

Lessons on entrepreneurial grit from an international ice swimmer

By [Leigh Andrews](#)

29 Nov 2018

Plunge my arm elbow-deep in a cooler of ice cubes for two minutes? Don't mind if I do! Self-proclaimed "former couch potato turned extreme swimmer" Ryan Stramrood explained how he got started and how he sticks to it in the latest HeavyChef masterclass, with important insights for those in the entrepreneurial space.



Angela Lee Duckworth's definition of grit.

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I've pushed as far as I want to go in the cold. It has taught me incredible lessons and I'm taking those lessons, sharing them and using them personally in my own life. All this has taken me in a direction I would never have believed possible. .

#pushpastimpossible #iceswimming #impossible #inspiration #inspirationalquotes
#inspirational #inspirationalspeaker #inspirationalgallery #iceswimming
#motivation #motivationalquotes #motivational #motivationalspeaker
#motivationalspeech

A post shared by Ryan Stramrood Official    (@ryan_stramrood) on Sep 22, 2018 at 12:29pm PDT

” that they live to stimulate the entrepreneurial sector, and the masterclasses – already scheduled to extend into 2020 – are designed as lessons for attendees to dip in and out of, depending where their interests and time constraints lie.

In case this is your first time hearing of them, the name 'HeavyChef' comes from the saying that one should “never trust a skinny chef”. So Roed says to get stuck in, and do your 10,000 hours, so you become an expert.



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Leigh Andrews 21 Feb 2017



Roed added that HeavyChef is about getting involved in an underserved area – that of the entrepreneurial resurgence in South Africa, as they hope to effect change from the bottom up, as change will come fastest that way. They've also evolved beyond just offering talks filled with the tips, tools and tricks of setting up a business to also offer a cerebral 'deep dive'.

Apologising for the pun, Roed introduced the day's speaker: international ice swimmer Ryan Stramrood, who soon proved himself as fitting to speak of entrepreneurial grit.

Stramrood asked if we'd seen Angela Lee Duckworth's TED Talk from 2013, as that's the first time the topic of 'grit' came to light for many.

Not only does successful entrepreneurship come from tapping into a specific mindset, but grit is the reason some are able to 'stick to it' through the challenges better than others.

"You get hit often, which can be soul destroying and make you question why you're doing what you're doing," said Stramrood of his hobby, admitting it's something that happens in his day running Stramrood Connect media sales, too.

Grit is what you tap into, to power through and make it work.

Stramrood explained how he came to his current tagline of '**Push past impossible**' in a thoroughly engaging way, by taking us on a journey into how the mind tries to steer us away from challenges and how we need to hone our focus and constantly check that we're doing what we need to be doing to reach our goals, as scary or unreachable as they may seem.



SA extreme swimmers to set off from Russia to US

23 Jul 2013



The crux of succeeding, said Stramrood, is on being aware of the current setting of your mind, coupled with truly believing that you can achieve your goal and being brave enough to try.

To illustrate this, Stramrood had filled two cooler boxes with ice and asked us all to plunge an arm in, elbow first, and to try keep our arms in for a minute. We lasted 30 to 45 seconds on average and there were many exclamations of pain, ranging from swearwords whispered under the breath to outright yelps of pain.

We kept these in mind with the knowledge that we'd make another attempt at the activity later, once we had a little more insight into that mindset of entrepreneurial 'grit'.



