



The Little Book of Talent: 52 Tips for Improving Your Skills

Daniel Coyle

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The Little Book of Talent is a manual for building a faster brain and a better you. It is an easy-to-use handbook of scientifically proven, field-tested methods to improve skills—your skills, your kids' skills, your organization's skills—in sports, music, art, math, and business. The product of five years of reporting from the world's greatest talent hotbeds and interviews with successful master coaches, it distills the daunting complexity of skill development into 52 clear, concise directives. Whether you're age 10 or 100, whether you're on the sports field or the stage, in the classroom or the corner office, this is an essential guide for anyone who ever asked, "How do I get better?"

"The Little Book of Talent should be given to every graduate at commencement, every new parent in a delivery room, every executive on the first day of work. It is a guidebook—beautiful in its simplicity and backed by hard science—for nurturing excellence."—Charles Duhigg, bestselling author of *The Power of Habit*

"It's so juvenile to throw around hyperbolic terms such as 'life-changing,' but there's no other way to describe The Little Book of Talent. I was avidly trying new things within the first half hour of reading it and haven't stopped since. Brilliant. And yes: life-changing."—Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence*

The Little Book of Talent: 52 Tips for Improving Your Skills Details

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From Reader Review The Little Book of Talent: 52 Tips for Improving Your Skills for online ebook

Flexnib says

Some great tips here, including:

TIP #4

BUY A NOTEBOOK

"...write stuff down and reflect on it. Results from today. Ideas for tomorrow. Goals for next week. A notebook works like a map: It creates clarity."

TIP #16

EACH DAY, TRY TO BUILD ONE PERFECT CHUNK

"...set a daily SAP: smallest achievable perfection. In this technique, you pick a single chunk that you can perfect—not just improve, not just “work on,” but get 100 percent consistently correct."

TIP #50

CULTIVATE YOUR GRIT

"Grit is that mix of passion, perseverance, and self-discipline that keeps us moving forward in spite of obstacles. It's not flashy, and that's precisely the point. In a world in which we're frequently distracted by sparkly displays of skill, grit makes the difference in the long run."

This especially made me think:

TIP #51

KEEP YOUR BIG GOALS SECRET

"Telling others about your big goals makes them less likely to happen, because it creates an unconscious payoff—tricking our brains into thinking we've already accomplished the goal. Keeping our big goals to ourselves is one of the smartest goals we can set."

This is an interesting point to reflect on, given how accustomed I am to sharing everything, in this age of Twitter, blogging, and GoodReads!

Marissa Morrison says

Stare at what you want to become (e.g. watch YouTube videos).

Musicians should have "listening practice" as well as playing practice.

Play super-slowly to find mistakes.

Work in a simple, spartan space.

Learning hard skills requires precision and repetition.

Soft skills require variation and improv.

Don't stop practicing the basics.

Good coaches are impolite, scary, succinct, focused on fundamentals, and older. They also make an emotional connection in the first minute.

Find the "sweet spot" (50-80% error rate).

Instead of practicing for a certain length of time, practice until a certain number of perfect reps have been

achieved. Make this a game.

Break every movement into tiny chunks. Build one perfect chunk each day.

Five minutes a day is better than one hour a week.

Think in vivid images (i.e. "Sing the phrase like a balloon running out of air" instead of "Sing quieter at the end").

Don't ignore mistakes; attend to errors right away.

Practice with eyes closed.

Practice only miming the movements.

Take naps.

Exaggerate new moves when you learn them.

When learning from a book, read and then write instead of read and re-read.

Practice a new thing three times, with a ten-minute break between each of the three practices.

Stop before exhaustion.

Immediately after a performance, rehearse.

End each practice session with something positive or fun.

Maryann says

I was lucky enough to win this book through a Goodreads giveaway. This is a great book on the topic. It isn't filled with fluff or wordiness. Just a common sense approach that gets right to the point. Some of the tips were new to me and it was well worth the read. I would recommend to anyone.

