



**Grit: Passion, Perseverance, and Parkinson's
with Angela Duckworth**

Recorded on June 1, 2021
Davis Phinney Foundation

Melani Dizon (Director of Education and Research, Davis Phinney Foundation):

So, we are here to talk with Angela Duckworth on grit, passion, perseverance, and Parkinson's. And we are so honored to be here. I told Angela when we were getting ready that I've been a fan girl for years and years and years. So, this is a really big honor to be able to talk to you. Davis and Connie, thank you for being here to watch this as well.

We're going to be talking about grit and how we handle adversity in our lives, which is certainly true for people who have been given a Parkinson's diagnosis. Before we get started, I just want to thank our Peak Partners, Adamas, Amneal, Lundbeck, and Sunovion, thank you for supporting our educational content and making it possible for us to provide education in lots of different ways for free to our community. Okay, so I'm going to introduce Angela.

She is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, author of the book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. She has a TED talk that has been viewed over 20 million times. She has a podcast with Stephen Dubner called "No Stupid Questions," which, incidentally, is how I got Angela to do this. I said "No stupid questions... I'm gonna ask you to join us for our webinars." She was very gracious to say yes. She's also the founder and CEO of Character Lab and we will be sure to put up all of those links for you today so you can check out more about Angela.

So again, thank you so much for being here.

Angela Duckworth, PhD (Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, Best-Selling Author of *Grit* and Founder of The Character Lab):

Thanks Mel. I'm really excited for this conversation, I'm, you know, somebody who who's own family has been touched by Parkinson's, I'm happy to elaborate, and so when I got the invitation, I thought well I can't say no.

Melani Dizon:

I love that. So, do you want to share a little bit about what your connection is to Parkinson's?

Angela Duckworth:

Yeah briefly, and my PhD has nothing to do with medical science so, I actually have questions about Parkinson's, but I certainly can't answer any from a medical perspective. My dad who's not with us anymore but he had Parkinson's diagnosis really for the last two decades of his life and he lived to a, you know, very healthy 87 so he had a very good run.

And actually, we lost him at the very beginning of the pandemic. He was, you know, quite, quite frail from a number of different conditions, including Parkinson's but actually several other things that he had going on and anyway so I certainly see the relevance to the research on behavior change and grit, you know, not only for the Parkinson's patient but also for the family, and the caregivers, for the loved one.

Melani Dizon:

Great, thanks so let's talk about this, why grit? How did you get to studying grit? What led you down that path?

Angela Duckworth:

Well speaking of my dad. He's really responsible for my research direction because you know he raised my sister and my brother and myself, you know, he of course, had a partner in this, my mom, but really I think my dad should take the credit for leaving all of us with a kind of an obsession with achievement, because he just talked about it all the time when we were growing up and you know he so admired people who had gone to the Olympics.

And won medals or every year when the Nobel Prizes got announced you know he would read to us from the newspaper and I think that fascination with achievement for my dad went along with a narrative where like some people are really gifted and kind of obviously smarter than others, more talented and you know he looked at the three of us kids and was very candid in saying that we were not the geniuses that, you know, end up winning these prizes later on.

And I had a rebellious streak I think as a little girl and I immediately wanted to prove him wrong, which I then spent the professional life as a psychologist you know amassing research showing that it's not just your giftedness or your native talent that determines whether you go to the Olympics, win a Nobel Prize, you know triumph over adversity in your personal life. And in fact, this quality of grit, which is the combination of passion and perseverance, over really long periods so it's a kind of stamina quality, that's not correlated at all with measures of IQ or physical talent. So, you know I felt like my dad was overlooking a really important part of the equation when we talk about achieving our potential or living, certainly leading a meaningful life.

Melani Dizon:

Right. Great. So, I'm excited to sort of pull apart the idea of the passion and the perseverance. So, we're going to talk a little bit about exercise and people with Parkinson's.

And I know a lot of your work serves as great advice for parents and teachers on how to get kids and students to thrive, especially you know if there are people that have just said like well, I don't have the talent, or I'm not naturally gifted in something. What can we take from those learnings and apply them to adults in particular an adult living with a chronic condition that you know they're expected to persist, to persevere, to keep doing things that are difficult with Parkinson's, it isn't a matter of just let me take a pill and everything's all hunky dory, you actually have to take action every day to live well.

So, what can we take from that?

Angela Duckworth:

Well, the, the possibility of human beings to unlock stores of energy and motivation, you know this idea goes all the way back to really 1900s, so at that time there was a psychologist named William James, and he was probably the most prominent psychologist at Harvard University.

And he had, you know, authored develop textbook, Principles of Psychology and so forth and around the turn of the century last century, he wrote this essay called the energies of men, and he just made the observation that our motivation and our effort can really actually be so much greater than we at first think as possible, and he talked about for example if any of you are familiar with like when you're running and you really feel like you just can't run anymore, or you can't run any, you know faster and then, you know, you get a second wind right he actually just used that as a metaphor to say like you know we have, as he put it, like, you know, it's as if we're half-awake like we have stores of energy and stores of motivation that that can be released, you know, under the right circumstances.

So, I think the trick when you're talking about a chronic disease like Parkinson's, is that you don't have a sprint you have a marathon right because it really is like a marathon with no obvious finish line right it's longer than 26.2 miles.

