



# 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](http://www.ambar.org/grit)



Commission on Women  
in the Profession  
American Bar Association

# Improve Grit and Growth Mindset Watch Women Attorneys Succeed

**I**n 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.

*\*Report of the Eighth Annual NAWL National Survey on Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms, 2013.*

\*\*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.



In short, grit—defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”<sup>\*\*</sup>—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**.

## What Is the Grit Project?

The Grit Project educates about the science behind grit and growth mindset and, through its online Toolkit, provides bar associations, law firms, corporate legal departments, and women attorneys with the resources to assess, teach, and learn these traits.

## **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](http://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**

### **CHAIR**

Roberta D. Liebenberg

### **MEMBERS**

Michelle Banks  
Lacy L. Durham  
Carrie Hightman  
Denise F. Keane  
Jessie Kornberg  
Paul W. Lee  
Andrew J. (Josh) Markus  
Margaret K. Masunaga  
Meg Milroy  
Maritza S. Ryan  
Stephanie A. Scharf

## **The Grit Project Committee**

### **CO-CHAIRS**

Carrie Hightman  
Milana Hogan  
Katie Larkin-Wong

### **MEMBERS**

Linda Chanow	Manar Morales
Gail Cummings	Ellen Ostrow
Jasmin French	Julie Pearl
Michelle Gallardo	Mary Reding
Patricia Gillette	Lauren Stiller Rikleen
Ilene Knable Gotts	Sarah Rohne
Debbie Epstein Henry	Heidi Schedler
Reda Hicks	Anne Marie Seibel
Heather Horn	Mary Sharp
Lisa Horowitz	Ericka Watson
Christina Liu	Susan Letterman White

## **ABA Commission on Women in the Profession Staff**

Melissa Wood, Director  
Natale Fuller, Program Specialist

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](http://ambar.org/grit).



## Program Sample Agendas

### Using Grit and Growth Mindset to Advance Women in the Law

The sample agendas serve as guides for developing your own program using the tools offered by the Grit Project. The agendas are intended to be a starting point rather than a prescription for how a Grit Program might run.

#### **Suggested Personalization:**

- Substitute other grit scenarios or films into proposed agendas.
- Restructure the format by including a panel or a consultant to reflect on what people have learned from grit and a growth mindset. For a list of potential speakers who have worked on the Grit Project, see the Grit Project Speaker's Bureau available on [ambar.org/grit](http://ambar.org/grit).
- Explore different methods of learning. For example, you might encourage your small groups to write down some of their key takeaways from their group discussion on large pieces of paper and post around the room. This way, visual learners can absorb more about grit and a growth mindset.
- Encourage participants to take the grit and mindset psychological tests at the beginning of the event or before the event to save time. The grit and growth mindset research PowerPoint can be presented in 20 minutes, so on the agendas, there is 10 minutes allotted for the test taking.\*

#### **Sample Agenda Grit Presentation and Discussion of Two Scenarios (Running Time = 1:00)**

1. Presentation on grit and mindset research (12:00 - 12:30)\*
2. Presentation of Scenario 1: Overwhelmed Associate (12:30 - 12:45)
  - a. Play Scenario 1 (12:30-12:35)
  - b. Among small groups, talk about discussion questions. (12:35 - 12:45)
2. Presentation of Scenario 2: Bullying in a Deposition (12:45-12:55)
  - a. Play Scenario 2 (12:45-12:50)
  - b. Among small groups, talk about discussion questions. (12:50-12:55)
3. Close Program. (12:55-1:00)



**Sample Agenda**  
**Grit Presentation and Discussion of Two Scenarios**  
**(Running Time = 1:30)**

1. Presentation on grit and mindset research (12:00 - 12:30)\*
2. Presentation of Scenario 1: Overwhelmed Associate (12:30 - 12:55)
  - a. Play Scenario 1 (12:30-12:35)
  - b. Among small groups, talk about discussion questions. (12:35 - 12:50)
  - c. (Optional) Present the results of small group discussions. (12:50-12:55)
3. Presentation of Scenario 2: Bullying in a Deposition (12:55-1:20)
  - a. Play Scenario 2 (12:55-1:00)
  - b. Among small groups, talk about discussion questions. (1:00-1:15)
  - c. (Optional) Present the results of small group discussions to the large groups. (1:15-1:20)
4. Ask participants to set individual goals to apply grit or a growth mindset to their careers. (1:20-1:25)
5. Close program. (1:25 - 1:30)

**Leveraging Your Content – and Spreading the Word about Your Good Work**

- Appoint scribes charged with taking detailed notes of your program. Use the scribe's notes to create a follow-up article to be published by the association or its member publication/periodical or to blog about the event. If such an article is produced, circulate it widely to participants, leaders of local law firms, and interested parties and post it on the association's website, with appropriate metatags so that it is picked up by search engines and increases web traffic.
- Distribute news of the program and follow-up report or article in social media.
- Consider taping all or part of the program to create podcasts and post online.

We at the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession would appreciate receiving a copy of any such articles and a summary of your comments about the program. We are also happy to answer your questions and include your alternative agendas on our website. If you have questions or ideas about other ways to present the grit program, please email Natale Fuller at [natale.fuller@americanbar.org](mailto:natale.fuller@americanbar.org).