Ferit Feyzula says

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Lori says

Audible version: this short book is a great one for anyone learning something or teaching something. The chapters are just a few minutes long and could be used by teachers to share with their students how the learning process works and what it takes to build skills.

Eric Wallace says

First you should know before continuing to read my review is that I am totally addicted to books about increasing productivity, developing talent and creativity, probing how the mind works and how to get the most out of it, and building good habits and influencing positive decisions. So how could I not like this book?

And yet because of said affliction, there were few ideas or concepts that were new for me, simply because

I've read so much on these similar topics. Still, I enjoyed the book for its straight-forward delivery of so many practical suggestions. The pithiness of each tip's title make them memorable, if you need a mantra to help you apply these steps. And the stories from the various "hotbeds of learning" that Coyle visited and observed in preparation for his earlier book "The Talent Code" (and this one as well) help make the goal more vivid and inspirational to boot. (Who could forget his description of the younger students' rapt attention as they unabashedly stare in observation of the elder masters of their craft?)

Despite the glut of my related reading, I have not read "The Talent Code" before--but now the pragmatist in me says that I don't need to, as this book seems to contain and summarize what I imagine to be the bulk of the "actionable" data. In other words, if I am reading with a goal of improving myself, then this is all I need. (Nevertheless I'm sure the other book is an enlightening and engaging read.) Similarly if you have not spent as much time as I have devouring books on secrets to performance and skill development, then this book may be a shortcut to learning and applying the key points.

My foremost take-away right now is the impression that I should spend my practice time for whatever skill I am seeking to master in the zone at the leading edge of my abilities, where it requires the most mental effort--and thus achieves the greater reward. (I suppose it's much like weight-lifting, where they say, "the only rep that counts is the last," the one in which it is almost too much for your muscles to bear--that's what makes the muscle grow.) But I fully expect to revisit the book in the future so I can be reminded of more ways to stretch and grow.

Anna Berendzen says

I'm not one for reading the self-help kind of books but I liked this one. I received it through the first reads program. It is very short and to the point with each of the tips being no more than two pages. An easy read to expand your knowledge!

Janalee says

This book had a lot of really great advice. And you can read it in a few short hours. Don't ask me to list it out for you, but I know it will come out of my head when it's needed. Oh! Here's something I remember. They talked about a therapy for shyness. Instead of delving into your past and figuring out why you were what you were, they just decided to create good habits. So the first assignment would be, Go ask a stranger what time it is, then go ask 5 strangers. All culminating to the final moment of holding a watermelon over your head and purposely dropping it in the supermarket and enduring the stares of strangers as they stare at you, who made this huge mess. Shyness cured. Allegedly.

It'd make really good FHE lessons, a lot of the tips.

Jennifer says

This small book looks like one of those small books received as a graduation present. If a person did receive it, s/he might smile politely, and express gratitude while secretly wishing they had received cash instead. It would be a shame if the recipient never read it, because this book contains nuggets of wisdom beneficial to

anyone looking to succeed in the workplace, improve on the sports field, or become a better musician.

This book can be easily skimmed (which is what I did), stopping on the tips that speak most to the reader. The author outlines 52 different tips, with a short explanation of each. Examples include:

- Don't fall for the prodigy myth
- Practicing a bit each day is better than practicing for an hour once a week
- Give a new skill a minimum of 8 weeks
- Stop before you're exhausted
- Pay attention immediately after you've made a mistake

Overall a good, short primer for those who enjoy productivity/self-improvement reads

3.5 stars

Hope says

I won a copy through Goodreads' Firstreads giveaway program!!!

I am always skeptical of self-help books, but "The Little Book of Talent" is more of a pocket reference guide. There are undoubtedly a couple tips in here that everyone already knows...but moreover many you never thought to try.

Coyle offers quotes from famous successes and examples for how these tips relate to everyday talents. I especially enjoyed his focus of nurturing 'soft' and 'hard' skills. Although this is not a new concept, the author explains in a logical way how to really fine-tune seemingly daunting skill sets.

I plan to share this book with friends because the viewpoint is fresh and the collective experiences ring true. Happy reading!

