

Hello everyone. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, We Build Better Contractors.

This week, I want to talk about a book that I read. This was recommended to me in my peer group. It's GRIT by Angela Duckworth. This book has lots of acclaim, New York Times bestseller, recommended by my peer group. I mean, it was just considered a phenomenal book. I'll let you know at the end whether or not I recommend it for you, but in the meantime, it does have some important messages.

Now, why is this important to you? And here's an example. She talks about the United States military academy at West Point. They get 14,000 applicants and they only select 1,200, less than 10% of those applicants get in. Of those 10% that get in, 20% withdraw before graduation, so one out of five. They go through a relentless selection process. In spite of that, one out of five of the people they selected drop out. Now of those 12,000 plus they didn't select, would some of those people have been more likely to stick it out? Well, the answer of course is yes. So, she wanted to know why do the people that survive, you could apply this to Navy Seals BUD/S training or any other rigorous kinds of training, sports, things like that. Why do the people that make it, make it? Is it talent or is it something else?

Think about the people that are at the top of your field. Think about the top contractors in your area. What makes them special? What characterizes the behavior of these people? So, she asked the question in the book and it always came back two things, they're lucky and they're talented. Are they lucky? What's the old saying? Luck is when preparation meets opportunity. I think we're all lucky. Those of us who are successful in life are lucky to some degree. But if luck is when preparation meets opportunity, are we not creating our own luck? And certainly, they're talented. You can't disagree with that. The people that you know that are really successful are talented people. But aren't they more than that? The third characteristic she talks about is the people that are really successful in any field keep going on after failure. And that's what they talk about. That's what she characterizes as grit.

Why do they keep going? They have determination, of course, but they also have a direction. They have this vision of who they're going to be and what they're going to accomplish. And that vision may be very nebulous. Well, the vision is tight. How they're going to get there as nebulous. They don't care so much about the tactics of how they're going to get there, but they have this vision in their minds and hearts. This is what I'm going to be, and this is what my organization is going to look like when I'm finished with it. So we have a little graphic here for you, and she talks about talent and achievement. Most people think talented people are achievers, whether it's concert pianists, athletes, business people, whatever. Talented people achieve things. Well, that's not necessarily true, is it?

I remember meeting a guy back in the 1980s and he had an MBA back when MBAs were kind of new and rare even at that time. And he was a very bitter guy because he wasn't getting ahead in his organization. He kept saying, "I've got an MBA from such and such a school." He was credentialed and I think he was very smart. But he wasn't getting ahead in his organization. He was very bitter about it. He was talented and smart, but he wasn't achieving. So, when you encounter somebody like that, why is that? And Duckworth says that we're going to, here's where we add the information. Talent doesn't lead to achievement. Talent plus effort creates a skill. You work on your skill. You build and develop your skills. Once you have, you combine your talent with effort, and you have a skill. Skill, the skills that you develop times effort, that is what equals achievement.

So, I'm not suggesting effort means you go out and work, if you're working 60 hours a week, you pick up and work 80 hours a week. That's not what I'm saying at all. Effort means that you apply yourself in building your skills. You work smart, you don't necessarily work hard, and that leads to achievement. So, grit means holding the same top-level goal in your mind for a very, very long time. And another psychologist that she quotes in the book talks about the term, this is a great term, positive fantasizing. You see yourself at this level of success. You don't know how you're going to get there; you don't know what it's going to take exactly, but you have this vision, this positive fantasy of where you're going to be. And

you hold that in your mind for a very, very long period of time. Warren buffet was talking to his pilot, she quotes him in the book. And he said, "Surely you have aspirations bigger than just flying Warren Buffet around the country all the time." And the guy said he did. Buffet said, "Okay, this is what you do then. You write down, you sit down, and you think, and you write down your top 25 goals. And then you go back, and you circle the top five goals. And then you reread those other 20. Reread them and commit them to your mind and heart because the 20 that you didn't select are going to be the barriers to getting to the five that you did select." Those shiny objects, those misdirections, those things that vie for your attention and your time, those are the things that hold people back from achieving their long-term goals. It really takes a singular focus, okay? Successful people have to decide what not to do. They have to decide what to stop doing in order to really achieve their long-term goals.

Now, do I recommend this book? I'm going to say no. I think it's a great book. Well, it's a good book. I think it was fine to be a New York Times bestseller. I think they make the point about grit over and over. And when I think about who you are, who the people in this audience, contractors are about the grittiest people there are. You talk about people that keep going on after failure, even the best contractors when it comes down to it get, what, one job out of five? One job out of three? So, you fail upwards. You fail more than you win. And Calvin Coolidge said that so long ago before Angela Duckworth was even born.

Calvin Coolidge said, "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." Great quote from President Calvin Coolidge. And I think contractors instinctively know that grit allows them to get ahead. The great successful contractors show grit, less successful contractors, less grit, comes right down to that. Don't forget about bootcamp, October 21st this year, and this is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and We Build Better Contractors.