And so, the quality of grit that I study is really, you know, studying people who are able to sustain energy toward goals, not over like a day or week but really over almost indefinite period.

And what's remarkable about these women and men, you know, some of whom yes go to the Olympics and some of whom yes are Nobel laureates, but I think more importantly are just like the admirable women and men who triumph over challenge in their life, is that it's not the intensity of their motivation. It's the consistency, it's really the stamina with which, so it's not that they, you know, are an 11 out of 10 on motivation everybody else is a three out of 10 it's more that you know you come back, like the next year and the next year and then five years

later and like they have somehow maintained a consistent level of motivation towards something that's very hard. I do want to add this though and I think for all of you like extremely gritty people, I want you to know that nevertheless, motivation and energy, always go up and down, and even for the grittiest of performers.

There are good days. And there are bad days, and I'll just use myself as a trivial example. So, you know, this last February, like I would just say was like not a great month for me like I was like, you know, really not myself, I you know didn't sleep well it wasn't like, you know, I was like dramatically under productive.

And I was just like, wow, this is a terrible month. And I would not say that you know if you dropped into my life at that time, you'd be like wow like Angela Duckworth like she's got it like. But the thing that does I think make me, you know, somewhat gritty, is that I didn't count myself out at the end of February wasn't like well, it's a disaster like I'll never like it's more like what was going this February I asked questions about like why it wasn't sleeping and like why didn't feel it and I was like you know what I think the weather is really getting me down and like, you know, I had to find alternative ways to you know get back to routine when it was icy and snowy outside.

In other words, if I say that, grit is consistency of your passion and perseverance over the long term. We don't want you to come away from this conversation thinking that if you have bad days, or you find bumps in the road or you like fall down on your face and you have a little struggle to get up like that, that just makes you human and every gritty individual that I study, you know has those bad days too.

And as long as you do get up and as long as you learn something from falling down, I think, you know that's the name of the game.

Melani Dizon:

You know that's such a great point. One of the things we do talk a lot about Parkinson's being a marathon, not a sprint. And when I go back and think about, you know, exercise, whether I'm you know training for triathlons or marathons or whatever you have this like periodization right, like you're going to have different cycles.

Unfortunately, Parkinson's has no cycle. There's no point where you're like, okay, and we're sort of hardwired right to kind of have a goal and to like, meet this thing and then to be done and then we have another one and this one is just like it's never going away you're gonna wake up every day and have this.

And so, I think it's a really good point right to point out to people, you might have, you know, five six months of you're exercising and it's just, it's going and you're doing what you need to do you might not always love it but you're getting up to do it. And then you're going to have days

where you're like, I can't, I'm too tired or whatever. And it's, yeah don't count yourself out like talk to somebody this morning who's who had covid, he has Parkinson's, and what he's finding is that his post covid symptoms had been fatigue, this is happening for a lot of people who had covid right but when you had Parkinson's you had fatigue anyway, so he's like, um this is really challenging. He's like, I can't get up to walk I'm not doing those things and, but he has a different mindset he's like I will get there. I know this is also going to pass.

Angela Duckworth:

So yeah, and it's not that we're saying that like strive for inconsistency we're just saying that like inconsistency and like the ups and downs are, you know, part of the endless marathon and so don't beat yourself up too much about that. I can give you a couple of ideas for getting yourself out of a rut, that are based on new behavioral science. So, um, one thing that helps people is like keeping track, like Jerry Seinfeld famously you know would check off on his calendar every day that he'd like try to like make up a joke right and like you would like try to get these streaks that are longer and longer.

And some of you may have this like you know already built into routine so streaks are for many people extremely motivating. You don't even have to get paid, you just have to like have a calendar and then you just like put X marks on it and you know every time you look at it, you know like day 217, you know, you don't want to break your streak so it's like oh I really don't feel like taking a walk, but like, I don't want to lose 217 days so streaks are helpful.

So, if that resonates with you, streaks is an idea, but it has to go with this other idea which is you need a safety. Sometimes we break our streak and then what we don't want is to feel like oh we fell off the wagon and now like we're never going to go walking again because like we just lost 217 days in a streak etc.

So, what some scientists called these is like emergency reserve days, so you can have imaginary like currency and you're like, it's like you have this like emergency savings so you can say like, my goal is to have a streak, like the longest possible streak, but I need to give myself like two emergency savings days which is like I'm going to let myself put like two x's on this calendar, you know, even if I didn't like go walking that day and you make that deal with yourself from the very beginning, and that helps a little bit like when you fall off the wagon you're like, I'll just use one of my emergency days.

It turns out when researchers study this is that we're very motivated to keep our streak going and we're very motivated not to like squander our emergency reserve days. So, it's basically this trickery that you're playing with yourself, but it can be you know helpful, especially when you're talking about the endless marathon right.

Another, you know, mental framework that other people find helpful is to just not think about the fact that it's endless, you know, in Alcoholics Anonymous at least in some chapters. There's a green card literally a green card you can Google it, and it says just for today.

And, you know, if you are a recovering alcoholic that too is an endless marathon and like if there you don't get breaks from it, you're never done, you don't check it off the list and it's very hard.

