

Hidden Potential

Adam Grant provides a brilliant analysis of the personal and organizational struggle to develop hidden potential i.e., get better. Discussing both the personal side of understanding one's own potential and the organizational side of discovering hidden potential through organizations like school systems and hiring practices, Grant offers a thought-provoking perspective. While some of Grant's discussion touches on ideas that may be polarizing, it's best to leave your political bent behind and thoughtfully interact with the information Grant relays. There's something here to learn for all of us.

Skills of Character

The first section of the book covers skills of character. These are elements that may play a significant role in each person's endeavour to reach more of their own potential. In the first place, learning in order to improve requires accepting the awkwardness of learning. There are certainly moments of vulnerability in the effort to learn, and risks associated with that. Grant encourages us to move toward that discomfort, do the uncomfortable things and take those risks in order to learn. Coupled with that, we must learn to be sponges, absorbing knowledge and experience wherever we can. Finally, those that struggle with perfectionism and linear thinking, which is more of us than we care to admit, must find a balance and a way to tolerate imperfections.

Embracing imperfections might be one of the more important skills for us to learn because perfectionism destroys working relationships, devalues people, and is most often based in obsessive tendencies. Additionally, imperfections are often elements that provide beauty and character to our world.

Structures for Motivation

Opposite to the thinking of will-power conquers all, the building of structures known as scaffolding, facilitates better chances of growing closer to our potential and bringing out the hidden potential. Concepts such as deliberate play can offer invaluable ways to bring motivation to sometimes monotonous or repetitive disciplines. Deliberate play can transform those disciplines into interesting and exciting moments. Further, we are often faced with a challenge that requires a bit of a reset, or sometimes a setback. We may not see improvement in realizing our potential until we go back to the drawing board a few times. It could be compared to learning and using new equipment in the pro audio world. At first, a transition from analogue to digital might be a step backward and concert sound deteriorates. But as we learn a new tool and approach, we break new ground well past our previous best sound.

Systems of Opportunity

Discussing education systems, team potential and intelligence, and unveiling the best in potential employees, Grant applies concepts from the first two portions of the book. There is a lot of value in this discussion and some of it may challenge our current thinking. However, the gem in this discussion reveals that the concepts from Grant's work could be invaluable when applied well. Sometimes counter-intuitive, such as the information on team intelligence, the lesson here is that whether hiring, educating, or working with teams, time and relationships play a big role in discovering and realizing hidden potential and getting better.

(Credit to Adam Grant, Hidden Potential, Viking, 2023)