



## **Genius File #9 – Being Authentic at Work (A Case Study)**

By

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Today Gretchen is one of the top sales people in her company, but this wasn't always the case. Her company sells home security systems, and Gretchen's job as an inside sales agent is to prospect over the phone to schedule home visits where a field representative gives a live sales presentation.

She spends her days sitting in a cubicle dialing out to homeowners trying to get them to schedule a home evaluation. Gretchen gets paid a sales commissions for every security system that gets sold to people she schedules.

When she first took the job she was taught that sales is a numbers game. Management told her that she had to make a specific number of outbound calls every day in order to beat the odds and find that one needle in the haystack that would agree to a home visit. Gretchen was told, "If you want to make money, you've got to call more people."

The best sales people in the company made approximately ninety to one hundred phone calls a day, and ended up scheduling three to five field appointments, out of which one would normally sign a contract. Management really stressed to her the importance of making a high volume of calls. Each sales person even had a daily call quota.

Gretchen, however, was built a little differently than most of the other sales people. Unlike the rest of them she had a very high level of empathy. And this empathy actually got in her way because while other sales people would spend no more than a few minutes trying to push for an appointment, Gretchen found herself talking to people for five, ten even fifteen minutes or more. She knew she

had to generate a high volume of calls so she was constantly trying to fix herself by suppressing her natural empathy and not connect too much with the person on the other end of the phone.

When she did this, she was not being true to who she was. She was awkward and preoccupied with watching the all-holy clock that sat next to her computer. The more she tried to ignore her natural tendencies and think differently so she could follow the script and stick to a time limit, the more awkward and ineffective she became.

Gretchen was in trouble. She wasn't performing well at all and the top question on management's mind was would she quit before they fired her. She was definitely ready to quit when I first met her. I had been asked by her company to consult to them on why she wasn't performing.

After I spoke with Gretchen it became pretty clear right up front that the issue seemed to be a poor fit between her natural talents and her role. Because of this I gave her a battery of assessments to help understand what her true talents were and how well they were aligned with her existing role.

The moment I saw the results it was obvious to me what the problem was, and Gretchen confirmed. Her extremely high empathy was causing her to want to connect with the people she was calling far more than the predetermined time limit would allow. The rest of the sales people in the company didn't have anywhere near her level of empathy, so they didn't have any problem running scripts and pushing through enough people until they found one that would agree to an appointment.

Getting on and off the phone as quickly as possible wasn't a problem for them, but it was proving to be a big problem for Gretchen. She felt bad about talking *at* people instead of talking *with* them. The result was that Gretchen was trying to be something she wasn't and it was negatively affecting her performance in a big way.

Luckily, the company was pretty open-minded about how to fix the problem. They had spent a lot of money training Gretchen and, already suffering from a high human turnover rate, they allowed us significant latitude in attempting to correct the problem.

What did I do? I simply told Gretchen to figure out how to be true to who she was. Once she learned that the role wasn't completely fixed, just her overall objective of scheduling X many appointments per week, she was able to make adjustments to how she went about achieving that goal.

I asked her how she would do the job if she were in charge. I said, "Just do you." As a result, Gretchen sought to change her role – not herself. She decided she would not put any time limit on the calls she made to prospects. She got rid of the clock on her desk and decided that she would not have a daily call quota, or any call quota for that matter – just a single quota for how many appointments she scheduled.

A very interesting thing happened when she did this. Gretchen, instead of suppressing her natural tendencies, started letting them guide her. She spent much more time with those she talked with. She got to know them and understand their needs much better. She once even told me about one call where she learned about the caller's teenage daughter, what her name was, how often she was home alone, where she was going to college and even what she was majoring in. This was typical of the level of communication Gretchen was having with the people she called on. She was really connecting with these people.

Instead of trying to force herself to ignore her empathy, Gretchen was now using that natural talent to connect with people on a much deeper level than the rest of the sales reps were. Doing so meant that she spent a lot more time with each person, and only made as few as twenty to twenty five calls per day.

But doing so also meant that she was establishing relationships with people, relationships that were returning results. Despite the fact that Gretchen was making less than 20% of the calls the other reps were, she still averaged to book three to five appointments each day.

Even better than that, instead of the company average of one signed contract for every five appointments, Gretchen was averaging two signed contracts for every five appointments.

Pretty soon, the field sales people were fighting to see who would get to call on the appointments that Gretchen had scheduled because they knew their odds of making a sale were a lot better.

The lesson of this case study is that by trying to create new natural talents where none exist, you are more likely to hurt your performance. When you seek to better align the natural talents you already possess with what you do, though, you can see significant jumps in both performance and satisfaction.

When Gretchen was inauthentic she was no more satisfied with her job than was the job satisfied with her. Now that she is authentic, she views her job as a vehicle for her passion for meeting and helping people and now she is as satisfied with the job as it is with her.

If you ask the field sales representatives who they want booking their appointments, they will tell you, "Gretchen man, she is a genius at finding people who sign contracts."

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).