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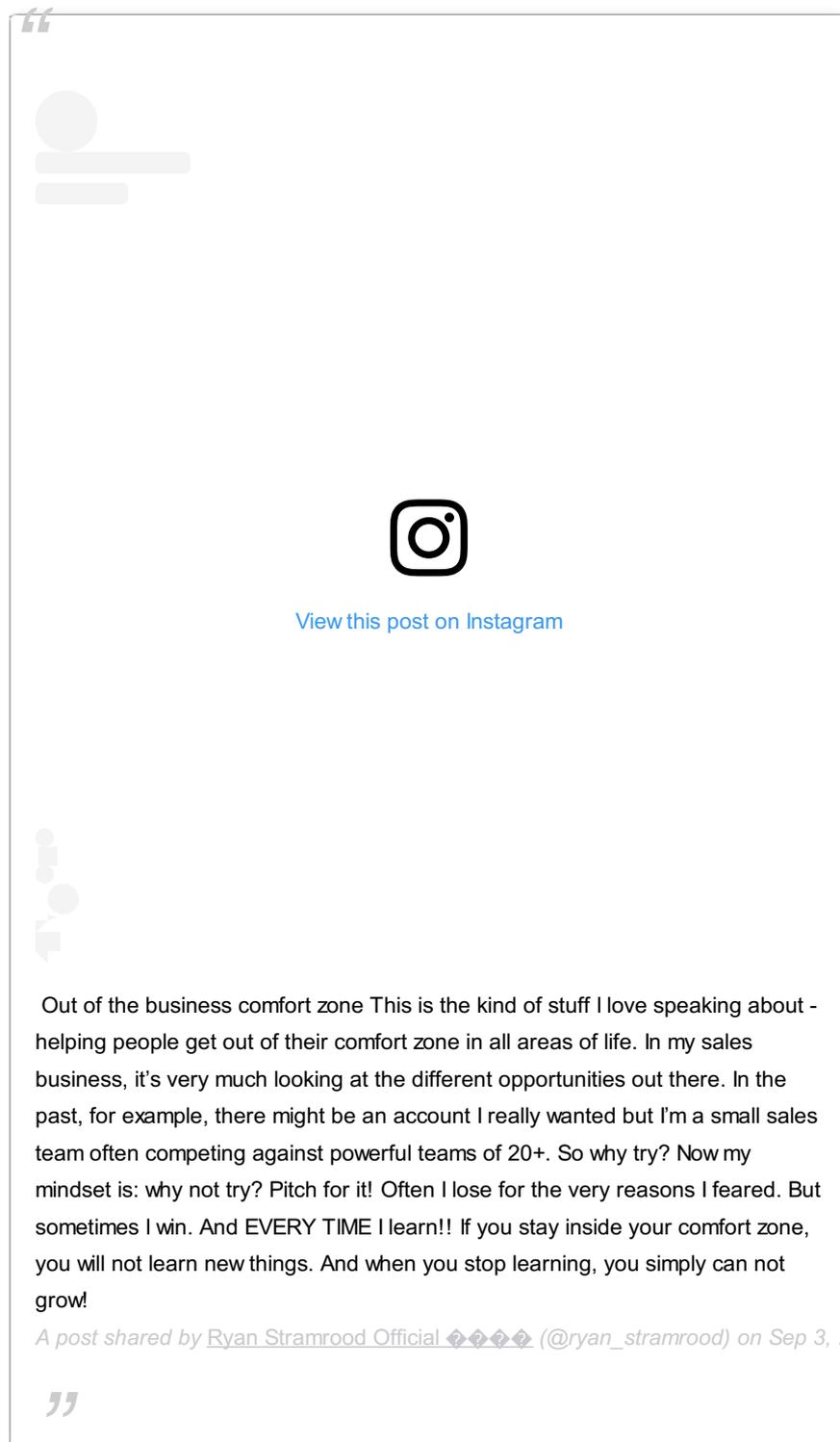


Stramrood then explained how and why he does what he does. He said he is, "literally an average Joe, there's no special metabolic skill, just a hobby of extreme deep sea swimming."

So while you've likely heard of Stramrood's impressive accomplishments in this realm, none of it is done for publicity – it's a personal thing, and Stramrood soon found out just how much you learn when you're forced outside your comfort zone – that's what entrepreneurship is all about.

Switching from 'self-protect' to 'self-explore' mode

Explaining this further, Stramrood said, "We are all human, we all gravitate to the normal. To get outside your comfort zone, you need to push yourself to constantly experiment with the new and the different, even if the outcome is negative." In doing so, you're technically switching your mind from "self-protect" to "self-explore" mode.



nderstood this for the first time when swimming the English Channel – 90% of those who try it fail. That's the same as entrepreneurs who succeed, added Roed.

In Stramrood's case, he "hit the wall" around nine hours into the swim.