Jalynn Patterson says

I really enjoyed this book. Who doesn't need to improve our talent from time to time? My favorite tip take a nap. With four kids running around I could always use this one.

AZ ZA says

Getting started

1.Stare at who you want to become

Studies show that even a brief connection with a role model can vastly increase unconscious motivation."windshield".

2.Spend fifteen minutes a day engraving the skill on your brain

watch the skill being performed, closely and with great intensity, over and over, until you build a high-

definition mental blueprint.

The key to effective engraving is to create an intense connection: to watch and listen so closely that you can imagine the feeling of performing the skill. For physical skills, project yourself inside the performer's body. Become aware of the movement, the rhythm; try to feel the interior shape of the moves. For mental skills, simulate the skill by re-creating the expert's decision patterns. Chess players achieve this by replaying classic games, move by move; public speakers do it by regiving great speeches complete with original inflections; musicians cover their favorite songs.

3.Steal without apology

All improvement is about absorbing and applying new information, and the best source of information is top performers. So steal it.

When you steal, focus on specifics, not general impressions. Capture concrete facts: the angle of a golfer's left elbow at the top of the backswing; the curve of a surgeon's wrist; the precise shape and tension of a singer's lips as he hits that high note; the exact length of time a comedian pauses before delivering the punch line. Ask yourself:

- What, exactly, are the critical moves here?
- How do they perform those moves differently than I do?

4.Buy a notebook

A high percentage of top performers keeps some form of daily performance journal. What matters is not the precise form. What matters is that you write stuff down and reflect on it. Results from today. Ideas for tomorrow. Goals for next week. A notebook works like a map: It creates clarity.

5.Be willing to be stupid

being willing to risk the emotional pain of making mistakes—is absolutely essential, because reaching, failing, and reaching again is the way your brain grows and forms new connections. When it comes to developing talent, remember, mistakes are not really mistakes—they are the guideposts you use to get better.

6.Choose spartan over luxurious

Simple, humble spaces help focus attention on the deep-practice task at hand: reaching and repeating and struggling. When given the choice between luxurious and spartan, choose spartan. Your unconscious mind will thank you.

7.Before you start,figure out if it's a hard skill or a soft skill

Begin by asking yourself which of these skills need to be absolutely 100-percent consistent every single time. Which need to be executed with machinelike precision? These are the hard skills.

Then ask yourself, which skills need to be flexible, and variable, and depend on the situation? Which depend on instantly recognizing patterns and selecting one optimal choice? These are the soft skills.

8.To build hard skills, work like a careful carpenter

When you learn hard skills, be precise and measured. Go slowly. Make one simple move at a time, repeating and perfecting it before you move on. Pay attention to errors, and fix them, particularly at the start. Learning fundamentals only seems boring—in fact, it's the key moment of investment. If you build the right pathway now, you'll save yourself a lot of time and trouble down the line.

9.To build soft skills,play like a skateboarder

When you practice a soft skill, focus on making a high number of varied reps, and on getting clear feedback. Don't worry too much about making errors—the important thing is to explore. Soft skills are often more fun to practice, but they're also tougher because they demand that you coach yourself.

After each session ask yourself, What worked? What didn't? And why?

10.Honor the hard skills

Prioritize the hard skills because in the long run they're more important to your talent. "Technique is everything. If you begin playing without technique it is big mistake."

11.Don't fall for the prodigy myth

If you have early success, do your best to ignore the praise and keep pushing yourself to the edges of your ability, where improvement happens. If you don't have early success, don't quit. Instead, treat your early efforts as experiments, not as verdicts. Remember, this is a marathon, not a sprint.

12.Five ways to pick a high quality teacher or coach

1) Avoid Someone Who Reminds You of a Courteous Waiter

2) Seek Someone Who Scares You a Little

Look for someone who:

Watches you closely

Is action-oriented

Is honest, sometimes unnervingly so

3) Seek Someone Who Gives Short, Clear Directions

4) Seek Someone Who Loves Teaching Fundamentals

5) Other Things Being Equal, Pick the Older Person

Teaching is like any other talent: It takes time to grow. Great teachers are first and foremost learners, who improve their skills with each passing year. That's not to say there aren't any good teachers under thirty—there are. Nor is it to say that every coach with gray hair is a genius—they're not. But other things being equal, go with someone older.