And so, what I think this green card in your wallet reminds you of is that, or at least gets you to shift your focus to is like, if you do think of, you know, every day as like an endless marathon I mean that itself is exhausting.

But you think like just for today, like just for today I want to take a drink or like, you know, I don't know if I can keep doing this forever but like, just for today I'm going to take my walk. Just for today, like. And so, again, you're doing all this mental trickery so that you can maneuver and manipulate your own motivation, and that is what highly successful people do. All of the various successful people the happy and productive people that I study are like, kind of, you know bartering with themselves, like kicking themselves like, you know, putting the Halloween candy in the freezer so they don't eat it like, you know, like knowing that if they call their friend and say I'm going to meet you tomorrow for a walk, knowing that if I do that I won't be able to get out of it right so it's all this kind of almost like manipulation of yourself in order to like keep your motivation as consistent as possible.

Again, knowing that of course you're going to have some ups and downs and good days and bad days, good months and bad months, but I think if any of these tricks resonate with you or if you have your own tricks right like keeping your sneakers out or like, you know, putting on Facebook like whatever goal, it is that you have to like you know get some public accountability from your friends and family.

All those tricks are part of what you know very productive and successful people do so keep doing them and, you know, always keep your eyes out for more tricks.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, I love the Seinfeld reference. Leigh if you could look up if you Google don't break the chain, Jerry Seinfeld, you can get the PDF, I actually have it next to my treadmill. I love it I love I'm like oh my gosh Let me check that off like I do not want to see something so definitely, you can download that PDF put it somewhere.

And then the I love, we're doing an EVCC challenge coming up in July and it's a, we did it we started it last year because of pandemic. And it's a whole month. And this whole thing about putting something on Facebook or telling people your goal is a really great way and that community is super fun and super engaging so if you're looking to kind of get started.

That's a really great opportunity to do that.

Angela Duckworth:

And very recent research looked at all of the, you know, goals are really important way that human beings motivate themselves. When's the last time you decided to do something hard without setting a goal right like goals are magical. And to your point Mel like when we publicly announced them so it's not a private goal but like you tell someone you tell your spouse you tell your daughter in law, you post it on Facebook, you tweet it, like that has been shown scientifically to increase the effectiveness of goals so it's a way of like turbocharging your goals by going and telling everybody what you're doing.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, it's also really interesting because I'll find myself like I'll set a goal in my head, and I'll be like oh my god I'm gonna tell somebody and then I get scared and I'm like oh god I can't tell them because then I have to do it really is it really makes a difference. So, if you're one of those people that likes to get that accountability and also just like you need a little, "Come on, you can do it" it's a good way to do it.

So, I want to talk a little bit about. So, the passion and perseverance piece. It's tough right so some people they love exercising, they're like, oh I've actually been doing this all along and thank God it helps people with Parkinson's because I'm already doing it. Some people, no, that's not what they do they never have liked it, they might call themselves, you know, they might identify as somebody who hates exercising.

How do you get those two to work when the passion's not there?

Angela Duckworth:

When doesn't come naturally, and you like have to do it. It's a should not want. Well, one of the things about the gritty women and men that I study you know usually in a different context right like you know who wins the National Spelling Bee like who graduates from West Point, without exception, I found that there is intrinsic motivation for things that you're really passionate about. So, to your point, Mel like it's so much easier when you want to study biology, and then you have to study biology, it's like, you know, now Parkinson's is a different beast because it happens to you and you may not have chosen, you know the routines that you need to adopt like once having that diagnosis. I think of my dad actually never loved exercise, didn't grow up exercising, he was not of that generation. He grew up in China in the 1930s and nobody was on the treadmill then I'm pretty sure.

And I think one thing that he could have done differently, is now backed up by science which is that when we think of things that we should do, like I should take a walk I should eat this I should not eat that or we tend to spontaneously think of oh well because it's going to make me

healthy and you think about like the long term the future, but that's not actually very motivating right so if you say to me like hey, you know like, here's a salad, like you know if you eat the salad like maybe there's this like very small chance that you'll live like a little bit longer and a little healthier like that does not make me want to eat the salad, like at all. Right. But if you make the salad delicious and motivating immediately, that's the way to get me to eat the salad. So, the question is how can you make exercise fun, right?

So, some people love all forms of exercise, God bless them, right like but you might not be that way, but there might be something that you like more than others.

One thing my dad didn't do was like you know he when he realized he needed to exercise like he was like oh I guess I'll go to the gym, and I'll get a trainer which he did. But he never loved it and he didn't even like it and so it was always a kind of like well I guess I'll do it and he didn't do it very much.

Was there a form of exercise that my dad would have enjoyed more now thinking back I think like one of the things that we really enjoyed doing together was just taking walks around the neighborhood and like talking about like philosophy or whatever.

And probably, it would have been better for me or to him to say like, let's take a walk every day and talk about current events in history and so like that would have been more motivating and more fun for him more intrinsically motivating more immediately gratifying.

Then, like oh I guess I'll go to the gym, because like that's, you know, like, good for me. So, I guess the moral of the story here is, whatever it is that you need to do that you should do. Can you again through this like mental trickery or just through like strategic choices, find a way to do that is immediately gratifying. And, you know, one way to, like say it in three words is make it fun, right and I don't think human beings are very good at doing things over the long term that aren't in some ways, immediately fun for them.

