

## Persisting Toward Success

I believe one of the most important skills learned in college is the ability to persist in the face of challenge, thus finding a way to succeed. Students learn to be gritty, in part, by not dropping a class at the first sign of a challenge. Classroom success contributes to early career success if students develop persistence.



How important is persistence? Angela Duckworth's book and Ted talk, with over 17 million views, examines persistence. She defines grit as passion and perseverance toward a goal. She argues that persistence is a mark of high achievers. For her video, see: [https://www.ted.com/talks/angela\\_lee\\_duckworth\\_grit\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_passion\\_and\\_perseverance?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance?language=en).

Academics study the connection between persistence and success. Similarly, the personal growth literature is filled with article titles such as Blankenship's "8 Successful People Who Proved Persistence Beats Perfection." The *Wall Street Journal* and related news outlets report on the connection between persistence and career success. For example, persistence is one of the traits mentioned in "Tough CEOs Often Most Successful, A Study Finds" <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119543240896797405>. One outcome of a lack of persistence for the generation now entering college is that on-campus health centers are witnessing a rise in student anxiety and depression as discussed in this recent podcast: <https://fs.blog/jonathan-haidt/>.

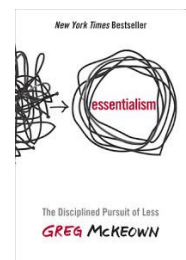
The ancient story of David and Goliath from 1 Samuel Chapter 17 is about persisting toward success in the face of a challenge. What does it teach us about persistence? Key lessons include:

- Knowing what's essential,
- Building transferrable skills,
- Growing self-awareness,
- Having a back-up plan, and
- Acting decisively - with conviction.

## Elements of Persistence

Here are seven things we can take-away from the story:

1. Recognize what's most essential. David focused on the cause, not on the size of the challenge. He was clearly aware of his highest point of contribution, to quote Greg McKeown.
2. Learn from experience. David recalled prior life challenges, hence continual learning and skill building is of great value in a career IF I'm able to convert those prior experiences to useful insights.



3. Know how your skills transfer elsewhere. David observed that his success in protecting the family's flock could apply right here, right now. He saw issues beyond himself at work in his life. He was a strategic thinker with a sound operating strategy.
4. Be both self-aware and selective. David said "no" to the king's armor realizing his skill set and approach to this challenge required agility. Moving quickly was part of his "vital few," again quoting McKeown.

*"The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything." Warren Buffett*

5. Give yourself multiple changes to succeed. David picked up five stones. He only needed one but had resources to try again. This is the 1000 BC version of risk diversification!
6. Don't be discouraged by undue criticism. Allies, family, and enemies all expressed disdain at David's capability to succeed in the face of this significant challenge. He persisted due to personal conviction. He would have been a great start-up founder!
7. Run toward your problems. It's important to be deliberate with decisions but don't become paralyzed by over-analysis. David charged the giant; the rest is history.

*"...knowing what must be done does away with fear." Rosa Parks*

## Some Observations

David's actions inspired others. His story is a great example of an early career success.

How did David respond after this initial win? He didn't let it go to his head but instead "behaved himself wisely." How many startup founders have struggled after a successful IPO or initial product launch? How many high flyers believe the rules don't apply to them?

It's important early in a career to persist toward successful outcomes but even more important to develop a longer-term view regarding humility plus a solid grounding in regard to what's most essential.

What else should we be telling college students about preparing for life success?



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