Improving skills

13.Find the sweet spot

There is a place, right on the edge of your ability, where you learn best and fastest. It's called the sweet spot. Ask yourself: If you tried your absolute hardest, what could you almost do? Mark the boundary of your current ability, and aim a little beyond it. That's your spot.

14.Take off your watch

Deep practice is not measured in minutes or hours, but in the number of high-quality reaches and repetitions you make—basically, how many new connections you form in your brain.

Instead of planning to hit golf balls for an hour, plan to make twenty-five quality swings with each club.

15.Break every move down into chunks

Practice one chunk by itself until you've mastered it—then connect more chunks, one by one, exactly as you would combine letters to form a word. Then combine those chunks into still bigger chunks. And so on.

No matter what skill you set out to learn, the pattern is always the same: See the whole thing. Break it down to its simplest elements. Put it back together. Repeat.

16.Each day,try to build one perfect chunk

In our busy lives, it's sometimes tempting to regard merely practicing as a success. We complete the appointed hour and sigh victoriously mission accomplished! But the real goal isn't practice; it's progress. One useful method is to set a daily SAP: smallest achievable perfection. In this technique, you pick a single chunk that you can perfect—not just improve, not just "work on," but get 100 percent consistently correct.

For example, a tennis player might choose the service toss; a salesperson might choose the twenty-second pitch he'll make to an important client. The point is to take the time to aim at a small, defined target, and then put all your effort toward hitting it.

17. Embrace struggle

Most of us instinctively avoid struggle, because it's uncomfortable. It feels like failure. However, when it comes to developing your talent, struggle isn't an option—it's a biological necessity. This might sound strange, but it's the way evolution has built us. The struggle and frustration you feel at the edges of your abilities—that uncomfortable burn of "almost, almost"—is the sensation of constructing new neural connections, a phenomenon that the UCLA psychologist Robert Bjork calls "desirable difficulty." Your brain works just like your muscles: no pain, no gain.

18. Choose five minutes a day over an hour a week

19. Don't do "drills". Instead, play small, addictive games

The governing principle is this: If it can be counted, it can be turned into a game. For example, playing a series of guitar chords as a drill is boring. But if you count the number of times you do it perfectly and give yourself a point for each perfect chord, it can become a game. Track your progress, and see how many points you score over a week. The following week, try to score more.

20. Practice alone

Solo practice works because it's the best way to 1) seek out the sweet spot at the edge of your ability, and 2) develop discipline, because it doesn't depend on others.

21. Think in images

The images are far easier to grasp, recall, and perform. This is because your brain spent millions of years evolving to register images more vividly and memorably than abstract ideas.

Whenever possible, create a vivid image for each chunk you want to learn. The images don't have to be elaborate, just easy to see and feel.

22. Pay attention immediately after you make a mistake

Develop the habit of attending to your errors right away. Don't wince, don't close your eyes; look straight at them and see what really happened, and ask yourself what you can do next to improve. Take mistakes seriously, but never personally.

23. Visualize the wires of your brain forming new connections

The more you pay attention to mistakes and fix them, the more of the right connections you'll be building inside your brain. Visualizing this process as it happens helps you reinterpret mistakes as what they actually are: tools for building skill.

24. Visualize the wires of your brain getting faster

Every time you practice deeply—the wires of your brain get faster. When you practice, it's useful and motivating to visualize the pathways of your brain being transformed from simple copper wires to high-speed broadband, because that's what's really happening.

25. Shrink the space

Smaller practice spaces can deepen practice when they are used to increase the number and intensity of the reps and clarify the goal.

Ask yourself: What's the minimum space needed to make these reaches and reps? Where is extra space

hindering fast and easy communication?

