The Grit Project

The ABA Commission on Women in the Profession

PROGRAM TOOLKIT

Using Grit and Growth Mindset to Advance Women in the Law

Produced by the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession

The Grit Project

www.ambar.org/grit
In the past two decades, women and men have entered law firms as first-year associates in roughly equal numbers. In 2013, about 47 percent of associates were female. However, by the time women arrive at the most senior leadership levels—non-equity and equity partners—they represent only 29 percent and 17 percent of their peers, respectively.*

While studies have identified some of the obstacles that contribute to this gender gap at the leadership level, until recently little has been known about the common characteristics of those women who do make it to the top ranks of law firms. In 2012, an important study undertook this much-needed research. The results were revealing: the study identified two traits common among highly successful women lawyers, **grit and growth mindset**. And the best news? Women lawyers have control over them.

In short, grit—defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”**—teamed with a growth mindset—the view that one’s abilities can be developed—were found to be important tools that aided highly successful women attorneys in handling challenging situations. These research results inspired the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession to undertake the Grit Project.

**The leading expert on grit is Angela Duckworth, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, who has developed a 12-item self-report grit test that measures grittiness on a scale of one to five.
Grit and Growth Mindset Research and the Practice of Law

Grit has been shown to predict achievement, often above and beyond other metrics—such as GPA or rank of law school—that law firm recruiting departments frequently look to first. The research on grit has shown the following:

- Grittier individuals tend to work harder and longer than their peers and are more likely to engage in deliberate efforts to improve their performance.

- Grittier individuals are more likely to “stay the course” and not to get distracted by immediate, short-term interests or needs.

- Having grit is particularly important in very challenging contexts.

With respect to mindset, people with a fixed mindset believe that their strengths are predetermined. In contrast, people with a growth mindset see their abilities as flexible entities that can be developed through dedication and effort. The result? Individuals with a growth mindset tend to outperform those with a fixed mindset.
A recent study of women lawyers in AmLaw 200 firms showed a strong, statistically significant relationship between grit and success for women in BigLaw. Digging deeper, the data suggests that grit is a precursor to success rather than an outcome of it. The research also found that many successful women lawyers display growth mindset characteristics and rely heavily on it to navigate challenging workplace situations such as their responses to negative feedback and the sometimes overwhelming pace and volume of the work itself.

**Good News**

**Grit and Mindset Can Be Taught and Learned**

The most exciting news about grit and mindset is that most experts agree that these traits can be learned and developed given the right conditions. The first step is educating women lawyers about these traits, and other traits within their control, that can lead to success.
The Grit Project Toolkit

How It Works

The Toolkit provides bar associations, law firms, corporate legal departments, and other groups all the materials needed to present a successful program, including program agendas, customizable PowerPoint slides, a library of relevant scenarios for group exercises including several digital vignettes, a discussion guide for presenters, program handouts, and a bibliography.

With the Toolkit, you can:

- Tailor the program to any audience.
- Present tools women lawyers can use to measure their grit and growth mindset.
- Instruct women attorneys on how to apply the grit approach to their law careers.
- Facilitate discussion of how to handle challenging situations in the legal profession using grit and a growth mindset.
- Customize the program to the format and time allotted.
- Offer future reading and learning opportunities.
All materials in this Toolkit are available online at ambar.org/grit.

Materials include:

1. **Program Agenda**—Format, sequence of presentations, and various segment options.

2. **PowerPoint Slides**—A customizable PowerPoint slide deck to use as part of an opening presentation, with notes for the presenter(s) and details on key points.

3. **Program Materials**—PDFs of recommended articles to use as background information for speakers and as handouts at the program, as well as the grit and mindset tests.

4. **Library of Scenarios**—Includes digital video of several scenarios as well as a library of written scenarios.

5. **Discussion Guide**—A how-to guide for presenters to lead small or large group discussions of the scenarios.

6. **Speakers Bureau**—Potential speakers and panelists.

7. **Marketing the Program**—Text that can be used to create a marketing flyer.

8. **Bibliography**—Extensive list of articles that can be referenced for a more in-depth understanding of the issues, to be distributed to speakers in advance of the presentation and to attendees as appropriate.
ABA Commission on Women in the Profession
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The Grit Project Program Toolkit is a project of the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession.

For more information, visit ambar.org/grit.