



THE **Secret** *No One Told You*  
ABOUT **Success**

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What is it that makes someone great? Is it some innate ability? Some unique skill set that they were gifted with? Is greatness something that is bestowed upon some but not others? Is the ability to be great at something, at anything, woven into the DNA of a select few?

When we look at those people who have achieved greatness, we see the relative ease at which they are able to execute upon a given skill. Listen to Warren Buffett dole out investment advice. Watch a video of Eric Clapton as he rips through a blues guitar lick or Michael Jordan dunking a basketball. The gap is so big between what these people are capable of and what we can do, it is easy to convince ourselves that they must have some innate ability, some naturally granted level of talent that we simply don't possess. That's why they are able to excel, why they can be great and we can't – right?

### **Wrong!**

Michael Jordan once said:

*"Maybe it's my fault. Maybe I led you to believe it was easy, when it wasn't. Maybe I made you think that my highlights started at the free throw line and not in the gym. Maybe I made you think that every shot I took was a game winner. Maybe it is my fault that I didn't let you see that failure gave me strength, that my pain was my motivation. Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a god given gift and not something I worked for every single day of my life. Or maybe, you're just making excuses."*

The single most pervasive and destructive self-limiting belief is that of natural talent. The myth that some people are naturally granted a level of talent, an aptitude for doing a given skill set. This myth conditions people to believe that they have either "got it" or "they don't". And therefore, if they are not naturally gifted at playing chess or guitar, at selling a product, at doing business presentations or anything else for that matter, they will never be able to excel.

Just imagine for a moment, how differently life would look to a person who had not been conditioned to believe in the concept of natural talent. They would approach learning anything with an open mind. They would willingly practice however much was required to excel. The more they practiced, the better they would become. This would be true for anything they desired to learn.

If they wanted to excel at math, they could. If they wanted to be great at playing an instrument, they could. If they wanted to be their best at playing a given sport, they could. If they desired to be a great sales person, they could. They could become good at whatever they set their mind to achieve. Imagine how limitless their life would be. Imagine what they could accomplish and achieve if they truly allowed themselves to let go of this limiting mindset.

The fear of failure, the fear of not being good enough, the fear of making a mistake would all cease to exist within their consciousness. Rather than being ruled by fears and self-doubts, they would view life as a virtually limitless opportunity to learn, grow and improve themselves.

Yet for most, this perspective is extremely foreign. Most people see their shortcomings with incredible clarity but they see their potential to learn through a fog-like haze.

So how does this happen to them? How do they come to believe that the only people who are capable of achieving high levels of success are those who have been fortunate enough to be naturally gifted?

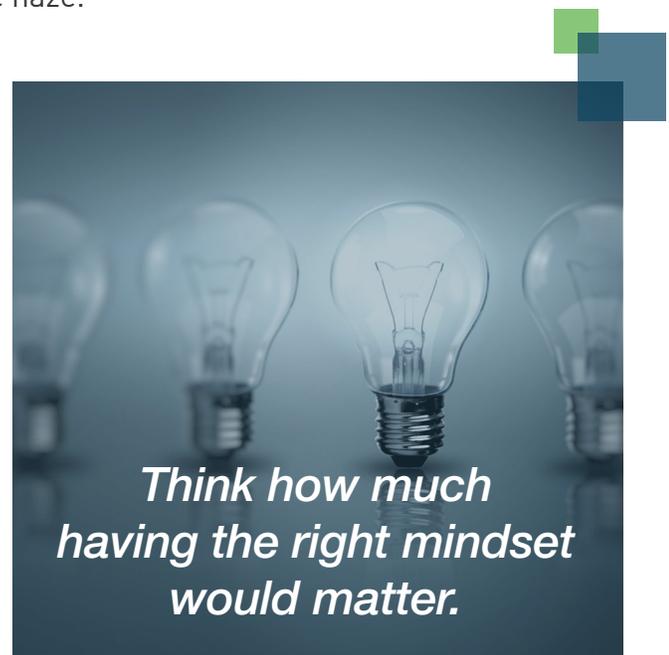
You don't have to look far to find countless examples of the insidious conditioning process that perpetuates the myth of natural talent.

Watch any sporting event and more than likely you will hear one of the announcers speak of an athlete's incredible natural talent. Pick up a newspaper, watch television and sooner or later you will find reference to some child prodigy, some wunderkind whose incredible natural ability is allowing them to excel. Over and over we hear stories of natural talent until eventually people start to believe the myth.

