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It's no secret that I'm a big believer in the power of perseverance; I talk about it often on podcasts and write about it quite a bit as well. Growing up in the '80s meant a steady supply of Star Wars, Star Trek, and Battlestar Galactica, which I credit as the start of my being a lifelong fan and follower of all things related to space exploration. That said, you can imagine my double delight this week with the news that NASA's most technologically advanced rover successfully touched down on Mars, and its name happens to be...you know what's coming... Perseverance.

When it comes to naming Mars rovers, NASA has a pretty cool tradition of holding a contest where anyone can submit their vote, and plenty of people do, resulting in entries coming in from all over the globe. In this case, the winning name comes from Alexander Mather, a 7th-grade student hailing from Virginia who beat out 772,237 other space enthusiasts for the honor of having his suggestion selected. As a bonus aspect of having the winning choice, Alexander and his family received an invitation to attend the Cape Canaveral launch and have a front-row seat to witness the historic event. How does Alexander feel about that? "There are no words in the human language that can accurately describe the feeling."

Copy that, my man. Well said.

From NASA's perspective, the name is particularly fitting. Preparation for the Perseverance Rover mission, ambitious to begin with, was made infinitely more challenging by Covid. Existing plans and protocols for testing, travel, and assembly all needed to be reimaged, and pulling it all together despite the challenges makes Perseverance the true embodiment of the spirit of its name. During the naming ceremony, NASA defined perseverance as "making progress despite obstacles," which consistently needed to happen throughout the process leading up to launch.

Here's the tie-in to our own daily lives. While we may not be attempting a \$3 billion mission to explore a different planet, using that power of perseverance towards our own goals and daily mindset can help deliver results that bring major personal progressions in virtually every area. This approach is the simple but not easy part; persevering and plowing ahead when the challenges and setbacks build-up is often the part where plans get downgraded to wishes. (As the saying goes: if it were easy, everyone would be doing it)

If we zoom in a little closer, another way to describe this mindset is grit. This term is perhaps best known by Dr. Angela Duckworth's research and specialization on the topic and her description of "having passion and perseverance towards your long-term goals". (Her TED Talk on the subject is easily found on YouTube and well worth watching).

Grit is directly applicable to our personal goals as typically; those are where we are emotionally invested. (For example, while we may demonstrate perseverance in completing a task like painting the living room, it's unlikely we are emotionally invested in completing it, so the passion aspect isn't as present).

It's difficult to overstate how powerful a force grit is, not merely for focusing on a particular goal but as a daily approach to the challenges, setbacks, and adversity that we all inevitably face in daily life. Developing a mindset that no matter what gets thrown at you, quitting is not an option is pursuit well worth the effort. Getting comfortable being uncomfortable and having the fortitude and willingness to do what others will retreat from because the journey is too long and challenging, or in military terms, "embrace the suck".

Success is not a coincidence, and I would venture to say that most of the people you know or read about that are performing at peak levels and achieving those audacious and outsized goals share a common trait of grit. Talent, education, and intelligence are all wonderful attributes to have, no question there. Still, without the passion to stay on course when the going gets tough, I would put my money on the person with the 'burn the boats' mentality to have more long-term success. If you consider it for a minute, you can probably think of people you have met over the years that seem to have all the right ingredients to do big things in life. Somehow though, while

it seems they have everything going for them, they consistently fall short. Perhaps they start pursuing a goal only to abandon it when it becomes too difficult, or a problem pops up that causes them to give up without digging into the possible solutions to overcome it. Obviously, this does not make them a bad person, it's often just an example of settling for the easier road of mediocrity versus the tougher terrain that comes along with the journey towards reaching peak potential. Their recipe for success had all the right ingredients, except it was missing a critical component: the passion for persevering towards that long-term goal (grit).

If you recognize that this is an area that you would like to improve upon and get 'grittier' in your approach to sticking with your commitments, it's important to remember is that it is never too late to change. History is not destiny, and simply because this is something you have struggled with in the past does not mean you cannot build these skills starting immediately.

For a takeaway, here are three core areas for developing more grit according to Duckworth:

1. **Practice-** There's a good reason the 10,000-hour rule has become well known and regarded as a way to develop mastery in any area; it tends to work! As much as we live in an on-demand world where instant gratification has become the norm, there are no shortcuts for putting in the time, and the expectation of results without effort is a set-up for disappointment. A big part of this is adopting the mentality of delayed gratification and accepting that hard work now will result in a payoff for your future self. Part of this also involves understanding that there will be unforeseen challenges along the way, and these setbacks are opportunities to learn, not reasons to throw in the towel.
2. **Purpose-** This comes back to the passion part. If you don't care about something, it's unlikely you're going to be willing to put in the time to practice it. Having clarity on your priorities and interests will help you focus your attention on what matters most and eliminate the distracting pursuits that divert your efforts and time. We all face an endless assault on our attention every day (social media is the #1 culprit for many of us), and it's a critical self-management skill ('attentional-control') to channel your resources to what matters most to you. Also, there will always be people who would like to explain why

what you are trying to do is impossible. That's fine as long as they don't get in your way while you're doing it! Understand that your level of commitment and dedication to a purpose may have you operating at a higher frequency than many people, and sometimes that means the life you live begins looking a lot different from theirs. Recognizing this likelihood is a big step in the right direction of overcoming FOPO (fear of other people's opinions). All too often, we tend to first consider what other people may think and let that prioritize and dictate the choices we make. Being the CEO of your own life means developing clarity on your long-term vision of success. As the quote goes, "when you write the story of your life, don't let someone else hold the pen".

3. **Hope-** Having the feeling that the destination is worth all the long miles of the journey keeps the wind in the sails and creates motivation from within. Slight but steady progress will keep you continuously moving in the right direction and help build resilience from any negative self-talk or doubt. Remember that failure is part of the process, and each setback serves the purpose of providing insight on how to improve. Thomas Edison had a great quote, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work".

Perseverance and building up your grit are mental muscles developed through repetition. Like any muscle, the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes, and the workout itself gets locked in as a habit. Over time you will find yourself automatically breaking challenges and goals down into the components of what needs to happen next in the process and questions whether or not you can do something will be replaced by the surety that you most certainly can, it's just the question of how. Unexpected problems will happen, and with them come new opportunities to develop your skill at identifying solutions. You will find that this high-performance mindset brings a realization that you want to keep aiming higher with your goals and aspirations and that the main limitations in your life are mental boundaries that are self-created.

One last quote, this one by Confucius: "The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential...these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence."

Confucius may not have called it grit but it sure sounds like that's what he was referring to.

As always, feel free to drop me a line at eric@bar40.org and let me know your approach to making 2021 your best year ever!