How to Become Great at Just About Anything

Freakonomics Podcast Listening Guide

Part A: Supporting Freakonomics, Becoming a Singer, and Becoming Great

Prelistening Vocabulary

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| encore | expert performer | research | defer | fascinated | virtuously |
| a quick favor | powerlifting | outcome | give it a go | sabbatical | expertise |
| public radio | perform | psychotherapy | record yourself | infectious | fallacy |
| funding | accomplish | improved | karaoke program | enthusiasm | firmly believe |
| donations | present your work | puzzled | the tools | set sth/so on fire | outwork/outperform someone |
| charitable gift tax breaks | shoot below 90 | deliberate practice | peak | willing to be challenged | Attainable |
| tripled | up a skill | plow through something | skeptical | grotesquely overrated | accumulation |
| in one shot | genes | abstract | off the bat | absent |  |
| swag | natural born talent | outside our work | objective | an insight |  |
| golf balls | lack of progress | apply the principles | pinpoint | savants |  |

1. Why are donations important to Freakonomics?

2. What did Bargmann and her husband notice?

3. What was her dream?

4. What type of experts have they studied?

5. Why was Levitt so excited when he met Andres Ericsson?

6. What did they say in their New York Times Magazine article?

“We actually find that with the right kind of training, any individual will be able to acquire abilities that were previously viewed as only attainable if you had the right kind of genetic talent.”

Part B: Mozart, The Boston Marathon, and the 10,000-Hour Rule

Prelistening Vocabulary

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| stand out | innate | exceptional | an undeniable fact | aspect | advocate |
| conduct lab experiments | tonal/atonal languages | relatively average | as a species | scrimmage | adjustments |
| collect data | influence | Did you catch that? | selectively breeding | refine | clear criterion |
| figure sth out | the meaning of a word | sloppy | codify a strategy | go through one by one | outside one’s comfort zone |
| a special talent/ability | trained | marred by missed notes | radically | components | just beyond |
| perfect pitch | It’s becoming increasingly clear | critics complain | warn  a magic bullet | acknowledge | Near maximal effort |
| identify | seemingly | careless technique | the most accmplished | establish | not enjoyable |
| produce | acquire | far greater technical skill | elite | built on top of itself | discouraged |
| reference point | teachable | be admitted to Juilliard | boil down to sth. | well-defined specific goals | physiological adaptations |
| guarantee | start very young | qualify for a world record | quality, nature | involves | crummy |
| outstanding | a freak of nature | gold medal | target | aimed at | stretch yourself |

1. How do people get good at something?

2. Which famous musician had perfect pitch?

3. What does Ericsson say about Mozart’s perfect pitch?

4. How does he compare Mozart to Suzuki-trained children today?

5. How do standards of excellent change over time?

6. What do music teachers now say about Alfred Cortot’s recordings of Chopin’s 24 Etudes from the 1930’s?

7. What does Ericsson say about running times for the Boston Marathon compared to the early Olympic Games?

8. What is our reason for improving so much?

9. What is the 10,000 hour-rule?

10. What are purposeful practice and deliberate practice?

Part C: World Records, Taxi Drivers, Doctors, Outliers, and The Beatles

Prelistening Vocabulary

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| enable | frankly  devise a | continual pressure | over and over  again | surgery | extraordinarily accomplished |
| soil conservation | physics-based approach | a compelling angle | lead to growth  move the conversation | very immediate feedback | irresistibly appealing  at first glance |
| technician | augment | neuroscientific | out of \_\_\_ and into \_\_\_\_ | failures | falls apart |
| hold a world record | automatic pilot | steers  is shaped by | a scary part | freshly out of | compose  compositional |
| free-throw shooting | break sth down | MRIs | acceptable performance | some dimensions | skills  enhance |
| alternate | put it back together | brain growth | automaticity | when it comes to | popularized |
| a pair | focused | memorize routes | point out the difference | diagnosing heart sounds | get sth wrong |
| stand on one leg | engaged | master a body of knowledge | between \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ | general practictioners | counting hours |
| blindfolded | a rubber band | a set route | deal with | incorrectly diagnosed | fundamental  be guided |
| underhanded | stretch | push your brain to do sth | analyze the outcome | have a hand in sth | incrementally |
| accolades | break | of that sort | the mere number | less accomplished | troubling |

1. Why is Bob Fischer well-known?

2. Why is it more difficult to become a taxi driver than a bus driver in London?

3. What does Ericsson say about heart doctors that have 20 years of experience compared to doctors fresh out of medical school?

4. What did research find about elite musicians and how much practice they did by the time they were 20?

5. What does Gladwell say that people have to achieve in order to become exceptional?

6. What does Ericsson say about Gladwell’s 10,000 hour rule?

7. What does Ericsson say about The Beatles and how people practice?

Part D: More about The Beatles, Differing Views, and Releasing an Album

Prelistening Vocabulary

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| that means | flourish | strip bars | a staggering number | the former | suddenly |
| an incredibly prolonged period | meaningless  a grandmaster | hours on end  covers | split hairs | the latter  negotiate | a huge jump  motivating |
| incubation | distilled | extraordinary | holistic | soft | bumpy |
| prove a point | set so/sth apart | emerge | technical | sharp | release a record |
| embark | take exception to sth | absorb | trying circumstances | buy into sth | radio play |
| trajectory | composing | a deep level | schmoes | acknowledge | phenomenal |
| draw a conclusion | be linked to | interpretation | recipe | reluctant  pursue a dream | embody  courage |
| elsewhere | innovative | point sth out | encounter | guidance | hesitate |
| bring sth to fruition | respectfully | go back to sth. | convert | cheer for me | inspire |
| baseline | causal | generation | emulate | around the corner | brand new |

1. What does Malcom Gladwell say about the 10,000 hour rule?

2. What does he say about how The Beatles developed their abilities?

3. How do Gladwell’s views differ from those of Ericsson?

4. What was the problem that Susanne Bargmann had with her singing?

5. What did she do to improve her singing?

6. What did she do after she improved her singing?