



Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary

Linda Kaplan Thaler , Robin Koval

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In Grit to Great, Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval tackle a topic that is close to their hearts, one that they feel is the real secret to their own success in their careers--and in the careers of so many people they know and have met. And that is the incredible power of grit, perseverance, perspiration, determination, and sheer stick-to-it-tiveness. We are all dazzled by the notion that there are some people who get ahead, who reach the corner office because they are simply gifted, or well-connected, or both. But research shows that we far overvalue talent and intellectual ability in our culture. The fact is, so many people get ahead--even the gifted ones--because they worked incredibly hard, put in the thousands of hours of practice and extra sweat equity, and made their own luck. And Linda and Robin should know--they are two girls from the Bronx who had no special advantages or privileges and rose up through their own hard work and relentless drive to succeed to the top of their highly competitive profession.

In a book illustrated with a cornucopia of stories and the latest research on success, the authors reveal the strategies that helped them, and countless others, succeed at the highest levels in their careers and professions, and in their personal lives. They talk about the guts--the courage--necessary to take on tough challenges and not give up at the first sign of difficulty. They discuss the essential quality of resiliency. Everyone suffers setbacks in their careers and in life. The key, however, is to pick yourself up and bounce back. Drawing on the latest research in positive psychology, they discuss why optimists do better in school, work, and on the playing field--and how to reset that optimistic set point. They talk about industriousness, the notion that Malcolm Gladwell popularized with the 10,000-hour rule in his book Outliers. Creativity theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi believes it takes a minimum of 10 years for one's true creative potential to be realized. And the authors explore the concept of tenacity--the quality that allows us to remain focused and avoid distraction in order to get the job done--an increasingly difficult task in today's fragmented, cluttered, high-tech, connected world.

Written in the same short, concise format as The Power of Nice and leavened with the natural humor that characterizes Linda's and Robin's lives--and books--Grit to Great is destined to be the book everyone in business needs.

Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary Details

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Sarah says

I. Just. Couldn't. Finish. I kept thinking to myself, "this has to get better, it just HAS to!"...but it didn't. The noticeable issue started with the tale of Melissa and Ariel; if Melissa never told anyone but her husband about Ariel's intellectual deficiency, then HOW did it end up in this book?!? Next was the inspirational story about "Jim" an ad exec (and his talent, intelligence and, ahem, grit), now better known as James Patterson, who has generously provided a glowing blurb on the back of the book; credibility counts, ladies, and yours is plummeting by now. Then there's the whole chapter about two young people who decided they HAD TO do something, and spent their lives practicing it to great(ish) success; because a child who decides he wants to be a chess champion will OF COURSE make the decision to be homeschooled, then move to Spain, then to Hungary, Switzerland and back to Spain, just to be the (second) best. Because, of course. Yet, even with that single-minded determination, if you follow in the steps of Thaler and Koval, when you get bored CHANGE DIRECTION....except don't, because that means you have no grit, except do, because what's the point if you're not having fun, except then a 12 year old is better than you, so suck it chess kid. The final straw that made me stop reading was the line "With no harness or safety net, sheer grit was the only thing keeping Wallenda from plunging 1500 feet to the canyon floor as the world watched." To clarify: "Wallenda is Nik Wallenda, the world famous high wire performer who comes from SEVEN-generations of performers, and the "canyon" is the Grand Canyon" (if you need an explanation, please crack an actual book). So here we have a guy who was LITERALLY raised performing in high wire acts, who has LITERALLY decades of diligent practice and experience, who has LITERALLY prepared for MONTHS for this act, and it's GRIT that is keeping him from plummeting to a speck of roadkill??? No, no, no.

I'm sure someone out there will find this book aspirational, or inspirational, or useful as a doorstep in a doll house, but I found it to be utter nonsense, and I have too many books on my dresser to bother with this nonsense. Grit is also knowing that walking away from crap is better than wallowing through it.

Renay says

I couldn't get past the paragraphs of generalizations about lazy, ungrateful Millennials.

Taaha Muhammad says

This book was good, in that it conveyed a handful of anecdotes/stories in which people used grit as a means of achieving their success.

The book didn't really expand on how to be gritty, beyond the superficial advice of "work hard, set goals, be positive", etc.

It was backed by some research studies, which was great! But more expansion/depth on some of the grit research out there would have been insightful! Also, any good book/essay would argue points by providing

counterexamples and tearing them down. As such, perhaps including examples of where being gritty DID NOT bring people success, and then perhaps deconstructing those stories, would've been a great plus.

Nonetheless, I walk away inspired by some of the great stories in this book. If it helps: it does get better further on as compared to the beginning!

