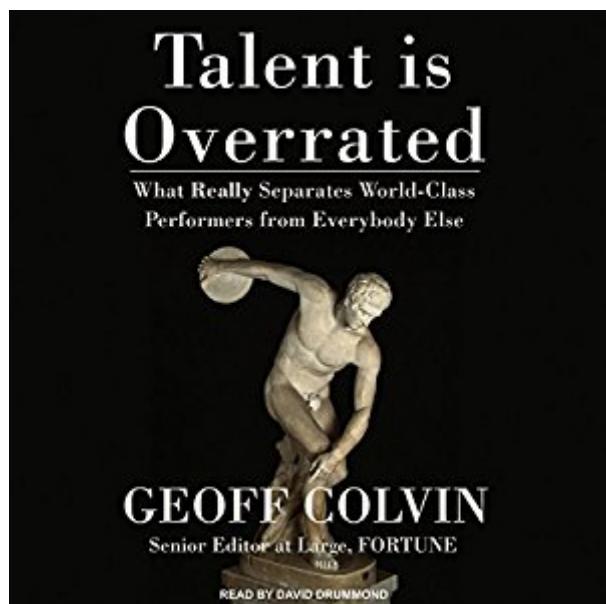


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# Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers From Everybody Else



## **Synopsis**

One of the most popular Fortune articles in many years was a cover story called "What It Takes to Be Great." Geoff Colvin offered new evidence that top performers in any field-from Tiger Woods and Winston Churchill to Warren Buffett and Jack Welch-are not determined by their inborn talents. Greatness doesn't come from DNA but from practice and perseverance honed over decades. And not just plain old hard work, like your grandmother might have advocated, but a very specific kind of work. The key is how you practice, how you analyze the results of your progress and learn from your mistakes, that enables you to achieve greatness. Now Colvin has expanded his article with much more scientific background and real-world examples. He shows that the skills of business-negotiating deals, evaluating financial statements, and all the rest-obey the principles that lead to greatness, so that anyone can get better at them with the right kind of effort. Even the hardest decisions and interactions can be systematically improved. This new mind-set, combined with Colvin's practical advice, will change the way you think about your job and career-and will inspire you to achieve more in all you do.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This was one of the best books that I have ever read on the topic on talent and skill development! It has a similar concept to "Outliers" by Malcolm Gladwell, but takes the concept a bit further. In this book, Geoff Colvin explores whether people with extraordinary talent (such as Lebron James or Yo Yo Ma) have some hidden advantage that makes them great. His answers delves into the nature of

how we learn, how we develop skills and whether we have the ability to jump from playing amateur golf on the weekends to the PGA tour. A great book and one that I would highly recommend!!

This is an outstanding book on excellence. Myth-busting yet liberating in the opportunities it lays open to the reader. Deserves to be read by one and all - and should be mandatory reading especially for parents I may suggest. There are several books that talk about performance and the secrets, so to say, behind success and developing world-class skills. itself lists 119,049 books on the subject. There is even a magazine named "Success" on the topic. *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell is one recent book on the subject. This book, *Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else*, however is perhaps the best and most comprehensive look at what it takes to deliver world-class performance. Not deep, because the book does not delve into the neurological, psychological or other factors in depth that affect success. It does mention myelin, but only as a possible contributor to efficacy in performance, but something that has not been proven beyond doubt in its ability to affect performance in adults. But comprehensive because it looks at almost all aspects of building world-class competencies, thinks of alternative explanations of genius, examines popular conceptions and misconceptions of genius, personalities through the ages thought to be endowed with some sort of a "genius" gene, medical explanations, and more. The history of outstanding skills is not new. The thinking however has changed dramatically. From believing that everyone was born with an inborn, innate, fixed capacity for a certain level of performance to more modern thinking that believes outstanding skills are the composite result of several factors, all of which are within the grasp of most humans - there has been a significant change in mindsets. What however still persists is the popular belief that some people are "just born with talent", perpetuated by fatuous journalists looking for a story that is more exotic than the rather mundane "hard work" theory. You never got a successful headline that read "Long hours, hard work, focused practice - the secret of success." It is much easier for us to believe, and rather, very important for the preservation of our self-esteem, that success that attends the outstanding performers is not within the reach of us, "average" humans. If we had to believe that success is in our hands, then we would also have to believe that we did not work towards achieving it. Much more comforting to the ego to believe that outstanding talent is "inborn", that some people are "simply born with it", or that some are "just good with numbers", or that some "have a photographic memory". What about the quaint but oft-repeated accusation against formal schooling? The one where people claim that schooling actually makes you less likely to "create" something? That schooling actually ends up making you no different from the others, a replica of each other,