Melani Dizon:

Right, yeah. So, the one like we've had several people that have kind of gone down the road of like I sold accident, they don't like it, and they kind of try all the things they run they ride their bikes they go to boxing and lots of people landed on something like dance, where something they was actually not something they ever did. And now all this, now they dance every day. And so, and there's that saying and I'm going to get it wrong but it's something like, it's not what you do, once in a while. It's what you do every day, I'm butchering it but the whole thing is like in your dad's case it probably would have been better to go walking every single day than it was to go to the gym twice.

Angela Duckworth:

Very occasionally go to the gym and work out with a trainer...

Melani Dizon:

Right, right. So yeah, no, you're totally right I mean from a physical standpoint for sure but also from a behavioral standpoint right so as a psychologist I will say that, things that we do twice a week or three times are actually in some ways harder for us to do psychologically the things that we do every day. Right. I mean, for example, I think we all brush our teeth, I was hesitating there for a moment but assuming that you brush your teeth every day you don't you don't wake up and think, um should I brush my teeth today? Oh, what the heck sure, you're like, you're not taught to use like you do it every day as a matter of habit and habits, generally, you know, which is basically your brains on autopilot right you don't even think about it you just do it it's like, there, there, there, they're much easier to create when they're like, every single time you know you do the same thing as opposed to sometimes you do and sometimes you don't.

So, physically I'm sure you're right Mel but also psychologically it's easier to do things where like you can become a daily routine.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, because the minute you have to like kind of shift your schedule around, you're like oh Thursdays I go, here it is, it's like another decision.

Angela Duckworth:

And you're thinking and the secret to habits is not thinking, actually when you do something that's a habit, you're not thinking at all, it just you're doing it. And I think for many of us we would love to wave a magic wand and have an exercise habit. It's like, wouldn't it be great if like without even realizing you're suddenly exercising like so, so, so to get closer to that make it a routine and make it something which again is extremely regular. So, if you look at people who are writers, say novelists right, novelists as a rule, you know, Stephen King or whoever they don't like wake up and think when am I going to write today. They have a routine where they do it every day, you know the same place, so you know when nine o'clock rolls around like that's your routine. You don't even have to think about it you're a little bit on autopilot.

So, it's going to take some experimentation and there's also research showing this too, but it takes a while to kind of figure out like what your routine should be, you're going to try dance maybe you love it if you don't love it you know try the gym, maybe you love it maybe you don't love it like you know and you have to have some flexibility always like I had a daily walking routine myself and then February came with all the bad weather so I had to adjust, but generally if you think of it as, how can I experiment to find something which could become a daily routine, and just ride that routine, as far as I and then you know when needed, you know, be flexible and experiment again but I think that's my prescription for you know how to get something like exercise like into your life.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, say that piece about not thinking is, is almost like if you wake up in the morning and you start to ask the question like just no, I don't get to like, I'm not I don't even get to ask

Angela Duckworth:

Yeah, doing is better than thinking when it comes to habits.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah. Yeah, so I'm a little bit about that what. Well first of all, you said that when you when you were young, your dad said and you were like, Oh, let me prove them wrong like on some level you had an interest, obviously in an achievement, because you went down that path but like, when it comes when it came to that and then when it comes now to behavior change like how long does it take? what, I mean you can set up the triggers you can set up the schedule but like how long does it typically take?

Angela Duckworth:

So, when scientists have studied the habits like eating fruit in the afternoon or exercising or taking you know 7000 steps a day or whatever it is that people are trying to do they've asked the question like how many days does it take to form a habit. And when you Google this you can find I'm sure Leigh could find like every possible estimate like 28 days 60 days 66 days.

And it turns out that there is no magic number for habit so all of those numbers on the internet are wrong, there is no single number. It varies widely by person, and also by habit type, the more complex and effortful the habit and exercise I think falls into this category, the longer it takes, it's certainly not a matter of days it's probably a matter of months. When you talk about a real exercise habit. That's data that I've been collecting with my collaborators.

Nobody forms an exercise habit in 11 days, but over the course of months, and again, it varies by the individual like yes you can start to become sort of automatically habitually an exerciser. I do think though that one thing you want to keep in mind is that this development of kind of like oh it's automatic I'm thinking about it. The thing I do like about these numbers is that when you do google it they usually give you big numbers and I do think that having a sense that you shouldn't expect on day 12 to wake up and like, why don't I haven't exercise habit it's like are you kidding it takes months to develop that so give yourself a break, while you are, you know, getting to be a more consistent exerciser and, frankly, there are a lot of people who exercise their whole lives and it never becomes truly a habit.

It never becomes truly like autopilot second nature they, they just have like lots and lots of tricks it's like you know I have an exercise buddy and I buy really nice workout clothes and I put my sneakers by the front doors I don't forget and I put it on my Google Calendar and I, you know, you know keep signing up for classes that I like more I mean, those people are never really habitual exercisers, but they, but they're very successful.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, I love that point. So, one of the ways that you can maybe try it is maybe borrow the presser reruns of somebody else. So, if you, if you've got somebody who's, they're like, Oh my gosh, I just know Rich gets up and does this every single day. How can I get on his like bandwagon maybe I can meet him for a workout and kind of borrow that for a while until it becomes that way for you.