Lutfiya Fajandar says

An average self-help book. The stars are for good ideas but the book does not really build engagement.

Tom says

“Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary” by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval is a short, quick read that is designed to be a morale booster/pick me up. It focuses on the idea that you need to get back up and try again. Failure is part of life, and when it happens, learn from it and try again.

I had the pleasure of listening to Linda Kaplan Thaler speak about the book during a Gartner Symposium/ITXPO. She is a great public speaker, the problem I found was that while I did read the book, her presentation covered all of the important parts, so there was really no need to.

The only issue I had with this book, is that there are no new ideas. It contains research and stories that agree with the points they are trying to prove and ignores any research that would contradict it. One example is the one they give on Michael Jordan and how he succeeded because he had grit, not talent. This was based on the fact that he was not chosen to be on the high school varsity basketball team when he was a sophomore and look at him now. Their rationale is that since he was not chosen he did not have the talent and if he did not have grit he would have quit. I do enjoy the way that they string their ideas together and it makes the reader feel that if they can do it, then you can too.

So, if you are looking for a book that has a new perspective on being more successful and uses data and research to prove it, this might not be the book for you. However, if you need a pep talk to get back in the game and not give up, then pick up a copy of this book and you will be ready to go another round.

Khalid Sultan Khalid says

Unlike many reviews here, I will focus on the takeaways from this book. Two main reasons for this: A) I solidify key terms I learned, and B) help those who did not read the book get a glimpse of what the book is all about (we all have heard that phrase: don't judge a book by its cover). So if you find a point catching your attention, feel free to grab the book and read it.

Eight key takeaways:

- The difference between a successful person and a less successful is not a lack of strengths, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will. – Vince Lombardi

Linda and Robin (I am using authors' first names) started with the book with this very point. What makes you different from the guy next to you is nothing but the WILL to go out there and make things happen. In

other words, authors are trying to communicate the idea that success is a mindset and action game.

- Failure is how we learn – it's how we develop and acquire grit. Sounds like a given? Well, it's true. Think of how many mistakes you have made and how you always think, "oh man, only if I have that chance again, I will absolutely make the outcomes different." It could be that speech where you gave and blanked in front of 80 students, or that research paper you worked on last minute. Your mistakes make you realize how to perform better next time!

- Making mistakes and being aware of that makes you a better individual every time. Both authors encourage you to make mistakes because they think it could be the only form of learning certain aspects of life. This relates to the previous point, too.

- Working a little harder than everyone else who might be just as talented (or even a bit more) is what will win the day. This should be self-explanatory. There are always people who are smarter than you either in IQ or EQ. Level up and bring you "A" game and learn from others along the way.

- Do not wait for perfect moments; they don't exist. Being picky with opportunities might come with costs. Grab each opportunity that comes your way and move forward from there. Also, do not think too positively as many books suggest you to do. Positive thinking should not be about the outcomes of your dreams, but about all the roadblocks in the way and what you can do to move past them.

- A ship is always safe at the shore – but that is not what it is built for. –Albert Einstein

A whole chapter was dedicated to this point alone. Point here is to get out of your comfort zone. Authors suggest dressing with your eyes closed or using one hand; ordering some you have never had in a restaurant; & saying hello to a stranger in the elevator. According to Grit, research shows that the brain craves novelty and that doing things that do not feel automatic has a positive effect on neurological activity. It can sharpen and can make you more creative. Interesting points.

- Make your bed the moment you wake up. Sounds boring, but it will give you a sense of accomplishment for the first task of the day. It will also reinforce that the little things in life matter, because if you do not do the small things right, you will never do the big things right. And if by any chance you had a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made – that you made – which can give you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.

- Retirement is another cultural idea that may lead people to give up career and life goals before they might actually want to stop working. In other words, keep working hard until your last breath as long as you enjoy it.

Overall, Grit to great was a short read (about 157 pages). It's concise, clear and to the point.

Jane says

Where I got the book: my local library. A Strength Training read.

Grit, say Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, is all you really need. It's the great leveler, available to all regardless of age, income, physical ability or IQ.

I started the Strength Training readalong group for writers because I wanted to make various aspects of my life stronger, better able to support the weight of a writing career that really wants to be the boss of everything.

I chose Grit as the first topic because I was about to go into NaNoWriMo with a 90,000 word goal, so I needed the image of grit in my head. I did NOT need the image of the tightrope walker who starts wobbling when he's 1,500 feet above the Grand Canyon—that pings my vertigo EVERY time I think about it.

The authors define grit as Guts, Resilience, Initiative and Tenacity—see what they did there? Apart from the aforementioned tightrope walker image, you don't need any of those things to read this book, which is 143 small pages short and mostly made up of stories. Several of those stories are drawn from the authors' own experiences, building up a New York advertising agency from scratch and so on, and are inevitably self-laudatory.

