

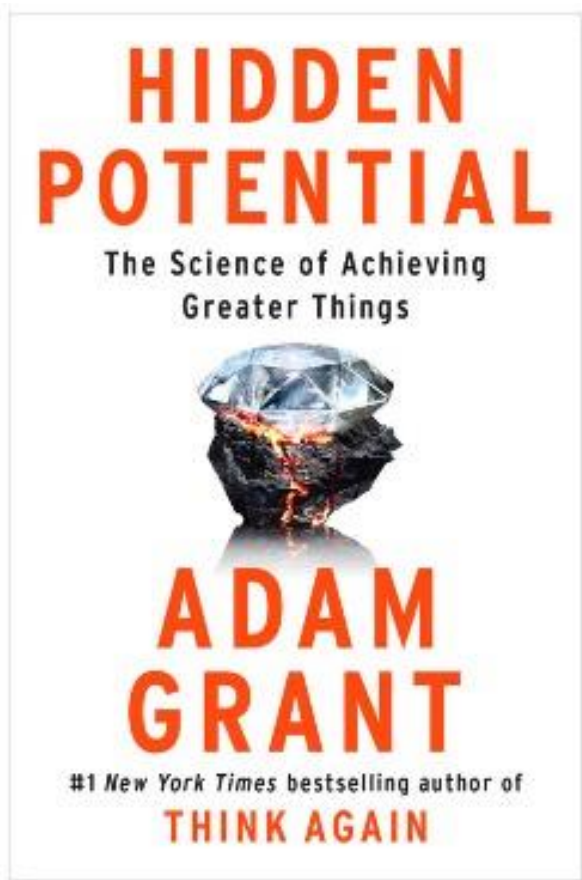
dear residents

Character, Comfort, Critics, Cheerleaders and Coaches

December 10, 2023

Dear Residents,

Happy Hannukah to all who celebrate. It's been a full week for me. I spent half of it in Philadelphia at the ABIM Council Meeting. I was glad to be back to fairer weather in Dallas. One of the benefits of being on a trip is the chance to read – how else can one pass the time in a middle seat! I have enjoyed Adam Grant's new book, '[Hidden Potential](#).'



As usual, Adam Grant writes about organizational psychology and seeks and interprets natural and laboratory evidence to unlock new ways of understanding the human condition. His books are optimistic and encourage new ways of being hopeful as we navigate a complex and evolving world. The book is divided in three sections, discussing character skills, creating structures to sustain motivation, and building systems to expand opportunity for everyone - not just for the privileged.

Regarding **character**, Grant states that character is often confused with personality and while they are related, one can view personality as your predisposition (how you think, feel and act instinctively), while character is your capacity to prioritize your values over your instincts. Character allows one to transcend one's personality traits.

Our growth is often limited because we seek the **comfort zone** – we limit ourselves to things we are good at and thereby avoid the discomfort of failure. The most growth occurs when we leave that comfort zone, seeking new knowledge and skills. Seeking advice (instead of feedback) is helpful. It's important to be aware of the critics who see your weaknesses and attack your worst self and cheerleaders who see your strength and celebrate your best self. While both have their place, what helps most is the coach who sees your potential and helps you become a better version of yourself.