Angela Duckworth:

Absolutely. And you know, the givers among you, which I think you'll recognize like you know if you're like a real giver and you just like there's nothing that gives you more energy than actually helping another person.

The way my mom who is still with us, and she's 86. I think the way that she gets her steps in when she was taking care of my dad he lived like at the opposite end of the nursing facility so she just got her steps in like walking I think, you know, to his bedroom and like sometimes wheeling him around and then when he passed away you know I noticed that my mom got like a lot less active because she wasn't taking care of my dad.

But the thing that motivates My mom is actually taking other people in the nursing facility for a walk. So, there's like nothing that wasn't whatever makes you tick right if you're kind of like oh I love conversation like I'll go with my best friend if you're like oh my god I would hate that. Maybe you're the kind of person who gets motivated by podcast, like you know and then you want to be by yourself listening to a podcast so it's going to take some experimentation, but whatever it is that you need to figure out, that makes it something which is immediately rewarding because that's the other thing we didn't say about habit formation yet Mel, and I think it's really important. Habits take repetition over many, many trials many many days many, many months probably if we're talking about exercise.

It's much better if it's really like a rhythmic and other words, not two days a week not four days a week but seven days a week, right just something really consistent.

The other necessary like feature of habit formation is it has to be rewarding. If you go to the gym, again and again and again and again, and like my dad you don't really ever enjoy it, it will never become a habit, no matter how long you go. So you have to experiment find ways where you're like oh every time I get to listen to this podcast and then that's a little reward for you and that like again will like, you know, over time, strengthen the habit.

Melani Dizon:

In your work at character lab you talk about three dimensions of strength, heart, will, and mind. Is having grit is having a strength of will? What does that look like in practice some of the things

we talked about what do gritty people say to themselves or what do they do that non gritty people don't tend to do.

Angela Duckworth:

And I know Leigh who I think I'm gonna just kidnap Leigh because I would love to have somebody in my life, just like looked up everything immediately, but we can certainly chat the link to characterlab.org, where you can read more about this but what grit looks like in adulthood, is that you have something that you know just before we started here, Mel you're telling me I was like, how did you get involved with the Davis Phinney Foundation like and you were telling me that, you know, somewhat non linear path that brought you here but I will say that one of the, one of the ways that like grit sort of like shows up is that when they talk about their work, it is like talking about like a calling, like it's like somehow it's interesting to them but also it's meaningful in terms of enabling them to live out their values.

Psychology is that for me right like I got to be with you for an hour maybe some of the things I'm saying are helpful. That is like you know living out my value of like you know trying to be a helpful person in the world, but it's also super interesting, like everything you're saying is interesting to me, these questions are interesting to me. So I think one of the ways that grit, sort of shows up or like what it looks like in adults, is that they're able to take their personal interest, psychology, writing, gardening cooking, right and then their values right like fairness, social justice, you know benevolence truth, honesty, whatever, and and then if it's in the same thing, then people usually will say like oh it's like a calling for me right like I feel like I was born to do this.

That's passion. And then in terms of perseverance, there are two things that I look for when I look for perseverance and in an adult and there are versions of this in kids too but just for an adult, I would say first, you would be this kind of resilience in the face of adversity right so somebody who falls down, but tends to get up again and, you know, dust themselves off and feel like they can learn something from it.

So that kind of resilience in the face of a diagnosis of Parkinson's or a more minor setback. I mean, that is a feature of perseverance and last, I'll say that this second feature of perseverance is like a desire to always be improving. So, there is a kind of, you know, scientist called deliberate practice where you are always asking like what's one thing I could do differently and better.

So, when I look at these Olympic athletes, you know, they, they have an interest in their sport. If you're at the Olympic level, it's also an expression of your values. So, it's not just fun. It's also like, you know, like you are and how you want to contribute to the world.

You know you are resilient in the face of setbacks, you know, losses, injuries. And if you're an Olympic athlete, you know you're, you're, like, not just going to practice like a mindless person you're always like, what's one thing that I could do better.

And just a model is for you, Mel. After this conversation, I of course will send you a note of gratitude for being such a gracious host, and I will ask you like what is one thing I could have done better in the email correspondence before this or during this conversation and like that is kind of what a gritty person would do is to just, you know, assume that no matter how good something is like, you know, there's something you can do what what's your advice for doing a little bit better in the future.

Melani Dizon:

Yes, that is great and I'm wondering about, so, one of the things that we have in our DNA as a foundation is Davis Phinney was an Olympic medalist, his wife Connie Carpenter Phinney, was an Olympic medalist as well.

This foundation, one of our core values is Olympic level work either Olympic level production of things execution of things the staff we've taken this on, we talk about it as a thing and I think it brings a lot of meaning to us when we are executing at an Olympic level, what we believe the standards are, when you combine that with meaning something that's meaningful.

You have this potential for a lot of downstream impacts so you had somebody who's doing something meaningful, you might be, we have a person Wayne he was an educator his whole life, he was a teacher, and an artist but he really got into poetry after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's, he now does, he did poetry in prisons for people in prison. He does poetry with people with Parkinson's. He teaches everywhere.