Getting us non-ice swimmers to understand what pushing past this entails, he said the 'too cold, even in a wetsuit' sea

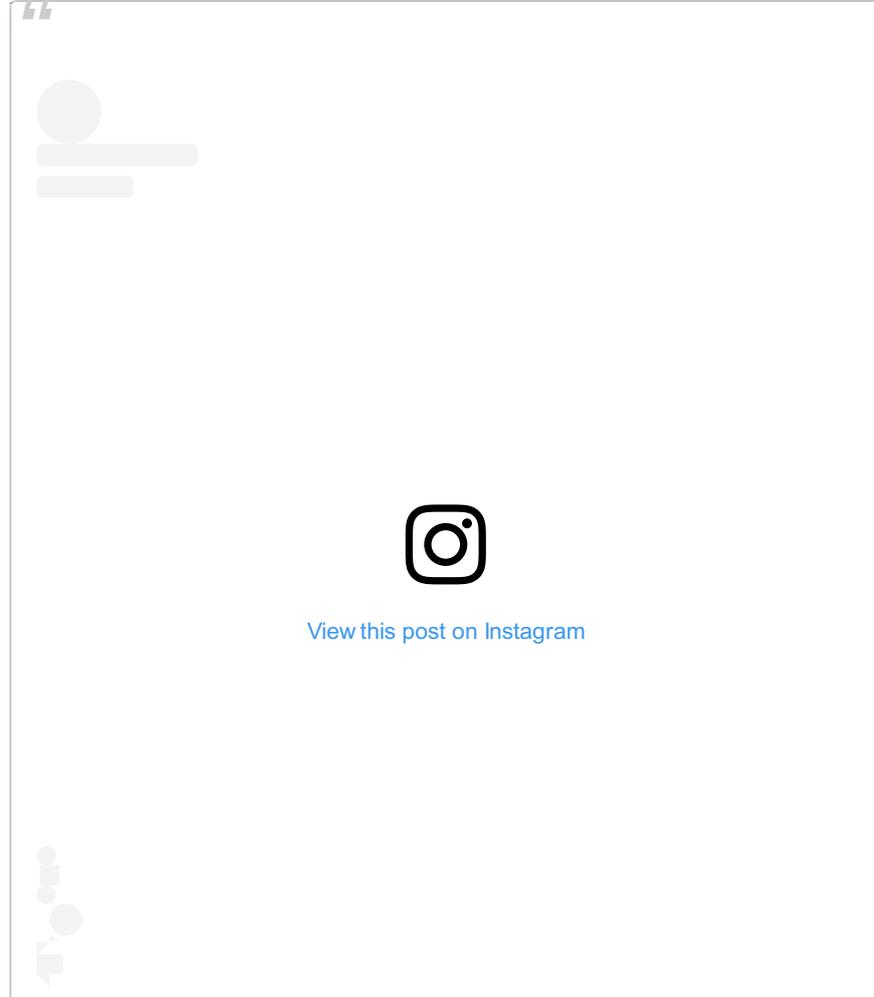
around Cape Town is usually between 12 and 18 °C, but 'ice water' is 5 °C and below. So it's literally a journey into the cold.

When your mind overrides your intention

Stramrood said your mind goes into overdrive to convince you of certain death if you persevere, because the colder you get, the more pain, panic and fear you face, which makes you question your ability. But of course, you don't just dive into the sea and see how long you can take it.

For Stramrood, the Table View to Robben Island swim used to be his Everest. He's now completed this swim 85 times and says he's usually at the island by 6am, back at beach by 8am and in the office by 9am.

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A placeholder for an Instagram post, showing a profile picture, a name, and a large Instagram logo in the center. Below the logo is a link to view the post on Instagram.

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Last month I missed the sub 4hr for a double Robben Island crossing by 1 minute and it hurt. Today I missed it by 12 seconds, haha. First leg, was cruising, on track for a 1h50, but then suddenly was off course and ended on a 2h06 and 8,2kms (extra 900m). Then en route home, halfway across the mist rolled in thick so couldn't see more than 20/30m ahead. Craig Willars had GPS and kept telling me I was cruising, but I lost faith cause it felt far away, I had visions of swimming in circles, shoulders hurting and could not see land. But then super suddenly the beach was there and ended the 2nd leg on 1h54 (a first for me doing the second leg faster than the first). 4h00 (and 12 seconds!), covering 16kms. 16C water. Great seeing Carina Bruwer Pugliese on route to start her swim and at the end (only person out there who shivers more than me :). Thx Megan, Craig and the Frazer team. ❖❖❖ @carinabruwer #pushpastimpossible

A post shared by Ryan Stramrood Official ❖❖❖❖ (@ryan_stramrood) on Oct 25, 2018 at 9:34am PDT

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s reminder that you need to commit yourself to something for 10,000 hours to master it and yes, he only dons a Speedo, goggles and cap to do so, but Stramrood said that with every swim, he still looks for an excuse to climb into the Zodiac that accompanies him instead of completing the swim.