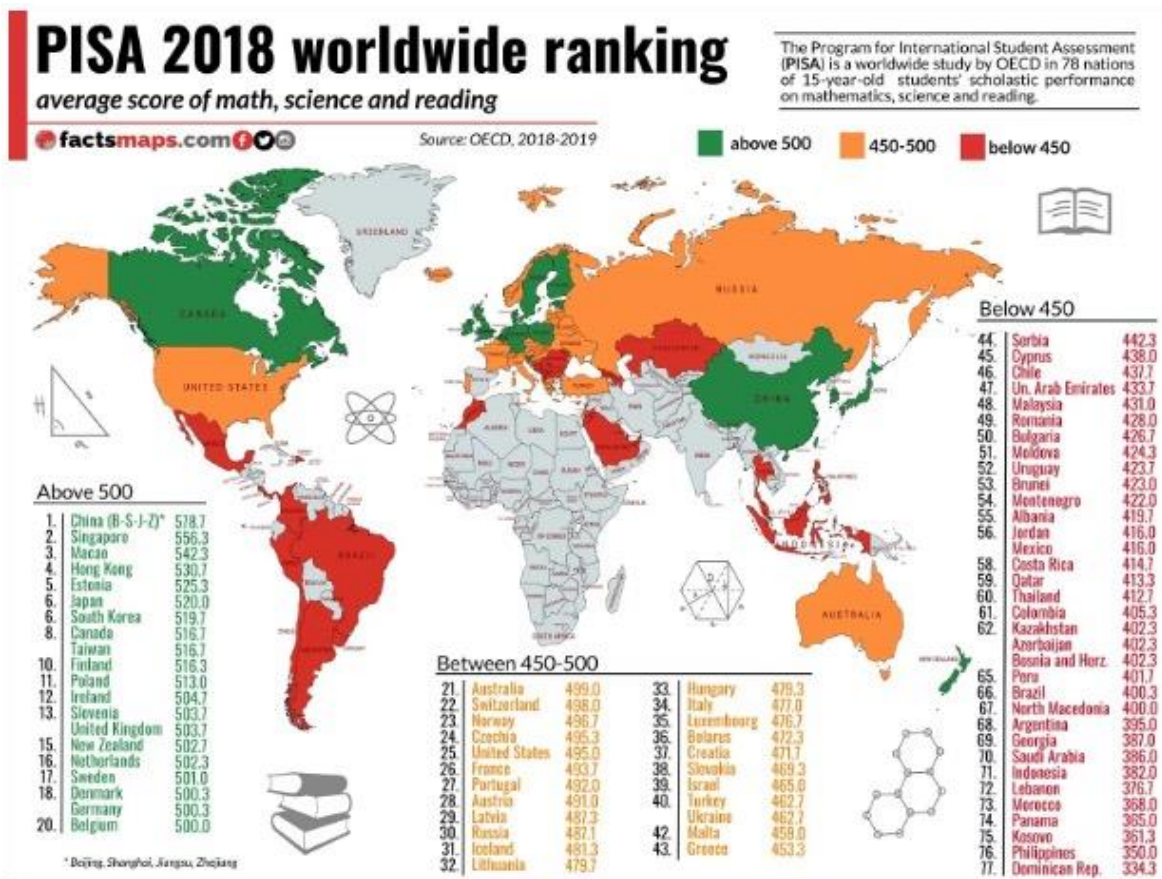
We are also limited by ever-increasing **perfectionism** – the zero tolerance for error may trap us in the realm of the straightforward and the familiar. The real world is far more ambiguous and being driven to find “correct” answers can be a futile exercise (ask any rheumatologist – we live in the ambiguity of autoimmunity). The quest for flawless results can lead us to simply refine our existing skill set (solving tiny problems of dubious value) rather than seeking new knowledge. Perfectionism traps us in a spiral of tunnel vision and error avoidance. Grant highlights the Japanese art of honoring beauty in imperfection – wabi sabi.



The Church of Light by the Japanese Architect Tadao Ando – his work is characterized by visible imperfections.

Grant takes on the dangers of monotonous **deliberate practice** (think musicians and athletes) and coins the term “boreout” to distinguish this from “burnout.” In medicine, we are lucky that our work is varied enough that we are not at risk for boreout – but I guess it could happen if your practice gets super specialized and you get busy perfecting that one skill. Sports psychologists incorporate play in practice by developing varying routines thereby reducing the risk of boreout and burnout. Brandon Payne used this technique on Steph Curry taking him from ordinary to extraordinary.

Grant asks us to **design better systems** to reach those who did not have privilege at the start – the late bloomers, the long shots, the ones who travelled a greater distance to get to where they are now. He explores compelling evidence from the school system in Finland – where all students (not just the talented and gifted) get great teachers and individualized relationships. Finnish students are now outscoring many countries in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).



Describing the ingenious rescue of the Chilean miners in 2010, Grant takes a foray in the concept of **collective intelligence** and how this intersects in teams and in company hierarchy. He bemoans meetings where loud and dominating voices can squelch great ideas and how leadership styles can prevent great ideas from being even considered. Weak leaders silence voice and shoot the messenger. Strong leaders welcome voice and thank the messenger. Great leaders build systems to amplify voice and elevate the messenger.

Grant ends by discussing the near impossible task of discovering **hidden talent**, the diamonds in the rough. We rely on metrics like GPA, SAT, USMLE etc., all of which will miss those individuals who travelled a much greater distance, started from a lower point but are brimming with potential. This year in resident recruiting we are paying attention to those applicants who have travelled a greater distance or have overcome significant hurdles in their journey to become doctors.

One of the more pressing needs in our residency program is to continue to develop **effective mentorship programs** for all of you. The subspecialty mentorship program is one of those initiatives, but we need to be doing more to create individualized pathways for you. We want you to become the best versions of yourself.

I remain in awe of your potential,
Dino Kazi