Enemies of grit include 1. the self-esteem movement 2. the false concept of retirement 3. the myth of talent. I kind of agree that the whole self-esteem thing is doing nobody any favors and that retirement is just dumb (I never did want to play golf) but would argue that there is such a thing as being born with a gift.

I liked some of the stories, especially the one about James Patterson, but the advertising agency ones not so much. There were some grit-building exercises at the end of each chapter, but I found them a bit too vague. Conclusion: kind of an entry-level self-help book. Not bad, but not great, which sort of destroys their premise.

Carlisle says

I don't normally read self-help books, but I got this for free as part of a conference swag pack. So, I read it. It's not the most engaging, and it's not the most cohesive. It reads like a Humans of New York series, and while the stories are fascinating, it's...not a self-help book. They lost me the moment they said that inflating people's self-esteem leads to artificial accomplishments. As someone with verrrry poor self-esteem, I can tell you that those who love themselves are bolder and more willing to try things if they're not scared.

Locs and Lenses says

I am usually not a fan of non-fiction but I am trying to break out of my genre and I am glad I did. If you are a 70s-80's kid you will truly appreciate this book. It is very entertaining and the stories told are relatable and interesting. It is written in snippets with anecdotes between chapters. The stories are ones I have never heard

about from some of most successful business of our time. I did not realize who these two authors were until they began telling the stories of the marketing campaigns they were a part of, Aflac and Wendy's just to name a few.

They spoke of this feeling of entitlement among my generation and boy did it hit home. They made me get up off my butt and reevaluate things. The tips they give are doable and they make so much sense. This would be a great book for high school students as well as college. It is a straight forward look at the old fashion word "grit". Digging in deeper than the other guy and not using your lack of extraordinary talent or knowledge as an excuse.

I loved this book and I am definitely adding it to my list of go-to favorites. I would definitely keep a highlighter or notepad next to me while reading it.

If you are not a fan of non-fiction this book will change your mind and having wanting more from these 2 great authors.

"I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review."

Dennis says

Lots of upbeat stories and slogans. Impressive. However, after reading one study recently, I'm not entirely buying this. Or at least the part which generally claims that "age is nothing". A study of essay writing through age showed that after a certain point writer's vocabulary becomes poorer, and sentences simpler (alas, not in a snugly Zen way). So try as you may but some merciless limits do exist :(

Ashly Lynn says

I received a free advanced copy of this book through Goodreads Firstreads for review. I was actually really excited to read this short little advice guide because of my current situation. I was hoping that it would be full of great tips, helpful advice, and the occasional story of achieving greatness and sustainability to keep my head up and keep pushing through to achieve my goals. That's not, however, what I got.

This is a short book written by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, two very successful women working in advertising. They have worked with huge clients including, but not limited to, Wendy's and Aflac. These two women share advice that they have gained over the years in an attempt to tell you how you, too, can achieve success.

Sounds like a fun little book, right? What I described above is what I was expecting to get. Two successful women giving advice, I was all about that. But, that's not what I got. What this book mostly consists of is anecdote after anecdote after anecdote of rags-to-riches stories. That's all this book is. Thaler and Koval just take turns telling story after story of people who achieved success. And, not even really how they achieved success – just that they didn't have it before, they worked hard and had a lot of luck along the way, and now they're rich. This book gives zero instruction (not that there are really instructions on how to achieve success) on how to reach your goals.

The first 15 pages started out promising with a definition of each trait it takes to make it big and be successful. It was nice. These women said that success is out there for anyone to achieve and you don't even have to be exceptionally talented to reach it – Success comes to those who work hard and practice. Okay, that I can get on board with. I liked the opening and was all ready to take notes on the advice these women were about to impart on me.

Then, by about page 35, after the 5th anecdote, I started to get bored. But, I was hoping that things would get better. I was hoping that there would be some more helpful advice imparted to follow and not just the women summarizing the story they had just told in an attempt to turn it into some sort of vague advice. I really thought this book would turn around.

It didn't.

It just got worse.

There were so many anecdotes that I just didn't care about, and the stories of "success" just kept getting worse and more boring, as if Thaler and Koval were attempting to grasp words that didn't even exist. This is a very short book, only about 130 pages, but I found myself really struggling to finish. I was bored. I wanted it to end. I didn't learn anything.

In fact, the word Pluck that's in the title of the book, I don't even know how it applies. It was never even explained in the book. Why is it in the title if you're not going to explain what exactly "Pluck" means and how you can use it to help you gain success.