It's all about mindset...

When preparing for an ice swim, Stramrood sometimes visits I&J in his lunch break and asks them to fill a tub with ice, then submerges himself for 20 minutes.

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Before an ice swimming challenge, it's important that I know I am prepared for the shock of the cold water as it hits my body. It instills panic and pain as the blood rushes to your core to protect those vital organs. I prepare myself for this impact through ice bucket sessions at our local fishery I&J - much to the amusement of the staff 💎💎

A post shared by [Ryan Stramrood Official](#) 💎💎💎💎 (@ryan_stramrood) on Sep 8, 2018 at 1:13pm PDT

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ge our arms in the ice coolers, and at the other end of the scale – the 32 minutes it took him to complete his first 'ice mile' swim in Antarctica on 2 March 2014, at a temperature of -1°C, after a full week of being on standby for the swim, a focused state of mental readiness that's truly exhausting.

The details of how he got to that point are Stramrood's to tell – and he tells them well, having kept the masterclass attendees enthralled for a full four-hour session, with many clamouring for further insights.

Key among these were that this **still doesn't come easily** to Stramrood. Every ice swim is a challenge that he has to 'psych himself up' for and focus on at every step of the process.

Stramrood presented us with the uncomfortable truth that we default away from danger all the time. There are things we could do differently in our daily lives, which are the little 'impossibles' that shape us. Every single day we doubt ourselves and to keep identifying those doubts is harder than you think unless you have a grit mindset.

Here's how to cultivate your own 'grit' mindset...

For me, the standout quote of the day was this: 'Not trying is an immediate fail, but trying and failing is learning'.

Told to immerse our arms in those ice coolers again we definitely had the inspiration to stay in longer – doubling our earlier attempts, on average – just from being more aware of what our minds were telling us to do.

Stramrood said this is proof that where your mind sets the line is not necessarily where the line is – within reason, of course.



Do. Learn. Fail. Repeat. Again and again.

Juanita Pienaar 6 Aug 2018



He has learned how hard it is to keep learning those lessons as you keep hitting the default defence response. To overcome this, you need the constant fortitude and resilience to remind yourself why you are doing what you're doing.

You also need to take what's holding you back and unpack it, and there's no need to flog a dead horse. If something's not right for you, accept that and move on.

In adding to Duckworth's initial definition of grit, Stramrood presented the following two slides –Duckworth's words, followed by Stramrood's additions.



Stramrood's update on Duckworth's definition of grit.

We then worked together to put together a definition of grit. The room's suggestions included the following phrases:

“ *Time, stand up, find a way, mindset, expectation, support team, awareness, anger, mental fortitude, perspective, clear goal, discomfort, common sense, consistency, map, focus, struggle, consciousness, remaining present, effort, tracking, curiosity, confidence, courage to get over the small hurdles consistently, honesty, resilience.* ”

We've all had a goal that was important to us that we stopped pursuing as we believed it was out of reach, succumbed to self-doubt and been aware of it. But Roed says to dive in, as it might not be as bad as you think.

You need to have awareness of where you're going, as well as awareness of the voices in your head and your gut. You've got to be in the moment, and have perspective of where you're going.

“ *Great @heavychef masterclass with @Strammie this morning on #GRIT. Highly recommended for anyone trying to achieve, well, anything.— Oliver Potgieter (@OilyPot) November 22, 2018* ”

Ultimately, you need to find things you're not comfortable with, especially if they lie in a direction that may improve yourself or your business down the line, then dabble with it, repeatedly. Be aware of what's holding you back, believe you can achieve your goals and be brave enough to try, ended Stramrood.

Brave words to live by. Click through to [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for more about Stramrood, and follow [HeavyChef](#) on [Twitter](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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