Just imagine a child prodigy. A child so naturally gifted that he won eight national championships in chess by the ninth grade. A child who earned the elite title of International Master by the age of 16. A child who was so prodigious at playing the game of chess that they made a movie about him.

Certainly this child must have possessed incredible natural talent. Some innate gift that allowed him to excel the way he did. He must have had some type of advantage that others didn't.

These are the types of stories that the media highlight. Over and over, they tell of the incredible natural talents of others who succeed. They convince us that if we weren't born with these abilities, we shouldn't even bother trying, we would just be wasting our time. Why? Because success is preordained, it is innate. For those who are gifted, success comes easy. Relatively effortlessly, even. At least this is what the media would have you believe.



Yet when you begin to dig deeper, when you really study the back story of any of these people who have been labeled as “naturals”, what you invariably find is that it took an inordinate amount of hard work to become “naturally gifted.” All too often, what the media fails to talk about is all the work, the hours of practice, the countless setbacks and mistakes that were made.

Just look at our young chess prodigy. The media makes no mention about the chance meeting that he had when he was six years old and just learning to play the game. They don't tell about how one day when this young boy was playing chess in his local park, a man who is a United States Chess Foundation National Master stopped and said hello. This gentleman has been called America's top chess teacher. He took a young, six year old Joshua Waitzkin under his wing and taught him to become a chess grand master.

Together they played chess, hundreds upon hundreds of matches, and young Joshua learned from each. Hour upon hour, more practice. Honing his abilities, perfecting his craft. Until finally, thousands of practice hours later, he became a chess grand master.

So what does Joshua Waitzkin, our young chess prodigy believe about his natural ability? Here is what he had to say:

*“The moment that we believe that success is predetermined by an ingrained level of ability, we will be brittle in the face of adversity.”*

The myth of natural talent convinces people that if they weren't born with an incredible skill, it will be impossible to develop it. So they don't give themselves permission to try.

Swedish psychologist, Dr. Anders Ericsson was fascinated with the question of 'talent.' Was talent naturally gifted, or was it the result of something else?

With his team of researchers, he went to the West Berlin Academy of Music, a school renowned for producing international soloist level violinists.

Without the students knowing, Ericsson asked to split the class of violinists into two groups – those that would make international soloist level, and those that were 'merely good enough' to be 1st or 2nd Violin in internationally renowned symphony orchestras.

Then they conducted detailed interviews with the students, the student's teachers, and the student's parents. These interviews resulted in the collection of data about each of the students, which Ericsson and his team then analyzed.

What they found was that all of the violinists from both groups had extremely similar stories. They'd all started playing at around the same age. They had all won similar competitions as they were getting older. They were all currently putting in similar practice time honing their playing skills.

In fact, there was only one statistic that clearly separated the first group, those destined to be international soloists, from the second group, those only good enough to be ensemble players, and that was lifetime practice hours. Those destined to become soloists on average had racked up **7,410** lifetime practice hours. Those destined to be ensemble players had only managed **5,301** lifetime practice hours.

That's a differential of 2109 hours. *That's 30% more practice.*

Imagine practicing 3 hours a day, 6 days a week, every week of the year, it would take you over two years to make up those 2109 hours.

Think of it this way – if you played chess against a friend who had played 2000 hours more than you, who would you expect to be more 'naturally' talented than them? Of course not. Certainly the extra 2000 hours of practice would give them an edge. Why wouldn't you expect their skill level would be better than yours?

Now take the word "chess" out of the paragraph above and substitute any other activity – speaking a language, skiing, computer programming, writing, painting, selling, leading a team, investing, anything you can think of. Do you think that someone with 2000 more hours of practice would appear more "naturally talented" than you?

What Dr. Anders Ericsson found in his research is that on average, it takes right around 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become our best at any skill.

Peel back the layers, look beyond the myths and hyperbole that make for great fodder in the media and truth becomes readily apparent. There is no DNA, no gene that automatically makes someone a great chess player, a super star athlete, a world class musician, a top sales person or a great leader.

Imagine what you could accomplish, if you truly believed you could be good at anything you set your mind to. What could you achieve if you truly believed that you could not fail? If you would willingly practice a given skill set for 10,000 hours, there would be nothing that would stand in the way.

**Think how much having the right mindset would matter.**

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