

# Complex Risk

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## Is Your Status Quo Holding You Back?

Dr. Eric Potterat, High-Performance Psychologist, knows a thing or two about success.

The retired U.S. Navy Commander developed and implemented the Mental Performance Training Program for the U.S. Navy SEALs and has a successful career working with thousands of elite performers in sport, business, and the military. For the last 7 years, he has been the Director of Specialized Performance Programs for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He also worked with the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team when they won the World Cup in 2019. A leading expert in organizational excellence, Potterat kicked off the 2023 Lockton Complex Risk Symposium on June 7 by inviting the audience to reflect on their various roles in life and how they might improve their performance in each.

Are you a parent, a child, a spouse, a sibling, a friend, a supervisor, employee, coach, mentor? Do you believe that you can improve your performance in any of these roles? Potterat believes you can. But to be better at any of our roles, we first need to understand the three factors common to the world's best performers: grit, mindset, and consistency.

We may think that talent drives success, but Potterat shared research that proves perseverance towards long-term goals is a better predictor of success than talent. Perseverance means embracing and learning from our failures — and, fortunately, the ability to fail in ways that make us stronger can be learned.

## How can we increase and improve our grit?

According to Potterat, we should all “get more comfortable with being uncomfortable.” What would that look like in your life? What professional situations make you uncomfortable? Presenting at a conference? Volunteering for a leadership role in projects that you normally wouldn’t? Learning a new skill?

Potterat suggests we start our grit journey by identifying our true motivators. What is your purpose and your passion? Delaying gratification can also help in building grit. Consider something you currently want. Is there a task or new skill you should achieve first? We sharpen our perseverance and grit by delaying gratification.

Most importantly, Potterat sees one common trait among top performers: viewing setbacks as growth opportunities. What’s the last failure you experienced? What did you learn from it? And how did it help propel you forward? Failure is painful, but Potterat believes that embracing our mistakes and analyzing them is the foundation for building grit.

Daily discipline practice is also important to developing grit. What can you commit to doing every day that will grow your skills and abilities? It may be something as simple as ten pushups or reading an industry article. Once you have established a daily discipline, Potterat suggests pushing your boundaries a little each day, growing and strengthening your mental toughness.

The second way to improve performance, according to Potterat, is mindset. Our beliefs and assumptions about how we view the world are more easily affected than we might think. He offered two different music samples to demonstrate how easily our mindset is influenced. Potterat believes that, though our mindset is easily influenced by the world around us, we have the final say in our mindset choices.

Citing Dr. Carol Dweck’s research regarding fixed and growth mindsets, Potterat explained that a fixed mindset shies away from challenge. It seeks an unthreatening status quo that feels safe. A growth mindset, on the other hand, can be stressful. Learning new things is hard and becomes increasingly more difficult with age. Yet Dweck’s research demonstrates that people who choose a growth mindset are happier and more productive. They choose learning and growth as a way to enhance their skills and abilities, which in turn creates a richer life experience.

Potterat reminded the audience that humans naturally love to solve challenges — except when our ego is involved. Adversity will at some point affect us. We will all experience loss, sadness, and disappointment. But we have the power to choose our mindsets, even in our most challenging moments. This ability, however, requires much energy and intention.

Returning to the question of our various roles, Potterat asked the audience to identify their five main roles in life. What are your different mindsets for each? Are those mindsets getting you the results you want? If not, consider how changing your mindset may improve the situation or relationship.

Other social scientists have contributed greatly to our understanding of mindset. Viktor Frankl’s seminal work, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, describes his observations during the Holocaust as both a prisoner and a psychiatrist. He longed to understand why some prisoners lived and others died, given identical torture and suffering. He finally realized that those prisoners who lived did so because they chose life. Their mindset determined their fates and ultimately saved them.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman has also explored mindset with his extensive research in *Emotional Intelligence*, which offers specific options for managing both our own and others’ emotional responses.

Pop culture is embracing the idea of mindset in programs such as Ted Lasso. As a coach, Lasso never yells at his players, never makes them feel bad. He sees his role as a supporter and encourager. And in the end, he is able to change the mindset of his team. (Yes, it's just a television show, but it's still a powerful example of a growth mindset.) The idea that we might do better tomorrow if we believe we can and then work at improving is the essence of a growth mindset.

In today's politically charged environment, we may believe we don't have the power to influence others. But by choosing a growth mindset, could we perhaps help others choose one as well? Potterat is careful, though, in advocating that we "stay in our circle." Focus on the things we can control 100% of the time: our attitude, effort and actions.

A fixed mindset is a comfortable, unthreatening place to be. But Potterat shared one of his favorite quotes by Roger Federer: "Staying the same is going backwards."

Once we have addressed our grit and mindset, Potterat suggests that we be more consistent and efficient with our time. Potterat thinks of time as currency and that we all have a "magic 16 hours" in a typical day. If we want to be more efficient with our waking hours, Potterat advocates eliminating the "white space" in our schedules — time that is unplanned. How are you spending your white space and what adjustments could you make in your schedule to more wisely spend that time?

## Are you ready to enhance your grit, mindset, and consistency?

Potterat warns that real change happens incrementally, and that building new habits requires focus on process over outcome. Be patient with yourself as you seek to improve and be both intentional and realistic. Getting valid feedback from trusted sources is important too. Do your colleagues, family, and friends see progress in your quest to improve? Ask them and find out.