stamped from the assembly-line output of education factories? This is a oft-repeated accusation against schools, most often heard being spouted by armchair experts from the comfortable confines of headline seeking news outlets. The author begs to differ. And what about evidence for the related notion that excessive schooling is correlated with lower creative achievement? ... Indeed, in many creative fields the person who pursues an advanced degree has consciously chosen a path that leads to a professorship, not to a life of innovating in that domain; it makes perfect sense that in these fields, those with the most years of formal schooling would be less eminent as innovators. ... Innovation doesn't reject the past; on the contrary, it relies heavily on the past and comes most readily to those who've mastered the domain as it exists. [pages 155-157]There does seem to be some scientific truth behind the assertion that it is easier to learn things when you are young. A separate effect involves myelin, the substance that wraps slowly around neurons with practice, insulating and strengthening key connections in the brain. ... Starting early holds advantages that become less available later in life. [page 171]This is something that the book, What's Going on in There? : How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life, also describes. That myelin could play a vital role in helping strengthen these key connections, especially in the first few years of life. BUT, and the big but is that there is no evidence that the same holds true for people later on in life. In the research, the poorest performers don't set goals at all; they just slog through their work. Mediocre performers set goals that are general and are often focused on simply achieving a good outcome... best performers make the most specific, technique-oriented plans. ... The best performers observe themselves closely. They are in effect able to step outside themselves, monitor what is happening in their own minds, and ask how it's going. Researchers call this metacognition ... Average performers believe their errors were caused by factors outside their control... Top performers, by contrast, believe they are responsible for their errors. [pages 116-119] There may well be a so-called "talent gene" that determines success and expertise in some particular area of activity, but "...All we can say for the moment is that no specific genes identifying particular talents have been found." [page 24] Talent skeptics are careful to say that the evidence, taken together, doesn't prove that talent is a myth. They allow that further research could eventually show that individual genetic differences are what make the greatest performers so accomplished. But hundreds of studies conducted over decades have failed to show this. On the contrary, the preponderance of them have suggested very powerfully that genetic differences of this particular type - that is, differences that determine the highest levels of performance - don't exist. [page 25]There you go - as closely and as clearly as one can say in the language of science, that there is no evidence of a "talent gene". On the other hand, there is ample evidence, backed by rigorous

scientific studies, that hard work pays. On factor, and only one factor, predicted how musically accomplished the students were and that was how much they practiced. [page 18]"The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance (PDF)", by Anders Ericsson, Ralf Th. Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Romer proposed "a new theoretical framework for understanding why some people are so remarkably good at what they do."... In a study of chess players, Nobel Prize winner Herbert Simon and William Chase (Ericsson's coauthor on the memory study) proposed the "ten-year rule," ... Subsequent research in a wide range of fields has substantiated the ten-year rule everywhere the researchers have looked. In math, science, musical composition, swimming, X-ray diagnosis, tennis, literature ... ... Many researchers and authors produce their greatest work only after twenty or more years of devoted effort It could be put very simply: What the authors called "deliberate practice" makes all the difference. ... "the differences between expert performers and normal adults reflects a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain." [pages 61 - 63]Deliberate practice is characterized by several elements. It's designed specifically to improve performance. ... Decades or centuries of study have produced a body of knowledge about how performance in developed and improved ... At least in the early going, therefore, and sometimes long after, it's almost always necessary for a teacher to design the activity best suited to improve an individual's performance. In general, well-designed practice, pursued for enough time, enables a person to circumvent the limitations that would otherwise hold back his or her performance, and circumventing limitations is the key to high performance at an advanced age. In a study of chess players, the older ones chose moves just as well as the younger ones, but they did it in a different way. They didn't consider as many possible moves because they couldn't; but they compensated through greater knowledge of positions. [pages 181-182]Praise at a young age can often be the single biggest motivator for a child to latch on to a particular skill at a task and hone it over the next ten or fifteen years into world-class expertise. ... as people start learning skills in virtually any field, they're typically compared not against the world's greatest performers in that field but against others their own age. ... Standing out at any given age is an excellent way to attract attention and praise, fueling the multiplier, and it can be done without relying on any innate ability. [page 202]In closing: But if you believe that your performance is forever limited by your lack of a specific innate gift, or by a lack of general abilities at a level that you think must be necessary, then there's no chance at all that you will do that work. That's why this belief is tragically constraining. Everyone who has achieved exceptional performance has encountered terrible difficulties along the way. There are no exceptions. If you believe that doing the right kind of work can overcome the problems, then you have at least a chance of moving on to ever better performance. But those who

see the setbacks as evidence that they lack the necessary gift will give up - quite logically, in light of their beliefs. [pages 205-206]

The work is what matters. *Talent Is Overrated* makes that point clear with informational anecdotes, statistics, and compelling language. Geoff Colvin breaks down what makes the top performers who they are. His ability to see past the false narrative of talent being the main cause of success, is a gift for all of us. It's all about practice, but it's deeper than that. You have to know how to practice. Geoff breaks down what makes practice effective with a model anybody can follow. It's always a treat when a personal development book has facts for proof, convincing narratives, and action steps. If you want to get better, this book can help. It's not just for athletes, musicians, and such. It can be used for doctors, writers, students, and everybody in between. Because talent is overrated, the work matters.

This book should be read along with Ericsson's *Peak* and Duckworth's *Grit*. They both support the science that talent has been away for some to explain away and dismiss the enormous amount of time and effort (now known as deliberate practice and purposeful practice) that individuals devote to being great at somethings. It really is an insult to the top tennis players that they must have talent when in actuality they sacrifice a lot in their lives that we choose to do--like they get up at 4am to practice while others are still asleep. Know what what want and know what you believe is the authors last idea. If we believe that hard work and deliberate practice are the starting point and tools to be great at something then this books removes the excuses and asks, "So now what's your excuse for not working hard to be the best?" Be careful reading this book and consider yourself warned. You may actually become great at the "what" in life that you've always dreamed about. Great dreams and dreams of being great at something really can become a reality!!

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