He has little workshops, and it's very meaningful for him. That ability to give back in a meaningful way gives him so much energy that actually has downstream impacts on the rest of their life. So a lot of times when people are struggling with exercise are struggling to do something, it's this idea of how can I like giving back. It's kind of like when I go clean the fridge when I clean my whole house. Once I give back in a certain way, I feel so good that then I go do other things, so it's another reason why grit is so important and to be able to like, find something that you love, and it may, you know trickle down to the rest of your life.

Angela Duckworth:

You know there were some thinkers, like Freud who really thought that like human beings were primarily driven by pleasure, by selfish interest. I think it's so obvious that most people are more driven by the need to be useful to other people right like what gets you up out of bed in the morning is it like because you want to eat like a really delicious breakfast or would you be more like quick to jump out of bed if somebody that you love needed breakfast?

So I think Freud was wrong about that and if you can use that to advantage right so when we talk about things like taking care of yourself, eating the right way exercising, you know, if we put all of the burden on like, that's because you will live a better life for your health right like, you know, but it's like, you know, how can I think of it as a way of being helpful to other people because if I'm healthier and I'm in a good mood.

And I have energy like everyone I love is going to have a better day, and also like when I talked about my mom, you know like, you know, getting all those steps in still doing that right because like, you know, she gets to walk somebody who, you know, really needs assistance and like they need to get their steps in, oh my gosh that is 10,000 times more motivating to my mom, then like, oh, you'll have an enjoyable walk right so again if that resonates with you then just think of it as like a challenge of like how do you creatively harness this need for purpose that you have, you know, which is a wonderful thing by the way and a much, you know more accurate view I think of like, you know, true human nature.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, so that makes me think of our care partners. I know we have a lot of care partners on the phone or on the line, and one of the issues that a lot of care partners face is, they really want their person with Parkinson's to live well. And they are reading and learning and doing all the things and they know what it would take for their person with Parkinson's to live well. And that person won't take action.

So they are frustrated, they're willing to do whatever it takes, they will say, Oh, I will schedule this with you, I will go and I will do that, what can they do? They might have all the grit in the world. But how do they do that?

Angela Duckworth:

Okay, so to two quick responses to like a really meaningful question which has, like, you know, requires a much longer response and then what I'll say here but one is, I do think at some level, you know, so I'll have two things to say but the first one is to say like at some level, you can't fully control another person's motivation. And as my own therapist said to me, once, you know you have to like, you know, part of being mentally healthy, is to let go of this illusion that like if you do and say all the right things, then this other human being is going to feel a certain way, but you can't control other people, they're not like your elbow or your wrist it's like you know they're a whole other person. So I do think there are limits to what we can do. And I think that was really important for me to like just realize that it didn't actually make me not try it just made me, like, you know, try and have more sane way, right, it's like, oh okay right through limits. I can't fully control anybody else.

So, that's one thing I'll say. The second thing is I'm in clinical psychotherapy, therapists have to handle this, like all the time. And so what do they do? You have a depressed patient who comes in, and you know that if they do the following exercises or if they you know take a walk that

they would like you know they're going to get better but they won't do it like what do you do they are not motivated to change.

So one of the things that cognitive therapist named David Burns developed, is like a way of like externalizing the resistance he calls it.

So, what he does is that he actually does something paradoxical. So you could imagine you're trying to get your partner to exercise and you just know that the whole day is going to go better if they would just take a five minute walk because you know also the five minute walk would probably end up becoming longer because like once you get, like, all you know all these things, but your partner really doesn't want to go and they're just like no I just don't want to go there.

So you do something, non-intuitive, which is, you say like, oh, so you don't want to go? No, I don't want to go. Great, tell me all the reasons why you don't want to go. Like let's make the case that you should definitely not go. You're like well it's cold outside. I'm really exhausted like I didn't sleep well last night like I'm really comfortable here if I stay here, I can watch my Netflix show like right. So you essentially just sort of lay this all out, then you essentially like advocate for all those things you know you're right this Netflix special is going to be great you know like it is pretty cold outside.

And what happens is that very often, at least in clinical therapy, the patient, now that you're their ally, and you're like pushing like in the same direction. They have nothing to push against, you're no longer their adversary, and then they're like well I mean, it is cold outside, but we could wear a jacket right like you know they start advocating like, yeah, a Netflix special is great but you know it's Netflix so we could watch it when we get back. In other words, sometimes when we're pulling against somebody like we're pulling this way, what do people do, they pull the other way, right.

We like turn around and we just like go on the same side as them and like they no longer have this you know thing that they're resisting, so he calls it externalizing the resistance and you can google David Burns and I think he has a podcast.

Melani Dizon:

Leigh already put it up.

Angela Duckworth:

Oh there you go because it's Leigh. So, so, again, I think those two things are things to keep in mind. Yeah, there are tricks that you can use tricks you know strategies. But, but also I think recognizing you're human being and the other person is another human being and you cannot fully control their motivation.

Melani Dizon:

And sometimes it's just, you know, you get out there, you do what you're going to do. And, you know, let's do it one of the interesting thing that happens with a lot of people is Parkinson's is apathy.