Next, I don't even know who the target audience of this book is supposed to be. I think it's meant for middle-aged people who have made mistakes in their life but have a desire to turn themselves around and be successful. I know this book was not meant for my age group. Thaler and Koval excessively talk down to millennials and make my generation (and everyone born after me) sound like horrible, lazy people who don't want to work or do anything and just expect things to be handed to them. This is not how you sell a book. I was so angry by the end of this book, I just about threw it in the garbage. I want to send these women an email and be like "Hey, so excuse you, but many people of my generation work exceptionally hard and it's not our fault that we live in a ruined economy and are doing our best with what we have."

This book in no way helped me or made me feel like success was achievable.

You can't talk down to an entire generation and then expect to profit off them buying a book you're promoting that you claim will help them achieve success, when you explicitly say in said book that we are lazy, ungrateful humans who don't deserve success. What kind of game is this? I don't want to play. Count me out.

There's also a few points where Thaler and Koval try to talk about mental disorders and obviously have no idea what they're talking about. At one point there was an actual generalized sentence that said all pessimists were depressed and all optimists were happy people no matter what immune to all mental disorders. I'm sorry, but do you realize how ridiculous that sounds?

Finally, there were so many contradictions in this book, I have no idea how Thaler and Koval expect me to achieve success. They were like be this and then later said but don't be this and do that but then later said but don't do that. The one that got me the most was in the beginning when they said talent didn't matter and it was, in fact, practice that counted, and then later they said practice isn't everything, you have to have talent

too. Alright-yyyy then.

I did not enjoy this book and definitely do not recommend or endorse it. This was boring, blah, and reaching to achieve something that wasn't there to begin with. I suggest Thaler and Koval stick to advertising and stay away from writing any more books or giving advice.

Riley Johnson says

Yikes. Aside from the humble-brags, generalizations, and vague stories about people who could've achieved for any number of reasons, this book didn't teach me about how to use grit to reach my goals. It did, however, teach me about which ad campaigns were created by the authors. If your Final Jeopardy question is "Which ad company created the AFLAC duck?", you should bet it all and answer, "What is the Kaplan Thaler Group, Alex." You're welcome.

Judey says

Book Review: Grit to Great (Thaler and Koval, 2015, Crown Business, ISBN 978-0-8041-3912-0, \$19.95)

The subtitle of this book is almost as big as the thin little volume: "How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You From Ordinary to Extraordinary".

Written by the chairperson and CEO of Publicis Kaplan Thaler (advertising that brought the world the AFLAC duck and the re-branding of Wendy's, among other campaigns), this is an easy read.

That doesn't mean it's fluff- not at all.

Just easy to digest.

I found myself marking passages and sharing the ideas with others.

Real life stories about people showing grit and ways to apply their actions in the real immediate world made this enjoyable and practical.

I highly suggest this for business, and also as a graduation gift.

(I received this book from Blogging for Books in exchange for a truthful review. I would happily have bought it myself. It's that good.)

Tags: Grit to Great, Linda Kaplan Thaler, Robin Koval, Crown Business, business book, book review

Bryce O'Connor says

I received this book as an ARC from a First Reads giveaway.

The message is nice. It celebrates perseverance and drive, or "grit" as the book calls it. My main problem is that it doesn't say anything that hasn't been said in a hundred books like it.

It's essentially a series of examples, successful people that failed and got back up. Mixed throughout are

stories of how the authors succeeded against all odds. These examples have a self-congratulatory tone, all in the third person, and some of their advertising triumphs (the Wendy's story struck me as particularly egregious) have a strange feeling of shilling for the companies they represent. Which is their entire job, technically, but it's not the feeling I should get when the examples are meant to inspire me.

The book is perfectly competent otherwise, it's not bad at all. Just repetitive. It could be summed up as "Hard work is what separates the dreamers from the doers, and a lot of successful people faced a lot of failure and rejection." This, while a good message, is repeated over and over with nothing new to add.

"Grit to Great" doesn't follow its own advice. If you want to set yourself apart from the hundreds of competitors, you have to put in the extra work to make yourself stand out. Unfortunately, this book doesn't do that.

Toby Amodeo says

Grit to Great is a fairly solid argument for the superiority of perseverance and resilience over pure talent or good connections.

The authors argue that having a big dream fleshed out with daily, achievable goals will breed more passion and inspire grit. Luckily, grit can be learned.

The second key trait they identify in successful people is optimism, which they also argue can be learned. Do you see setbacks as temporary challenges that your actions can overcome?

On the whole, I found the book useful and encouraging. I especially enjoyed the journaling or thought exercises at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, I did appreciate that the authors warned the reader to not use grit for something that didn't deserve the effort. If you want true happiness, they argue, devote yourself to a cause bigger than yourself.
