

# Sir Paul Callaghan had what we all need - GRIT

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As I write this article, the documentary, *Dancing with Atoms*, a tribute to Sir Paul Callaghan, is being released. I heard the filmmaker Shirley Horrocks speak about the making of it and about the remarkable and interesting person he was. Tragically Sir Paul passed away in 2012 and those of us in the food industry are often reminded of him through Callaghan Innovation, the Government agency supporting tech innovation and its support of NZFIN, the food innovation network.

Shirley Horrocks spoke about Sir Paul's remarkable ability to communicate science with people, and the passion he had for his wide areas of interest. This passion and positivity remained despite what all scientists experience many failures before they get it right or find the answer.

He had what the world of work describes as resilience or, more recently, has defined also as GRIT.

In 2013 Angela Duckworth, a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania, popularised the term saying grit is the "quality of being able to sustain your passions and also work really hard at them, over really disappointingly long periods of time". People with grit can overcome stress and use failure as a means to achieve their ultimate goal. You can view her TED talk at [https://www.ted.com/talks/angela\\_lee\\_duckworth\\_grit\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_passion\\_and\\_perseverance](https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance).

There is good news here for us as scientists or technologists. Like Sir Paul we already have a head start with some of the fundamentals of being gritty. Our roles require us often, over long periods, to fail a number of times before we get an answer, to sustain our passion and work hard to test a hypothesis. We know how to fail: it's part of good science.

At the same time however, for all of us in the world of work, the answers are becoming increasingly unknown or illusive. CEOs are asked to lead businesses through on-going uncertainty, into a future where disruption is becoming commonplace and to bring the rest of us along on the journey.

Under these circumstances therefore, it seems that for all of us grit is even more important, and is the reason that it's a common element in what employers are needing more of in their businesses.

## What is your GRIT profile?

How do you rate on the following 5 Characteristics of GRIT as provided by Margaret M. Perlis for Forbes?

### Courage

While courage is hard to measure, it is directly proportional to your level of grit. More specifically, your ability to manage fear of failure is imperative and a predictor of success. There are valuable lessons in defeat and the vulnerability of perseverance is requisite for high achievement.

### Conscientiousness – achievement-oriented vs. dependable

The achievement-oriented individual is one who works tirelessly, tries to do a good job, and completes the task at hand, whereas the dependable person is more notably self-controlled and conventional.



**Sir Paul Callaghan was a remarkable science communicator**

Both are components of conscientiousness but achievement-orientated traits predict job proficiency and educational success far better than dependability. In other words, it is important to commit to go for the gold rather than just show up for practice.

### Long-term goals and endurance: follow-through

Malcolm Gladwell, in his 2007 best selling book, *Outliers*, said the baseline time commitment required to become a contender, even if predisposed with seemingly prodigious talent, is practice, at least 20 hours a week over 10 years. However one of the distinctions between someone who succeeds and someone who is just spending a lot of time doing something is this: practice must have purpose. That's where long-term goals come in. They provide the context and framework in which to find the meaning and value of your long-term efforts, which helps cultivate drive, sustainability, passion, courage, stamina...grit.

### Resilience: optimism, confidence, and creativity

A key component of grit is resilience, resilience is the powering mechanism that holds your head up, moves you forward, and helps you persevere despite whatever obstacles you face along the way. In other words, gritty people believe, "everything will be alright in the end, and if it is not alright, it is not the end."

### Excellence vs. perfection

Certainly there are times when "perfection" is necessary to establish standards. It is interesting however that conditions like anxiety, low self-esteem, obsessive compulsive disorder, substance abuse, and clinical depression are only a few of the conditions ascribed to "perfectionism."

Excellence is an attitude, not an endgame. The word excellence is derived from the Greek word *Arête* which is bound with the notion of fulfilment of purpose or function and is closely associated with virtue. It is far more forgiving, allowing and embracing failure and vulnerability on the ongoing quest for improvement. It allows for disappointment, and prioritises progress over perfection.

John Lawson is founder of Lawson Williams Consulting Group. He initially studied Biotechnology at Massey and is a professional member of NZIFST. He now enjoys leading a team of recruitment consultants, helping people like you develop satisfying careers.

