

Insights from *Hidden Potential* by Adam Grant

There is one thing that predicts your future growth more than anything else. It's not your genetics or your intelligence. It's your **character skills**. Character skills allow you to override your instincts and hold true to your values. Unlike personality traits, your character skills are not fixed. Research shows that adults earn an average of \$320,000 more over their lifetime if they had an experienced kindergarten teacher who taught them to be more proactive, cooperative, focused, and persistent.

If we can strengthen similar character skills (regardless of how old we are), we will go greater distances and unlock hidden potential. When looking to strengthen character, it's helpful to create an identity that encompasses the traits and behaviors of high-potential people. I call this identity the "Proactive Imperfectionist Player." Let's isolate the first part – "Proactive Imperfectionist" – and understand why being a "Proactive Imperfectionist" is essential to unlocking potential.

Proactive Imperfectionist...

Most perfectionists fail to maximize their potential because they learn to hate mistakes and avoid criticism. Making mistakes lowers their self-esteem and makes them think, "I'm not doing that again." And shrinks their comfort zone. This way of thinking repeats until their comfort zone is tiny, and they only do what they know they're good at.

A "Proactive Imperfectionist" counteracts perfectionism by setting a "mistake quota." For instance, a Proactive Imperfectionist learning a new language tries their best to speak fluently, but expects to make 200 mistakes a day. A Proactive Imperfectionist student does his best to ace practice exams, but doesn't stop studying until he gets 100 practice exam questions wrong.



Make a mistake quota: When you set a "mistake quota," you seek discomfort – which is crucial because how much you grow depends on how much discomfort you're willing to experience. I challenge you to set the following mistake quota this year: experience two project failures (a side hustle project, a learning project, etc.). If you don't encounter at least two failures, you either finished too few projects, or your projects didn't push your skills enough.

Seek out hard truths: A "Proactive Imperfectionist" not only seeks out mistakes, but also seeks out criticism and hard truths that most people's egos can't handle. A Proactive Imperfectionist seeks out people they respect and asks, "What one thing can I do to get better?"

... Player

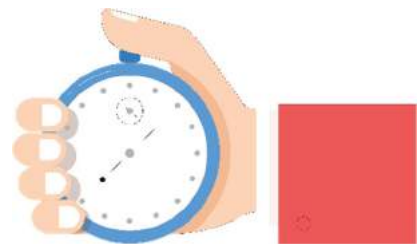
Reaching your potential requires incredible discipline.

- Discipline to do focused, deliberate practice for several hours a week.
- Discipline to resist short-term pleasure and pursue long-term growth.

However, research shows that people with extreme discipline rarely use it. In other words, disciplined people stay disciplined because they don't rely on willpower. In the famous marshmallow test, the disciplined children who resisted the marshmallows the longest didn't rely on willpower because they either covered their eyes, covered their marshmallows, sat on their hands, or mushed the marshmallows into balls and bounced them like toys. Those creative and playful strategies *allowed* them to stay disciplined. You see a similar principle in the lives of people who excel at their sport, craft, or profession. Masters in all fields design and redesign their practice to be fun and effective by engaging in what psychologists call "deliberate play."

Deliberate play

A testament to the power of deliberate play is a basketball player once ranked a three out of five by high-school recruiters who was told he would never be a star in the NBA because he lacked explosiveness. That player is now regarded as the best shooter in NBA history – Stephen Curry. Early in his career, Curry worked with a trainer named Brandon Payne, whose motto was: "There is no boring in our workouts." Payne turned drills into games and always gave Curry a score to beat. Payne created games like *Extreme Twenty-One*, in which Curry had one minute to score twenty-one points with three-pointers, jump shots, and layups, but after each shot, he had to sprint to the middle of the court and back. The intensity simulated a real game, and his score in one practice became the metric to beat in the following practice.



Incorporate "deliberate play" into your deliberate practice to prevent your practice from turning into an emotionally draining obsessive slog that leads to "boreout" (you quit because you lose interest). Be a "Proactive Imperfectionist Player" by turning practice drills into games (like Stephen Curry's coach), injecting novelty (practicing in different locations and switching up equipment), alternating between skills (going between instruments), playing against the clock, and measuring your performance so you have a score to beat next practice. The less practice feels like work but still pushes you out of your comfort zone, the further you will go.

"Without enjoyment, potential stays hidden." – Adam Grant