

The power of Grit, Gratitude and Striving

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Would you consider yourself a mentally tough person? Maybe you've never had a chance to find out how well you can perform when you're faced with adversity. Well, now your chance has come.

How we handle the current COVID-19 crisis – as leaders, as workers, as human beings – will define us for the foreseeable future. It's going to change the way we work, the way we connect with people and the way we see ourselves.

I strongly believe that with the right attitude and the right tools, challenges and struggles can become the platform for the greatest growth and achievement you'll ever have.

The right attitude means acquiring a growth mindset. Simply put, a growth mindset sees challenges as learning opportunities.

And right now there are plenty of challenges. It can be hard to see where the opportunity in all this lies, but with a growth mindset, it is possible.

Challenged by the new technologies needed to enable working from home? Embrace it as a chance to become more flexible, adaptable and agile.

Anxious about the social isolation of working from home? Make a point to reach out to people you haven't contacted in a while – learn how to make more genuine connections.

Worried your productivity and motivation will slip? Take this chance to discover what really excites you about your job and how you work best.

To build a growth mindset remember these three guiding principles: grit, gratitude and striving.

The power of grit

Grit is the combination of passion and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals. Research has found one way to foster grit is through developing a growth mindset but grit also helps to build a growth mindset as we discover that we can survive, learn and flourish as a direct result of the challenges we face.

University of Pennsylvania psychologist [Angela Duckworth](#) spent years analysing the short and long-term effects of grit on people's performance in multiple domains including business, the military and sport. In the process she discovered that successful people had often overcome 'multiple challenges over multiple years to sustain the pursuit of something important to them.' That's grit.

When you think about it, this makes a lot of sense. Over the years I have met hundreds of super-intelligent 'braniacs' who, despite their intellect, have not lived up to their potential. And I have worked with loads of ridiculously talented athletes who thought that their victory in the genetic lottery would take them to the top. Board rooms, athletic tracks, football fields, netball courts and swimming pools are awash with missed opportunity.

On the flip side, we all know people who may not be applying for Mensa, but who have still achieved phenomenal success in life. Those who do reach the top get there because they work hard and have staying power.

The value of gratitude

Gratitude isn't about corny sentimentality or cliches. Gratitude – the act of appreciating the good in life – is a powerful practice that boosts the feel-good neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin and the hormone oxytocin. It can improve our relationships, enhance recovery from illness, foster resilience, boost self-esteem and our sense of wellbeing, and even give you a better night's sleep.

Gratitude is a choice you can make, even in your darkest moments, to acknowledge that good also exists and this act can help us through the challenge of the current crisis. It is an essential element of a growth mindset.

Robert Emmons is a professor in psychology and a leading expert in gratitude research. He proposes that gratitude has two parts.

- **An affirmation of goodness.** We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we've received, even if life isn't perfect. Right now, you may be grateful that the business you work for is taking measures to protect your health amidst COVID-19, that you have the technology at hand to work from home, that you have enough food in the cupboard – and hopefully, enough toilet paper.
- **Figuring out where that goodness comes from.** We recognise the sources of this goodness as being outside of ourselves. 'It didn't stem from anything we necessarily did ourselves in which we might take pride. We can appreciate positive traits in ourselves, but I think true gratitude involves a humble dependence on others: We acknowledge that other people – or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset – gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives,' [Emmons says](#).

Gratitude, a social emotion, connects us intimately with others – so it is through the act of gratitude that we can become one with something greater than ourselves: each other and the world around us. As we all become a little more physically isolated under a shutdown, it's necessary to remember that we aren't emotionally isolated.

The importance of striving

I love the word *strive*. It represents something we all need more of in our lives and is tightly interwoven with psychology frameworks on growth mindset and grit. Striving also links with gratitude, as taking time to reflect on accomplishments, especially the challenging ones, is a vital component of ensuring a healthy brain and a flourishing mind. Striving is connected to our sense of fulfilment and purpose. To strive is to embrace change and constantly step out of your comfort zone.

When I ask people what achievements they are most proud of, it is very rare I hear an answer like 'inheriting \$500,000 when grandma passed away' or 'winning a new car in the school raffle'. Instead, it's about the challenges people have overcome. The success that comes from hard work. You appreciate something a lot more when you have to work hard for it.

Our greatest growth comes from pain

While it definitely doesn't feel like it at the time, challenging, even negative events are linked to surprising benefits in people who have experienced a moderate amount of adversity in life. They're predictive of lower global distress, lower functional impairment, as well as [increased satisfaction](#) with life. In [one study](#) of 1500 adults, researchers reported that those who overcame adversity in the past were more likely to savour the present, and experience better overall subjective wellbeing.

What all this means for you, is that while you're facing challenges right now – whether it's the challenge of working with new technologies and processes, of keeping a team together in stressful times or simply the challenge of keeping yourself positive and productive – through a healthy combination of grit, gratitude and striving, those challenges can start looking an awful lot like opportunity.