

Genius File #4: A Right Turn Towards Individual Success and Satisfaction

By

Jay Niblick

Did you ever have that one class in school where no matter how hard you tried you just never seemed to get it? No matter how hard you studied; no matter how hard you worked; results just never seemed to come easily if at all. Even if you did do well it was always a struggle. But, if you are like most people, there was also another class where the exact opposite was true and things just came to you almost effortlessly. The whole concept just made sense and you achieved success with much less effort.

One reason for this is because each of us has certain innate talents for thinking and making decisions. These natural talents allow us to see some aspects of reality very clearly while filtering out other aspects almost completely. For example, some people naturally see the big picture very easily (the talent for strategic thinking), or intuitively understanding how various parts work together (the talent for integrative ability), while still for others understanding complex problems is like second nature (the problem solving talent).

Our thinking talents and decision-making styles comprise the very core of who we are. They make us the unique individual that we see in the mirror each morning and they hold the greatest potential for delivering our greatest levels of performance and success.

For the most part, science agrees that these decision-making styles are pretty much permanently engrained in who we are by both our genetics and early life experiences. As a result, these are not things that you can develop through training exercises or sheer effort in adulthood. If your job (or class) depends

heavily on a talent that you don't possess, or if it doesn't align well with what talents you do possess, you are in trouble. You will always be that student sitting in the difficult class, working harder than anyone else just to keep up and achieve less.

Conventional wisdom, however, would argue that you should do just that. The traditional view of self-improvement says that it is good to place yourself in that difficult class, to become well rounded in a wide variety of areas and to identify your weaknesses so you can *fix* them and turn them into strengths.

Unfortunately conventional wisdom is based on time-honored principles. And the problem with such principles is that they can become subject to less and less consideration over time. Eventually, such "wisdom" becomes such a part of the norm that it fails to be questioned at all, becoming accepted without question – even when it is wrong.

More specifically the conventional wisdom I'm talking about here is a legacy of beliefs concerning how companies manage people and how people allow themselves to be managed. It is a legacy created in a bygone era where the world operated in an industrial economy, but this era has passed. Today the world's organizations, and those who work in them, find themselves in a new and very different kind of era – an intellectual age.

The old era was an industrial one, where the value of the individual worker was primarily based on their ability to physically "do." They were the physical worker. In the new Intellectual era, however, the value of the individual worker is primarily based on their ability to mentally "think" rather than "do." Today's worker is what famed management theorist Peter F. Drucker called the *Knowledge Worker*.

The problem with the old Command and Control mentality of the industrial era is that it finds the role as *sacrosanct* and the worker as *sacrificial*. By this I mean the belief that there is "one best way" to complete a task, wherein the individual worker is instructed to sacrifice their way of doing things in favor of a unified, common and controllable way.

In this mentality if the job requires abilities the worker doesn't possess it is the worker who changes, not the role. It is the worker who is expected to change who they are (e.g., fix weaknesses, develop new talents, etc.) in order to better fit the requirements dictated by the role.

When the primary value of the worker was for their manual ability to do, perhaps this worked fine, and everyone could conform to a standard way of *doing* something - because it is possible for people to modify how they manually perform a task. However, since the primary value of today's worker is intellectual, it is *not* possible to expect everyone to conform to a standard way of *thinking* – because it is not possible for people to consciously change their natural way of thinking.

To succeed today, though, you must find your own best way to do things. Today, you must be sacrosanct and the role must be sacrificial.

This is what the result of a recent seven-year, 197,000 person study teaches us that the most successful people do anyway. The most successful people today don't follow conventional wisdom. They understand that their natural talents are fixed and therefore they don't spend their lives trying to become the A+ student in that difficult class. Because they understand that they are who they are, instead of wasting vast amounts of energy trying to become something they are not, they invest that energy in trying to better apply the natural talents they already possess.

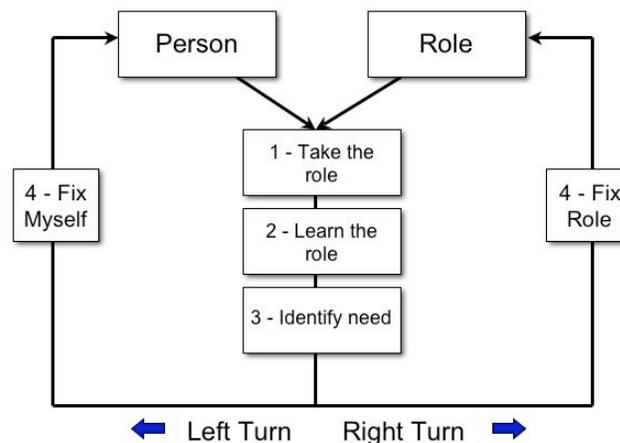
In a sense, and to quote a preeminent researcher in the field named Dr. Robert Hartman, "they stop trying to put in what God left out and instead work with what He put in." Instead of fixing themselves, in other words, they fix the role. To the geniuses of today, *they* are sacrosanct and the role is sacrificial.

Simply put, the most successful people in the new economy realize a couple of core things:

- Their value to the organization has shifted from their physical ability to do, to their mental ability to think
- While they could change the way they manually did things, they cannot practically change the way they uniquely think about things.
- Since they can't change how they think to conform to a role, the role must conform to their way of thinking
- To reach the highest levels of performance and satisfaction, that which was sacrificial (i.e., my best way) must become the sacrosanct.

The illustration below depicts the different direction the most successful people take, compared to the rest of us. Below are the four universal steps that everyone goes through in any role:

- Step 1 – Accept the role.
- Step 2 – Get to know the role better and figure out what it really requires for success.
- Step 3 – Inevitably, identify gaps between what the job requires and what they can provide (talents, knowledge, skills, etc.).
- Step 4 – Attempt to close that gap (either by changing themselves, or changing the role).



Step #4 is where the crucial difference lies between those who succeed in today's intellectual era and those who don't. Because those who struggle assume that the role is fixed, and because they mistakenly assume that they *can* develop natural talents, they focus on changing themselves to develop everything the role requires. Making a simple mistake, they assume that with enough hard work and intelligence they can develop both the skills and talents needed, so they set off trying to *fix* themselves.

The most successful today, however, do the opposite. They somehow understand that they can't develop new natural talents. So, instead of focusing on changing themselves they focus on changing the role. In the diagram above you see how you can choose to turn either left or right.

Due to their heightened self-awareness, and their belief in being authentic, today's most successful people figure out how to change roles so that they only depend on their natural talents. The single biggest differentiating characteristic of a successful knowledge worker today is someone who turns right far more than they turn left.

In order to succeed in today's intellectual era you must change how you think about your role. You must wake up to the realization that you are the tool. You must gain the same level of awareness and understanding for yourself that is commonly achieved for how physical tools or processes work and the most efficient and effective way to utilize them.

It's for this simple but powerful reason that you need to revolutionize how you think about yourself and the paths you take to achieve your objectives. The objectives may indeed remain the same, but the best way to reach that objective must be yours to determine.

And you will do that by developing a much higher level of self-awareness for your natural talents and non-talents, and then choosing a path that is true to who you are.

When we really know our talents, and when we are more authentic to those talents, an almost mystical energy seems to show up in what we are doing. The stars seem to align and as Basil King put it, "mighty forces come to our aid."

In the end it's not about "fixing" what we don't have, but rather learning to trust what we do have and letting it do its thing. In that moment when we are in *the flow* - where all of our talents are optimally aligned with what we are doing - anyone really can become a genius.

The question becomes, "will you turn left to modify yourself to better fit the one best way - or will you turn right to modify the role to fit your best way).

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>.