

Talent Is Overrated

What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else

by Geoff Colvin

Chapter 1 - The Mystery

- Most people never reach **outstanding performance** even if they practiced for decades.
- On average, experienced managers don't produce high-caliber outcomes.
- You become fine at your work with hard work but you won't become a great performer.
- Extraordinary performers may have a **gift** that they discovered at a **younger age**.
- Some searchers argue that the "gift" is a myth.
- High performers have **average IQ**.
- **Deliberate practice** is the key because they train themselves more efficiently.
- Today the scarce resource is no longer money but **human ability**.
- With the internet, workers have to compete with other workers around the world.

Chapter 2 - Talent Is Overrated

- Researchers made a study on musicians to try to find if "talent" was a thing. **High performers practiced more**.
- The elite group practiced 2 hours per day vs 15min for the lowest group.
- **Talent**: a natural ability to do something better than most people.
- Is someone talented if he needs years of practice to reach this level?
- Parents may be **nurturing a skill** in their children and call them gifted.
- The **science of genomics** has not proven yet that it exists genes identify particular talents.
- Mozart's father was also a musician and a teacher. Mozart's "talent" probably comes from **hard work** from a younger age.
- Tiger Wood's father was a golf addict and also a teacher. Same as Mozart, hard work made the champion.
- Warren Buffet and Bill Gates are other examples of high achievers and there is no evidence that they were going to become great business persons.

Chapter 3 - How Smart Do You Have to Be?

- **Memory and intelligence** are two key **skills** for great performance.
- Memory can be trained with practice.
- **IQ** measures general intelligence but doesn't measure social skills, honesty, or wisdom.
- Higher intelligence doesn't necessarily correlate with higher performance (ex: salesperson).
- IQ is a decent predictor of performance on an **unfamiliar task**, but once a person has been at a job for a few years, IQ predicts little or nothing about performance.
- A high IQ is not a prerequisite to extraordinary achievement.
- We are limited by our **physical constraints** (ex: height)
- Experience, inborn abilities, intelligence, and memory don't automatically drive high performance.

Chapter 4 - A Better Idea

- Jerry Rice is a football player, he spent little time playing football but **designed his practice** around his specific needs.
- In a study, the best violinists put more hours of lifetime practice.
- “The differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life-long period of **deliberate effort** to improve performance in a specific domain.”

Chapter 5 - What Deliberate Practice Is and Isn't

- **Deliberate practice** is an activity designed specifically to improve performance, often with a teacher's help; it can be **repeated a lot**; feedback on results is continuously available; it's highly demanding mentally, whether the activity is purely intellectual, such as chess or business-related activities, or heavily physical, such as sports; and it isn't much fun.
- Deliberate practice requires that one **identify certain sharply defined elements** of performance that need to be improved, and then **work intently** on them.

Chapter 6 - How Deliberate Practice Works

- **High performers** have better perceptions and interpretations of the indicators that average performers don't even notice.
- They anticipate the future to be better prepared and detect better the information.
- They also have more **knowledge in their field**. By understanding deeper the problem, they have **better strategies** to solve problems.
- Long-term working memory: top performers understand their field at a higher level and thus have a **superior structure for remembering information** about it.
- Expert's superior memory doesn't extend beyond their field of expertise.
- The more you practice the more you have myelination of your neurons.

Chapter 7 - Applying the Principles in Our Lives

- First, **define** what you want to accomplish.
- Then **design** the first steps of your deliberate practice.
- **Practicing directly**:
 - The music model: analyze a speech and its elements, and get feedback after each repetition.
 - The chess model: compare your decision with the one chosen by your mentor (case study).
 - The sports model: working on critical specific skills.
- **Practicing in the work**:
 - Before the work: **deliberate practice** requires that one identify certain sharply defined elements of performance that need to be improved, and then work intently on them.
 - During the work: **self-observation** with metacognition (knowledge about your knowledge, thinking about your thinking).
 - After the work: **self-evaluation** compared to their standards.
- **Deepening your knowledge**: become an expert in your field, build a mental model of your domain. The model helps you distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, and enables you to project what will happen next.

Chapter 8 - Applying the Principles in Our Organizations

- Deliberately put managers into **stretch** jobs that will require them to **learn and grow**.
- Give short-term work assignments **outside of the person's expertise** to stretch him.
- Encourage them to be active in their communities to **learn new skills**.
- Mentoring and **candid feedback**.
- Deliberate practice through inspiration.
- Invest time, energy, and money.
- Make leadership development part of the culture.

- **Develop teams**, not just individuals (risks are low trust, competing agendas, unresolved conflicts, unwillingness to face the real issues).

Chapter 9 - Performing Great at Innovation

- As products and technologies are becoming commoditized, **innovation and creativity** are becoming even more **valuable** by the day.
- **Inspiration striking the genius is a myth**, you need around 10 years of deliberate practice to get the “inspiration”.
- Knowledge is not a burden that limits people’s creativity.
- Technical innovation comes from the improvement of existing technologies.
- Organizations are not innovative, only people are.
- Give **clear direction** on what kind of innovations are valuable for the organization.
- **Authorize your team to innovate and fail**, extrinsic motivation (money) is not required.

Chapter 10 - Great Performance in Youth and Age

- With rising standards and knowledge, you need more effort to hope to excel.
- **A supporting home environment** enables a person to start developing early.
- **Parents** choose the teachers for their children and **invest time, money, and energy**.
- Need the combination of a **stimulating and supporting environment** to get an attentive and engaged student.
- **Aging** makes people **slow down** but doesn’t impact the performance of an expert in his field (musician, chess player, athletes).
- To **maintain the performance**, the expert still needs **deliberate practice**.

Chapter 11 - Where Does the Passion Come From?

- Deliberate practice is difficult and not funny but high performers may enjoy the practice.
- **Intrinsic drive** is more powerful than **extrinsic drive**.
- The extrinsic motivation that is controlling reduces creativity.
- In an organization, employees are **discouraged** because they don’t have the opportunity to work on projects they selected by themselves and because when they get promoted, they have more responsibilities and **less freedom**.
- **High performers** are not born with “passion” but find their intrinsic motivation later.
- Multiplier effect: “Each increase in competencies is matched to a **better environment**, and, in turn, the better environment will be expected to further enhance their competence.”
- To start the multiplier effect, starting deliberate practice earlier makes the child feel he is special, and begin learning skills where competition is sparse.