turn, innovation. People with grit aren't afraid to push boundaries or rethink what is possible. They also have perseverance in the face of struggle, a key factor in creativity.

Smart and highly skilled people can fall behind professionally, but grit lets talent thrive. It's easy to find examples in industry superstars. Consider Oprah Winfrey, who was fired from an early job as a newscaster and told she was "[unfit for television news](#)." To soften the blow, her producer gave her a spot on a daytime talk show. The rest is history.

People tend to [underestimate](#) the hard work needed for creativity, assuming that it is an innate trait. [Mastery](#) takes time, effort and commitment. Similarly, people with [grit](#) work continuously to improve their skills, but are resilient in the face of setbacks.

[Studies](#) also show that people's first ideas or solutions to problem are not their best, but they get better steadily with effort. Consider [James Dyson](#), inventor of the Dyson vacuum, who tried over 5,000 prototypes before developing the models that would generate billions.

Another reason grit matters: you can't succeed if you don't try. It might sound obvious, but perseverance is key. [J.K. Rowling](#), writer of the Harry Potter series, wouldn't have become one of the world's highest-paid authors if she had given up after her first book was rejected - by twelve publishers! She kept trying and her persistence paid off.

### How to Identify and Measure Grit in Hiring

How can recruiters and hiring managers identify grit in the talent pool? [Hiring for soft skills](#) like grit can be tricky, but it's a critical aspect of the process. Candidates are prepared to discuss technical skills and past work experiences, but recruiters should use certain strategies to tease out real examples of the person's grittiness in action. What are some strategies to assess those key elements of grit - passion and perseverance?

Duckworth's [Grit Scale](#) shows some of the questions she used in her research, which can be adapted and incorporated into job interviews. For example, recruiters can ask how a candidate maintains focus and interest working on long-term projects.

Another [approach](#) is to ask candidates about their biggest professional failure. Do they accept part of the blame and learn from the experience, or do they attempt to deflect responsibility to others? Did they turn that seemingly negative event into an opportunity for growth and learning?

One great example is [Steve Jobs](#), whose world was rocked when Apple - a company he co-founded - fired him in 1985. Jobs went on to launch Pixar and, of course, returned to Apple as an industry leader in the 1990s. He [credited](#) his biggest successes with that initial firing, which gave him an opportunity to explore his creativity, learn his weaknesses and dream even bigger.

### **Can we learn to be grittier?**

Soft skills are often assumed to be inherent traits. Either we have them or we don't, right? Wrong! A growing body of [research](#) shows that soft skills can - and should - be cultivated through professional trainings.

Almost anything can be [learned](#) and grit is no exception. [Small steps](#) make all the difference, such as setting (and meeting) goals, developing and improving skills, and ensuring that work is always connected to a bigger purpose. These strategies can be implemented on the individual or team level, and have a big long-term impact.

### **Conclusion: Grit matters**

Research on grit has taken off and for good reason: it is a strong predictor of success and should be considered when hiring. Along with other in-demand [soft skills](#), grit is an important skill to assess in candidates, along with resilience, adaptability, purpose, communication, and many more.

By using strategic techniques, a candidate's grittiness can be assessed during hiring and onboarding, and even supported and developed after the hire. In an age when soft skills are increasingly in-demand, the importance of grit will continue to grow. Built grit into hiring now to bring talent to the next level. Let's get gritty.

# Hiring for Grit: Why It Matters, and How to Identify It

Posted on February 22, 2019 by [Aaron Schwartz](http://blog.indeed.com/author/aaronschwartz/) (<http://blog.indeed.com/author/aaronschwartz/>)



What do you need to succeed in today's age of nonstop innovation? Intelligence, technical skills and education might come to mind. But it turns out one of the biggest predictors of success isn't listed on many resumes: grit.

Angela Duckworth is a psychologist and the author of the best-seller "[Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-book/) (<https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-book/>)," and she has studied this concept extensively. Duckworth (who also spoke at last year's [Indeed Interactive](http://blog.indeed.com/2018/05/16/indeed-interactive-live-day-two/) (<http://blog.indeed.com/2018/05/16/indeed-interactive-live-day-two/>)) defines the term "grit" as the combination of perseverance and passion.

But what makes grit so important — and how can those of us in the business of hiring identify candidates who possess it to make more effective hires?

## What is grit?

Duckworth's work on the [science of high achievement](http://blog.indeed.com/2018/05/16/indeed-interactive-live-day-two/) (<http://blog.indeed.com/2018/05/16/indeed-interactive-live-day-two/>) indicates that extraordinarily successful people possess the ability to keep trying in the face of failure or struggle, combined with a passion for their work and an eye toward their larger goals. These are the primary components of grit.