Angela Duckworth:

Which is part of the pathology of it right? Like the dopaminergic... yeah.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, and one of our doctors is always like you know, apathy is one of the toughest ones, this struggle for the care partner, but the person with Parkinson's doesn't care because they're apathetic they literally by definition do not care.

And so one of the things that you can do is plan the day for them. So, you just are like have the things scheduled hey we're going to do this and then they might not even fight you because they're...

Angela Duckworth:

Yeah, well that that generally works with most people, but I can see why it would especially work for, for Parkinson's, like behavioral scientists sometime call this the power of default, right, the power of like, what is our it's like, if you're, you know, at a restaurant and the sort of like well most people order this, it's like well, you could change it but like default.

This is how Retirement Savings Programs work it's like if the box is already checked off for you to contribute to your retirement fund you can uncheck it, but you know, and we get these advertisements all the time it's already checked off. Do you want to receive our newsletter? Checked, it's already checked, you can uncheck it. So, the idea of planning somebody else's day which is like with, you know, you're, you're sort of like well you know the plan is like at eight o'clock we're going to take a walk and at 830 we're going to have breakfast and then it's not you know impossible to change but then like people very often just gravitate to what already is and I can see given dopamine and all that, like, why this would be especially helpful with Parkinson's, and my dad was this way to write like you know it wasn't like my dad was like hey really want to take a walk around the block like. So, yeah, that's a great idea. Yeah.

Melani Dizon:

So somebody says, are there additional strategies you would recommend people with Parkinson's use to maintain grit, despite symptoms of depression and apathy I would say depression right now, especially for people who might not have a care partner to help them out.

Angela Duckworth:

Yeah, that is a, like, an important question right because not everyone is lucky enough to have somebody on this call for example, who is like taking notes and figuring following web links from Leigh.

So, I will say that, you know, the idea of intrinsic motivation, which we talked about Mel, is also important to anyone. Maybe especially important to you know somebody who is, you know, suffering from depression or like you know managing chronic diseases like Parkinson's and by that, I mean you know what it is that gives you energy is something to like then like double down on, right. So, what human interests are like, for example like we all can for a moment right now think about the things that we find interesting like you and I Mel are like, oh, psychology like motivations so interesting, maybe a lot of you feel that way as well but not everyone. Other people might be like, oh you know current events, you know, politics in the United States like super interesting, for others less, right, you know some people are like, oh, you know, airplanes like super interesting or like you know the history of World War two or whatever it is cooking gardening.

I think that the definition of a human interest is that subject, which gives us energy and spontaneously grabs our attention, and some subjects will do it more than others, and just that little bit of introspection, right, like I hate thinking about finances and money and taxes and I also hate thinking about honestly current events I don't like spontaneously want to ever talk about them.

My husband likes all those things which is good because we can divide up, but like it for me then, if I were dealing with you know depression or lack of energy, you know Parkinson's, then it would be really important for me to say like, Well how can I get more of these energy giving you know attention grabbing things in my life like how can I like rearrange my day so that there's more of the stuff that I enjoy that I care about that kind of give me a little bit of a lift.

And how can I, you know, delegate this other stuff to other people. Now again, that would be true for all of us, but maybe especially you know for those who are struggling in the ways that you described.

Right.

One of the topics that you and Stephen Dubner talked about that I always find super interesting is this idea of motivation and you said it a couple of times. And I think a lot of people do wait to get motivated, that it's like it's going to come, I'm going to get just hit by this like bullet of motivation. What is your take on motivation?

Angela Duckworth:

So, one of the things that makes you and being different from all the other animals on the planet is that we have meta cognition. In other words, like animals have feelings and they have

thoughts too, but the only human beings have like thoughts about their thoughts, you know, it's like, we don't think that chipmunks and squirrels and dogs are like, I was sad, what does it mean that I was sad, why was I sad? I mean you know they can feel sad, but they can't feel like, you know thoughts and feelings about that. Now, this metacognition right this uniquely human faculty enables us to manipulate ourselves in that way so motivation is very important for you to take a kind of meta cognitive proactive, agentic, like, I don't have to just let my motivation ebb and flow, as it will I can maneuver it myself like I can, in a meta cognitive way realize that I'm really cranky and tired today, and I can do something about it, I can, you know, Oh, I think I heard a podcast for somebody like said that if you if I think of three good things in my life three blessings.

You know, it should lift my mood maybe I'll try that. Let me try it okay let's see my daughter Lucy is the nicest person in the world. I had a delicious breakfast with a miraculously ripe avocado, can never get the rightness right but today it was perfect. And I listened to this beautiful song that I hadn't heard in a million years. And that was just great, and I love the Beatles. Right. Hmm. Now how do I feel? Actually, I feel like a little bit better.

Well it's weird that kind of work that's metacognition you're like, realizing that you feel a certain way, energetic, not energetic, tired, bored interesting, and then you do something about it in a proactive way and I do think that's why, in part, human beings have become such a you know dominant creature on the planet, it's like, it's a very powerful thing that you can manipulate your own mental state.

