



TALENT IS OVERRATED

by Geoff Colvin



Overview

Why don't people who work hard all their lives excel in their professions? Are there specific, secret techniques that world-class performers use to rise above the rest? People often assume that those who excel are simply naturally gifted, and thus do not bother making an effort to be the best. Yet perhaps it is not innate abilities, but rather a specific type of practice and focus, which separates world-class performers from the rest. And perhaps it is available to anyone with just a bit of hard work. In "Talent Is Overrated," Colvin uses a variety of real-world examples to deconstruct our notion of "talent" and what truly underlies it. Readers will learn about the routines of the greatest athletes, and how they too can excel through a technique known as *deliberate practice*. Anyone can indeed achieve greatness... but most, won't due to the intense commitment that it requires. Yet for those willing to commit, "Talent Is Overrated" can illuminate the path to excellence.

"Great performance is in our hands far more than most of us ever suspected."

Chapter 1. The Mystery

Looking at your relatives, friends, and coworkers, you will find that though they work all day and spend a lot of time on their hobbies, they aren't "great" at any of them; merely fine or average. The same will likely apply to most people. Some argue they are less than terrific at their hobbies because they don't take them seriously, and that excellence is the result of hard work. Yet most people, despite dedicating most of their waking hours to their jobs, rarely excel.

Others therefore argue the inverse: that greatness is the result of natural talent only a few people have. Yet extensive research shows that people who excel have neither the innate ability nor the staggering intelligence many assume. The thread that unites them is *deliberate practice*, a type of repetition that focuses specifically on

improvement. It requires dedication and passion, and can be adopted by anyone. As the societal pressure to improve and global communication – as well as competition – increases, it is crucial to understand how to achieve excellence.

Chapter 2. Talent Is Overrated

We often give up when a new activity is "too hard", and encourage our children to do the same. When skills don't develop as quickly as we would like, we assume we weren't born with the necessary talent and shirk further practice. One study, polling mainly educated professionals, showed that more than 75% believed that singing, composing, and playing concert instruments requires a special gift or talent. Yet research has shown that the most talented performers have one thing in common: they have clocked in far more hours of practice than most "average" musicians. Their success was not the result of a natural advantage: they simply dedicated more hours to self-improvement. But that means that most people's success is in their control, and that bugs them. They don't want to take responsibility, and avoid believing that they could be world-class.

These findings debunk the myth of the innate "talent" many claim to see in children. Mozart and Tiger Woods are both commonly cited as child prodigies, but in reality, both began learning their chosen skill at an early age. Mozart's father, also a composer, began rigorously training Mozart when he was only 3, and Woods' father took Tiger to the golf course before he turned 2.

Many successful people were neither child prodigies nor experts. Bill Gates was no more adept at computers than any other child of his generation. John D. Rockefeller did not earn his fortune from being particularly remarkable, just spending much more time pouring over the financial numbers of his businesses. All found great success through years of hard work. Their late successes – as well as their early failures – call the concept of "innate talent" into question.