26.Slow it down (even slower than you think)

When we learn how to do something new, our immediate urge is to do it again, faster. This is known as the Hey, Look at Me! reflex. This urge for speed makes perfect sense, but it can also create sloppiness, particularly when it comes to hard skills. We trade precision—and longterm performance—for a temporary thrill. So, slow it down.

Super-slow practice works like a magnifying glass: It lets us sense our errors more clearly, and thus fix them.

27.Close your eyes

Closing your eyes is a swift way to nudge you to the edges of your ability, to get you into your sweet spot. It sweeps away distraction and engages your other senses to provide new feedback. It helps you engrave the blueprint of a task on your brain by making even a familiar skill seem strange and fresh.

28.Mime it

Removing everything except the essential action lets you focus on what matters most: making the right reach.

29.When you get it right,mark the spot

One of the most fulfilling moments of a practice session is when you have your first perfect rep. When this happens, freeze. Rewind the mental tape and play the move again in your mind. Memorize the feeling, the rhythm, the physical and mental sensations. The point is to mark this moment—this is the spot where you want to go again and again.

30.Take a nap

Napping is good for the learning brain, because it helps strengthen the connections formed during practice and prepare the brain for the next session. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, found that napping for ninety minutes improved memory scores by 10 percent, while skipping a nap made them decline by 10 percent.

31.To learn a new move,exaggerate it

If the move calls for you to lift your knees, lift them to the ceiling. If it calls for you to press hard on the guitar strings, press with all your might. If it calls for you to emphasize a point while speaking in public, emphasize with theatricality. Don't be halfhearted. You can always dial back later. Go too far so you can feel the outer edges of the move, and then work on building the skill with precision.

32.Make positive reaches

You can either focus your attention on the target (what you want to do) or you can focus on the possible mistake (what you want to avoid). This tip is simple: Always focus on the positive move, not the negative one.

33.To learn from a book,close the book

closing the book and writing a summary forces you to figure out the key points (one set of reaches), process and organize those ideas so they make sense (more reaches), and write them on the page (still more reaches, along with repetition). The equation is always the same: More reaching equals more learning.

34.Use the sandwich technique

What's the best way to make sure you don't repeat mistakes?

1. Make the correct move.

2. Make the incorrect move.
3. Make the correct move again.

The goal is to reinforce the correct move and to put a spotlight on the mistake, preventing it from slipping past undetected and becoming wired into your circuitry.

35. Use the 3 × 10 technique

To learn something most effectively, practice it three times, with ten-minute breaks between each rep.

36. Invent daily tests

To invent a good test, ask yourself: What's one key element of this skill? How can I isolate my accuracy or reliability, and measure it? How can I make it fun, quick, and repeatable, so I can track my progress?

37. To choose the best practice method, use the R.E.P.S. gauge

R: Reaching and Repeating

E: Engagement

P: Purposefulness

S: Strong, Speedy Feedback.

The idea of this gauge is simple: When given a choice between two practice methods, or when you're inventing a new test or game, pick the one that maximizes these four qualities, the one with the most R.E.P.S. The larger lesson here is to pay attention to the design of your practice. Small changes in method can create large increases in learning velocity.

38. Stop before you're exhausted

39. Practice immediately after performance

As the golfer Jack Nicklaus said, "I always achieve my most productive practice after an actual round. Then, the mistakes are fresh in my mind and I can go to the practice tee and work specifically on those mistakes."

40. Just before sleep, watch a mental movie

Just before falling asleep, they play a movie of their idealized performance in their heads.

41. End on a positive note

A practice session should end like a good meal—with a small, sweet reward.

42. Six ways to be a better teacher or Coach

1) Use the first few seconds to connect on an emotional level

Before you can teach, you have to show that you care.

2) Avoid giving long speeches—instead, deliver vivid chunks of information.

Master teachers and coaches don't stand in front; they stand alongside the individuals they're helping. They don't give long speeches; they deliver useful information in small, vivid chunks.

3) Be allergic to mushy language

All good teaching follows the same blueprint: Try this concrete thing. Now try this concrete thing. Now try combining them into this concrete thing. Communicate with precise nouns and numbers—things you can see and touch and measure—and avoid adjectives and adverbs, which don't tell you precisely what to do.

