



Genius File #3 – God's Mistake or Yours?

By

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We live in a world obsessed with fixing ourselves. More specifically, the *fixing* I'm talking about here is the fixing of our weaknesses - something the great many endeavor to correct when it comes to increasing performance. We take courses and classes, read books, and follow this craze or that fad – all intended to make ourselves better in whatever role we fill professionally.

While self-improvement is surely a noble cause, and no one would argue that trying to get better at anything is every "wrong", it's how we approach that improvement that needs to be reconsidered.

What needs reconsidering is exactly what we try to fix and how we go about it. When it comes to getting better by gaining new skills or knowledge, that is one thing. Yes, the technician must gain new skills by learning to use new equipment, and the lawyer must improve by gaining new knowledge of the law. But knowledge and skills are acquirable things that can be learned.

What can't be acquired, however, are natural talents. Natural talents are your *innate* ability to do something, your natural endowment or aptitude. The key word here is natural.

Based on your genetics and the way your brain is structured you possess unique natural talents for certain ways of thinking, making decisions, and behaving. We know from research and experience that these natural talents are fixed and do not change much over the course of your life. They are not something you can learn or acquire through conscious effort like reading a book, or training.

Acquired skills, on the other hand, are those talents that we *can* acquire or develop. These are the knowledge and experience we gain throughout life. While they can play a supporting role in your success, they can not replace natural talents.

The key is that while some individuals might improve their ability in one specific area through acquiring knowledge and experience, if it isn't a natural talent for them to begin with, they will never be great at it.

For example, the sales person who learns the technical steps of the sale has one form of an acquired skill for selling. The accountant who has the knowledge of math and accounting principles has an acquired skill for her work. The airline pilot who has learned the principles of flight has an acquired skill for flying.

The sales person who has acquired knowledge and experience, though, only has one half of the picture. If he doesn't possess the natural talents for being aggressive, persistent or empathetic than all that acquired talent is for naught.

Likewise, the accountant who has acquired the skills for accounting may be very proficient at those aspects of her work, but without the natural talents for being attentive to details and being driven by perfection, she may miss details that add up to costly mistakes or settle for less than perfectly balanced books (which is nirvana for the best accountants by the way).

I fly a lot and I'm glad that the pilots who fly me around the world have the acquired skills and knowledge for how to actually fly that Boeing 777 from Hartsfield to Heathrow. But I would not want to fly with someone who didn't also have the natural talents for decisiveness, intuitive decision-making and an ability called compartmentalization that the best pilots possess.

Every role is different, as is every person who fills it, but the one thing we've learned is that without the right natural talents to back them up, acquired skills and knowledge wont deliver maximum performance in any role.

Here's the problem though. Most people fail to differentiate between acquired and natural talents. They try to develop natural talents, just like they were skills or knowledge, but since natural talents are acquirable, it simply doesn't work.

The trick to becoming much more successful in life, according to the research, is to better align the natural talents you already possess with what you do. Instead of trying to put new talents in, the key is to figure out how to better use what talents you already possess.

Here's another way to look at it. To assume that you – at your very core - need to *fix* yourself requires the presupposition that you must be broken, and that implies that God screwed up. Feel free to substitute whatever spiritual belief you have, but it likely wont change the concept.

Think about it. If you believe that at your very core the way you were made is insufficient to achieve success, then you have to admit that you view yourself as flawed. Now I'm not talking about developing new acquired talents, rather a belief that "I need fixing." Acquiring new knowledge and experience is great. That's a prerequisite for anyone's success and something all top performers constantly do. But when you attempt to fix *who* you are instead of fixing *how* you are, then you must first think who you are is insufficient. And if you think that then you can't avoid the question, "Who screwed up?"

In reality it's not what you are at your very core that needs work, but how you apply yourself that needs fixing. If you believe you were created for a specific purpose, then you have a completely unique and incredibly powerful set of natural talents for that purpose, so it's not what raw materials you have to work with that you should be concerned about. What you should be focused on is how you apply those raw materials.

If you need to fix anything, it is the way you apply you – not you!

The most successful people studied in a recent international study of top-performers understand this. They don't view their set of talents as flawed, rather any flaws they see come in how they apply those talents.

Because of this radically different perspective on themselves, when they focus on correcting flaws, those flaws are in their application of themselves, not themselves.

In other words, they achieve tremendous leaps in performance by adjusting their environment (what they do or how they do it) not themselves. They don't change their talents, they change how those talents are applied.

Give yourself up to your natural talents and allow that which is you – as you were created – to do what it does best. Remember, regardless of whatever higher power you believe in, if you believe that such a higher power is infinitely more powerful and knowing than you, you have to ask yourself, "did that power know what it was doing when it created me?"

If you answer yes, then you can't blame your God for making you incorrectly. If you still agree with me then any mistakes in your life are not - cannot be - in you at your core, but in the application of you.

In other words, God made you, but you decide what to do with yourself. If a problem exists it's not with the thing God created, but how you apply it.

I say all of this because there is a huge difference between thinking you are broken and realizing that you are just poorly aligned. The former is a racecar with a blown engine that must be completely rebuilt (broken). The latter is a perfectly good Ferrari trying to race in an off-road rally (poorly aligned).

Success is not about developing talent – it's about aligning it

The Genius Files is a series of educational articles crafted from lessons learned in the recently concluded Genius Project (a seven-year, 197,000, twenty-three country study of what drives individual excellence in the new knowledge worker economy).

The Genius Project is the foundational research behind the latest book from Innermetrix Inc Founder and CEO Jay Niblick titled, *What's Your Genius – How the Best Think for Success*.

To view the entire Genius series, or to learn more about how you can unleash your own genius, please visit [**http://www.whatsyourgenius.com**](http://www.whatsyourgenius.com).