And, and chipmunks and dogs and squirrels and fish and you know raccoons and even dolphins can't do that. So, that is why I think that this conversation to me Mel's like so important because if you got anything out of this conversation if it just gave you one idea, or one moment of reflection where you got to see yourself a little bit more clearly. Then you are doing metacognition right now. And I think that that's kind of like, if you can do that you can kind of like solve your problems because like, you know, it's a way of constantly improving on how you're functioning.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, and I think one of the things right there is, when you're thinking about it, one of the ways to move from the thinking to the, to the behavior is to not judge or like put a preference on what the thought is so you might have said I'm not feeling energetic and instead of going down the path of like I'm going to judge that I'm going to give it a preference, I'm a bad or good, it's just like, oh I'm noticing it. I'm going to go do something else like, I think that you don't have right you don't have to believe every thought.

Angela Duckworth:

You don't have to reflect on that. So let me just say a couple words on that so I'm sure everybody here has heard of mindfulness and I'm sure many of you have practiced mindfulness

and some of you might be like, you know, very, very you know veteran mindfulness practitioners, but for those of you who know less about mindfulness one of the key elements of any contemplation practice, you know, there are lots of varieties of this, is a non-judgmental awareness of the present. So, like, why is that important. Well, if I am like somebody who'd like just eat a whole pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream and then I feel guilt, right, a mindful approach to that which is to notice that you feel guilty like I noticed that I feel guilty, or I noticed that I ate a pint of ice cream without it kind of spiraling into like a very judging sort of like, oh my god that's terrible and either really bad person, etc. So mindfulness is being able to be somewhat distanced like as if you were a sort of a neutral observer it's like oh I noticed that I ate a pint of ice cream.

I noticed I did that because I was stress eating like I noticed that right it's like having a remove. And the reason why this is such an important part of mindfulness practice is because what the brain and mind spontaneously do is evaluate and judge.

So we have a very strong bias to be very judgy, like was that good or was it bad, am I a good person right bad person like you know and and mindfulness is a practice of like tamping down that reflexive like thing, because just as you say Mel, when we attach a judgment a strong evaluation, especially the negative ones the self-critical ones on two things, we could just spiral into these extremely unproductive.

Kind of like self-critical loops, and I will just say when I was in my 20s I'm like a, you know, 51 year old who I remember when I was in my 20s I would literally say things like, I'm bad, I'm bad, now I think back and I'm like, dude, I should have cut like what it's like it's like, oh I you know I eat to apples instead of one I'm bad I'm like are you kidding me like so. So I do think having this non-judgmental remove is the name of the game. It's not easy to do, which is why all the mindfulness practitioners, will you can chat right now but like you know you don't like become a mindfulness, you know, Maestro in a day or two, but you can, over time, learn to remove and if you can even just use this language like I noticed, like that's very helpful because it's already distance like I noticed that was in a terrible mood today, I noticed I was not very nice to the Telemarketer because it's like, instead of like immediately attaching all that judgment. I think that'll be helpful.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah, it's part of like when we give advice to people, one of the reasons like we're able to give advice as we have that psychological distance. We haven't created for myself by doing some of those practices that you talked about.

Angela Duckworth:

I'll just add this I know we don't have a lot of time but I can't resist when you say that we need, when I give advice to someone else I have psychological distance, is like I have tons of psychological distance on this call because. I've just dispensing advice left and right. But then

when my own life it's hard, but here's a trick and actually people like LeBron James use this because, you know, there's so much recorded footage, many high performing people will literally say to that like they'll use you in the same place like well LeBron has actually said things like LeBron, what should the LeBron do right now?

Should LeBron leave this team and go to another team? And he has said this like on recorded footage and you could I know if I were having like a really stressful emotional view of like Angela, Angela, Angela, Okay, we got to get our head on straight Angela, What should we, and we could use you instead we like what should you do. Should you say yes to this engagement, or you should use no? So sometimes you can even just use language to distance yourself. And if you want to Google that and if you want to book on that.

Ethan Kross with a K, and he wrote a book called Chatter, and it's all about how to use you know, these self-talk techniques that have been studied in and out of clinical therapy as ways to more productively you know distance yourself than we sometimes do on our own.

Melani Dizon:

Yeah and like the same thing or like an alter ego, like if you have to have like somebody who's an athlete or maybe a performer on some level, like, like I always be like, well, Melani wouldn't do that but I like the whoever my alter egos name is she would do that so what would she do? You can look at that as well and so for some people, you know they just create the alter ego of somebody that they admire, and they say like what would so and so do right now?

Angela Duckworth:

I'm sure what would Beyonce do, has been uttered in the private might have millions of people probably even within the last day.

Melani Dizon:

And here we can say what would Davis Phinney do? Davis Phinney would get up he would go ride his bike he would go take a walk, he would smile because he's got the best smile and he would say, I love vacuuming right like that's what Davis would do. I wish we had seven more hours to talk. I'm so grateful for you being here today and for taking the time out of your very busy day I hope summer has started and you have a little less of a crazy schedule with your students. But everybody check out Angela Duckworth can go to AngelaDuckworth.com, CharacterLab.org

And then you can also take the "How Gritty Are You?" and I think that we put that up already, but we'll send it as well and then her TED talk, so Angela thank you so much for being here, we're so grateful.

Angela Duckworth:



Thank you. I'm grateful as well. I hope we get to have another conversation and thank everyone for joining us, I know you are all very busy people, so I'm appreciative of your time.

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