4) Make a scorecard for learning

Life is full of scorecards: sales figures, performance rankings, test scores, tournament results. The problem with those scorecards is that they can distort priorities, bending us toward short-term outcomes and away from the learning process.

The solution is to create your own scorecard. Pick a metric that measures the skill you want to develop, and start keeping track of it. Use that measure to motivate and orient your learners. As a saying goes, “You are what you count.”

5)Maximize "reachfulness"

The larger point is that being a good teacher means thinking like a designer. Ask yourself: What kind of space will create the most reachful environment? How can you replace moments of passivity with moments of active learning?

6)Aim to create independent learners

Your long-term goal as a teacher, coach, or mentor is to help your learners improve so much that they no longer need you. To do this, avoid becoming the center of attention. Aim instead to create an environment where people can keep reaching on their own. Whenever possible, step away and create moments of independence. Think of your job as building a little master-coach chip in their brains—a tiny version of you, guiding them as they go forward.

Sustaining progress

43.Embrace repitition

44.Have a blue-collar mindset

Top performers get up in the morning and go to work every day, whether they feel like it or not. As the artist Chuck Close says, “Inspiration is for amateurs.”

45.For every hour of competition,spend five hours practicing

Games are fun. Tournaments are exciting. Contests are thrilling. They also slow skill development, for four reasons:

1. The presence of other people diminishes an appetite for risks, nudging you away from the sweet spot.
2. Games reduce the number of quality reps.
3. The pressure of games distorts priorities, encouraging shortcuts in technique.
4. Games encourage players, coaches, and parents to judge success by the scoreboard rather than by how much was learned.

One solution to the problem is to make public performance a special occasion, not a routine. A five-to-one ratio of practice time to performance time is a good starting point; ten to one is even better.

46.Don't waste time trying to break bad habits-instead,build new ones

The blame lies with our brains. While they are really good at building circuits, they are awful at unbuilding them. Try as you might to break it, the bad habit is still up there, wired into your brain, waiting patiently for a chance to be used.

The solution is to ignore the bad habit and put your energy toward building a new habit that will override the old one.

To build new habits, start slowly. Expect to feel stupid and clumsy and frustrated at first—after all, the new wires haven’t been built yet, and your brain still wants to follow the old pattern. Build the new habit by gradually increasing the difficulty, little by little. It takes time, but it’s the only way new habits grow.

47.To learn it more deeply,teach it

48.Give a new skill a minimum of eight weeks

Of course, this doesn't mean that you can be proficient in any skill in eight weeks. Rather, it underlines two more basic points: 1) Constructing and honing neural circuitry takes time, no matter who you are; and 2) Resilience and grit are vital tools, particularly in the early phases of learning.

Don't make judgments too early. Keep at it, even if you don't feel immediate improvement. Give your talent (that is, your brain) the time it needs to grow.

49.When you get stuck,make a shift

A plateau happens when your brain achieves a level of automaticity; in other words, when you can perform a skill on autopilot, without conscious thought.

the best way past a plateau is to jostle yourself beyond it; to change your practice method so you disrupt your autopilot and rebuild a faster, better circuit. One way to do this is to speed things up—to force yourself to do the task faster than you normally would. Or you can slow things down—going so slowly that you highlight previously undetected mistakes. Or you can do the task in reverse order, turn it inside out or upside down. It doesn't matter which technique you use, as long as you find a way to knock yourself out of autopilot and into your sweet spot.

Ahmad Hossam says

A bible of inspiration and practical advice for skill developments. I admire its conciseness and clear cut instructions; if you're only interested in conclusions, not arguments or lengthy scientific discussions underlying self-improvement , this is the perfect book for you.

Amir Tesla says

Nuggets of applied techniques for effective learning and training many of which if employed enables you to achieve the results of 1 year training in just couple of months.

This book would be a great companion to his other amazing one "The talent code"

It's supposed to be a pocket book, so, the material are quite concise. I'd prefer more in-depth material, hence the two withheld stars.

Saeed says

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