

Talent Is Overrated Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Talent Is Overrated* debunks both talent and experience as the determining factors and instead makes a case for deliberate practice, intrinsic motivation and starting early.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Not many books calm you down and make you excited to get going at the same time. This one does. In *Talent Is Overrated*, Geoff Colvin pops the “it’s all about talent” bubble, but in the same breath lets you know that the best time to plant a tree would’ve been 20 years ago.

His follow-up book *Humans Are Underrated* was the second book on Four Minute Books, so I thought it was time to make it a set.

Here are 3 lessons from Geoff’s 2008 bestseller:

1. Practice and experience are two different things.
2. There are three huge advantages to starting deliberate practice as a kid.
3. You can let your inner drive develop by forcing yourself to practice.

Ready to go from average to great? Let’s do this!

Lesson 1: Practice and experience are not the same thing.

A 1990 study in the UK among 257 musicians showed that none of the top performers were:

- a.) showing signs of great achievements before picking up serious practice with their instrument.
- b.) improving faster when practicing, than their peers.

So not only did they have no inborn talent or capacity for greatness, they also needed just as much practice as their friends.

But if they all built up the same amount of experience and no one was particularly talented, how come there were such big differences in how people performed?

It's because practice and experience are two different things.

You can make pizzas for 20 years, and still make crappy pizzas (please don't do that, I love pizza).

We all know someone who's worked at the same company, doing the same job for decades, which means they never improved to the point where they wanted to take on new things or received a promotion.

This happens when you stop improving, because you're doing good enough of a job.

Yes, doing the same thing over and over again will build experience, but it's still the same experience that you're building.

What you need is new, additional, unfamiliar experience, and that only comes with practice. Deliberate practice, to be exact.

Lesson 2: When you start practicing deliberately as a child, you will have three big advantages.

As science progresses, it takes longer and longer to master any given field, be it physics, biology, or even business.

That means even when you practice the right way by meticulously analyzing your mistakes and improving in the exact areas you need to be, it'll take you longer to achieve greatness than previous generations.

Nobel prize winners, for example, are now 6 years older on average, when they make their scientific breakthrough, as they were 100 years ago.

Sadly, there is no way to turn back time, so the only advantage you can get is to **start incredibly early**.

Yes, for you and me that ship has sailed, but not for our kids.

Whether you let them decide or pick for them, setting up a regular, deliberate practice for your children lets them reap three major advantages over the rest of the world:

1. Children don't have to deal with the responsibilities of adulthood, like work or family, so they can practice more.
2. They can rely on a support network, i.e. their family, that might not be there when they're

grown up.

3. Our brains get slower over time, but at a young age, children can still learn a lot very fast and make bigger leaps in progress.

But how do you get your kid to keep practicing the piano? The answer will surprise you.

Lesson 3: You can let your inner drive develop over time by forcing yourself to practice.

Believe it or not, it might be as simple as **forcing a deliberate practice on your children**.

Here's the thing: Being slightly better than your peers triggers something called *the multiplier effect*.

Originally stemming from economics, for human performance it means that having a slight edge can lead to bigger motivation to practice, better coaching, more support, and a whole bunch of other external factors, that will come together to multiply that advantage.

That initial bit of satisfaction, that smug smile you get for shooting a 3-pointer, can be enough to trigger your inner drive.

But in order to get there, you first have to practice – and no harm is done when that practice is forced upon you.

Studies about top performers often find that piano lessons, tennis practice or soccer training was enforced by their parents when they were younger, but once they crossed a certain threshold, they made the drive to do great their own, embraced it, and turned it into their passion.

Talent Is Overrated Review

Great summary. I was expecting a lot of details about deliberate practice, which of course there were, but *Talent Is Overrated* seems to emphasize the external factors a lot too and spends quite some time clearing up false assumptions.

I thought this was refreshing because there is already a plethora of information on deliberate practice available, so just talking about the practice itself would not do much. Hats off to you, Mr. Colvin!

The first lesson here reminded me of *Mastery* by Robert Greene, because it says that mastery requires you to go beyond what even your teacher does. The second lesson reminded me of *So Good They Can't Ignore You*, which says it's more important to get going than to decide where you'll go. The last lesson resembles *Bounce* by Matthew Syed, indicating it doesn't take much to get motivated.

It's a good match for Geoff's other book, *Humans Are Underrated*, as this one tells us how we can become great, while the follow-up shows us what specific skills we should strive to be good at. I highly recommend *Talent Is Overrated*.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why taking an IQ test is useless
- What really happened when Abraham Lincoln wrote his famous Gettysburg Address after a stroke of genius
- How long the preparatory period before great breakthroughs is (it's not the 10,000 hour rule)
- What deliberate practice actually looks like
- How one scientist formed his daughters to becoming 3 world-class chess players on purpose
- Why a top tennis player never looks at the ball when expecting a serve
- Where your brain changes when you practice deliberately
- How Benjamin Franklin could calmly skip church on Sundays by knowing what he wanted

Who would I recommend the Talent Is Overrated summary to?

The 9 year old, who's not sure which passion to pick and might need a little help from her parents, the 57 year old accountant, who can think of an area or two he could improve in, and anyone who feels unmotivated to practice something creative.