Grit is closely related to many [soft skills](http://blog.indeed.com/2018/11/26/how-to-hire-for-soft-skills/) (<http://blog.indeed.com/2018/11/26/how-to-hire-for-soft-skills/>) — the personal attitudes and practices that shape how we interact with others — that are already on recruiters' radars. For example, [resilience](https://www.inc.com/gordon-tredgold/4-reasons-why-entrepreneurs-need-to-be-resilient.html) (<https://www.inc.com/gordon-tredgold/4-reasons-why-entrepreneurs-need-to-be-resilient.html>) is critical for entrepreneurs who must go through the circuit of finding investors; [persistence](https://www.businessinsider.com/adam-grant-persistence-predicts-creativity-2016-2) (<https://www.businessinsider.com/adam-grant-persistence-predicts-creativity-2016-2>) goes hand-in-hand with creativity and innovation, as many iterations may be necessary to refine an idea; and a strong sense of [purpose](https://www.forbes.com/sites/janbruce/2017/03/10/why-soft-skills-matter-and-the-top-3-you-need/#8b5c1db76f3b) (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janbruce/2017/03/10/why-soft-skills-matter-and-the-top-3-you-need/#8b5c1db76f3b>) helps employees feel connected to their work.

## Just add grit to make good ideas great

The building blocks of grit may be perseverance and passion, but grit is more than the sum of its parts. People with grit are goal-oriented, purpose-driven and willing to put in the work to realize their dreams and become the best in their fields.

Taken together, these elements make grit a key ingredient in innovation and creativity. People tend to underestimate the [hard work that creativity requires](https://scottbarrykaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Lucas_nordgren_2015_persistence_creativity.pdf) ([https://scottbarrykaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Lucas\\_nordgren\\_2015\\_persistence\\_creativity.pdf](https://scottbarrykaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Lucas_nordgren_2015_persistence_creativity.pdf)), assuming it is an innate capability. In practice, it involves sustained effort and dedication. Studies show [people's first ideas are not always their best](https://www.businessinsider.com/adam-grant-persistence-predicts-creativity-2016-2) (<https://www.businessinsider.com/adam-grant-persistence-predicts-creativity-2016-2>) but that they steadily improve with continual effort, study and attention over multiple iterations.

Consider [James Dyson](https://www.inc.com/margaret-heffernan/suck-it-up-james-dyson-s-lessons-in-perseverance.html) (<https://www.inc.com/margaret-heffernan/suck-it-up-james-dyson-s-lessons-in-perseverance.html>), inventor of the Dyson vacuum, who tried over 5,000 prototypes before developing the models that would generate billions. Some of his early prototypes were probably adequate, but his final one revolutionized an entire industry. That is the power of grit.

This demonstrates why grit is a fantastic asset in any new hire. Imagine two candidates for a position, both with top-notch experience and training. The grittier candidate won't shy away from thinking outside the box and considering multiple solutions. The less gritty one, however, is more likely to take their first idea and run with it, missing bigger and more exciting possibilities.

A candidate with grit also knows mastery.

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryancollinseurope/2018/07/24/mastery-its-the-secret-to-your-success/#3fca658c7a51>) of a skill does not happen overnight. Take the example of professional athletes, who build on their natural talents with continuous practice and often suffer sidelining injuries in the process. An employee with grit will work to improve their abilities, develop new skills and grow in their role, rather than just fall back on natural talent.

What's more, people with grit remain resilient in the face of setbacks, an unavoidable feature of even the biggest success stories. Gritty high achievers aren't discouraged by rejection or failure, but rather are encouraged to try even harder. This makes them a huge asset to any team. They will persevere in their goals and motivate teammates who need that extra push.

## **How to identify and measure grit in hiring**

If grit is such a strong predictor of success, how can recruiters and hiring managers identify people who have it in the talent pool? Candidates are prepared to discuss technical skills and past work experiences, but hiring for soft skills (<http://blog.indeed.com/2018/11/26/how-to-hire-for-soft-skills/>) such as grit can be trickier.

Recruiters must employ special strategies to tease out examples of grittiness in action, as well as to assess candidates' passion and perseverance. These strategies include:

- Ask candidates about their biggest professional failure ([https://blog.shrm.org/blog/want-to-hire-employees-with-grit-ask-this-interview-question/?\\_ga=2.212278748.911850556.1549311815-885354438.1547134972](https://blog.shrm.org/blog/want-to-hire-employees-with-grit-ask-this-interview-question/?_ga=2.212278748.911850556.1549311815-885354438.1547134972)). Based on their response to this telling question, you can determine whether the applicant is able to accept responsibility and learn from the experience or whether they're attempting to deflect responsibility to others. Did they turn a seemingly negative event into an opportunity for growth and learning?
- Duckworth's Grit Scale could also help. This shows some of the questions (<https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>) Duckworth used in her research, which can be adapted and incorporated into job interviews. For example, recruiters can ask how a candidate maintains focus and interest when working on long-term projects. Listen for details — they will be illuminating.

Research on grit has taken off, and with good reason: it is a strong predictor of success that should be carefully considered when hiring. People with this winning combination of passion and perseverance aren't only good at their jobs; they're strong in the face of obstacles and dedicated to the bigger picture. Recruiters can use targeted strategies to assess grit in candidates and can use this information to identify the most promising future hires.

To bring talent to the next level, it's time to get gritty.