

Grit by Design

Grit isn't a personality trait. It's not loud and it doesn't seek applause.

It's a practice—a way of showing up when nothing is guaranteed.

By Sarah Opitz



Psychologist Angela Duckworth defines grit as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. It's not about talent or luck—it's about what you do when things get hard. In her book *Grit*, she explores how high achievers blend stamina and purpose over time.

That quiet determination, unseen but unwavering, keeps people moving long after the excitement fades. Eline van Beest seems to embody that mindset instinctively. Her path echoes the kind of persistence Duckworth describes: hurdles, setbacks, and steady, relentless progress toward a singular mission—to redesign the path to success for med-tech founders.

While at Delft University of Technology, Eline founded and built NightBalance, a medical technology company focused on sleep apnea. She sold it to Philips, went on to lead a biotech company, and is now focused on building the infrastructure she wished she'd had. She's not just asking for change. She's creating it.

Backed by Stichting Santiago and with the purpose to collaborate with the four Dutch technical universities, Eline is setting up the Netherlands' first Professorship in Med-Tech Valorisation, a role now in the process of being filled. This bold move aims

to close the gap between academic research and real-world execution. Universities teach theory, but few equip students with the realities of regulation, documentation, clinical validation, medical product development and production. "We don't learn this in school," she says. "and it shows."

Eline is also launching the Santiago WISE award, a prize for early-stage women in med-tech. This mini scholarship covers the cost of medical technology training courses. The aim is to equip female founders with real-world med-tech skills often missing from academic settings. Winners will be announced at the TOPX Summit this November.

"Women receive just 1–2% of funding, even though we generate 30–35% of the field's innovations," Eline explains. "If we can help them stand out—even a little—they'll have a better shot."

A Pressure Cooker Year

Despite advice against launching a med-tech company, Eline founded NightBalance to improve sleep apnea treatment. She built the company from an early-stage idea, culminating in a high-profile acquisition by Philips, placing her device in over a dozen markets worldwide. It reshaped her

understanding of scale, leadership, and the realities of building in healthcare.

"As a young entrepreneur, I had a reason to quit every day."

That grit was tested in 2017, one of the hardest moments of her career. Eline had just raised €12.5 million and was pregnant with her second child. Her team had reached all clinical endpoints and needed one final milestone—approval from Dutch health authorities for coverage through the healthcare system—to unlock the next tranche of funding from investors.

At the end of September, the call came: denied. Again. It was the third rejection in four years. The criteria had shifted again. Frustrated and just weeks away from parental leave, with only three or four months of runway, Eline faced a brutal decision: accept a painful bridge loan or risk collapse. "This is it," she remembers thinking. "This is the end."

What turned the tide wasn't data. It was something Eline had spent years quietly building: trust. Her close relationship with the patient association became a game changer, and they responded quickly to address the final concerns raised.

In mid-December, just two days after giving birth, her phone rang: Milestone met.

Two days later, Philips called.

What No One Teaches You

Med-tech entrepreneurs often face an uphill battle.

About Eline van Beest

Eline is a Dutch entrepreneur and investor with deep experience in medical technology and biotech. She founded and scaled NightBalance, a med-tech company treating sleep apnea, which was acquired by Philips in 2018. She later served as CEO of Hybridize Therapeutics, a biotech company spun out from the LUMC. Currently, she's a partner at Thuja Capital, where she invests in early-stage healthcare companies. Eline holds a MSc in Industrial Design Engineering, with a specialization in medical technology from the Delft University of Technology.

Universities prioritize research but rarely teach the skill set needed to bring a device to market. When Eline launched NightBalance, she didn't know how much regulatory acumen mattered—until she and her team misclassified their device as Class I when it should have been Class II. The error had swift and unforgiving consequences.

"You think you're moving fast until you realize you're starting over. We had to redo our documentation. We lost a whole year." She still talks about that experience when mentoring other founders. Not because it was unusual—but because it was predictable, and avoidable. This gap is exactly what Eline is working to close. Through the professorship and the prize, she wants to teach founders to ask smarter questions sooner. "In biotech, there are seasoned professionals along the entire pipeline. In med-tech, founders are left guessing."

The gap between technical brilliance and real-world readiness still drives her, but now from the investor's seat. Today, Eline sees many young entrepreneurs. "They pitch with great ideas. But when I ask for a design history file, they look at me like a deer caught in headlights. No one taught them this part." She's committed to building that missing layer of education and support.

Rethinking Leadership

Early in her career, Eline was deeply involved in every detail. "I cared so deeply about getting everything right," she recalls. Over time, she realized leadership isn't about proximity. It's about trust.

This lesson became clear when she brought in an interim CEO, 15 years her senior, during maternity leave. Eline had assumed that weekly check-ins were enough. But the interim leader met with the team daily. "I thought, isn't that micromanaging? But she said: 'You have to build muscle with them—until they can do it themselves.'"

It was a revelation. Now, Eline leads by that principle: guide early, then step back.

She also values external perspective. At Hybridize, her biotech venture, an advisory board gave her space to test ideas.

And today, Eline channels her experiences and those gathered from others into a CEO academy she created at Thuja Capital, where founders meet regularly to speak candidly about what they're facing. "You think you're alone," she says. "You're not."

The Cost of Being Seen

On a trade mission to the U.S., she was asked the same question at least ten times: Who are you here with? It wasn't curiosity, she realized, but assumption. "It's like a drip on your forehead," she says, tapping it. "A thousand tiny drops that wear you down." She was the one leading a part of the mission, yet few saw her as the leader.

This constant underestimation is what drives her visibility work. When asked to present, Eline often passes the mic along the curated list of women leaders she keeps, from rising stars to seasoned veterans over 50. "We always see the same women—or the same type of woman—on stage," she explains, "We need broader representation. More age diversity. More depth."

Visibility isn't vanity. It changes who gets funded, who gets heard, and who gets believed.

Grit Isn't Glamorous. But It Builds Things That Last.

Eline's journey hasn't been linear, but each chapter has left a mark. After NightBalance, Eline led a biotech company that developed an IND-cleared



asset now in clinical trials. The team successfully out-licensed the asset in a \$100 million deal and continues to advance it under the licensee. The company is no longer developing new assets but remains in place. "Success isn't always about running the company forever. It's about making sure what you build outlives you."

The work Eline does now is foundational and sometimes invisible. But she knows how to play the long game. She aligns closely with Duckworth's research: grit isn't flashy. It's the quiet resilience that builds enduring systems.

"We can't keep doing things the same way and expect different results. If you're an investor, back diverse founders. If you're an academic, teach real-world development. If you're on a stage, share it. And if you're a founder, learn everything you can—because ideas are everywhere. Execution is rare."

Through grit by design, Eline van Beest is opening doors—and making sure they stay open for those coming next.

Santiago WISE Award: Women Innovation Stimulation & Education

Eline is launching a new initiative to support women founders in med-tech. The prize offers access to educational courses on medical technology development to set them up for success and give them a competitive advantage in the market.

More information can be found at:

<https://santiahofonds.nl/WISEaward>.

Winners will be announced at the TOPX Summit in November 2025.

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