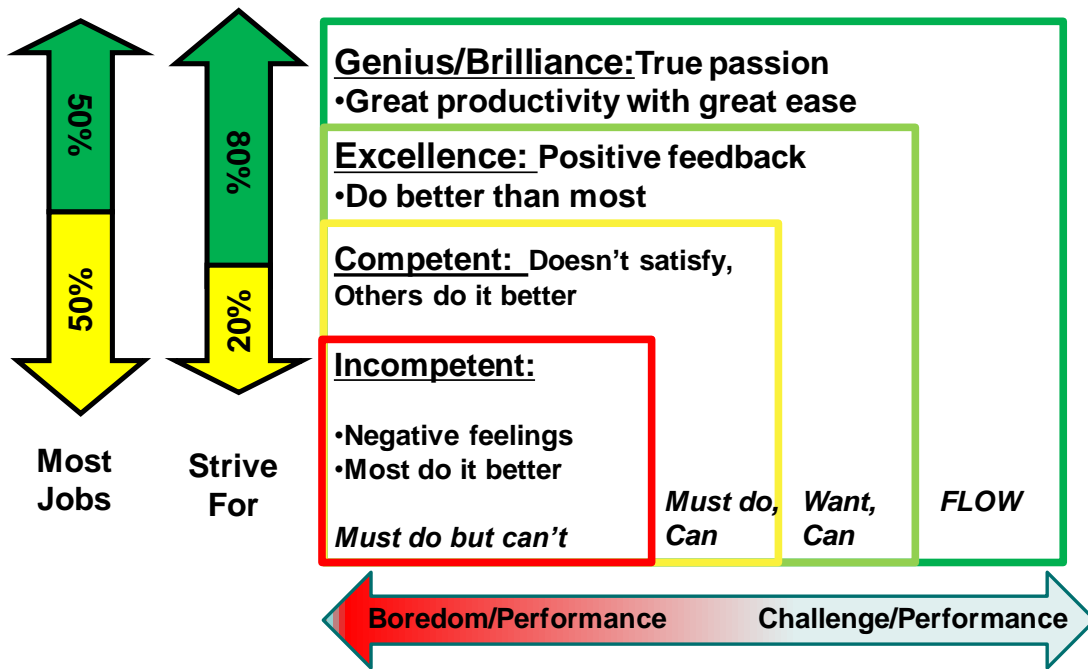


Genius: Maximizing your Contribution

By Jack Skeen, PhD

“Genius” and Flow



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Certainly, one of the greatest investments every successful financial firm makes is in its people. Some firms conscientiously recruit the best and the brightest from the finest business schools in the country. Other firms seek out the unknown gems from the smaller and lower-profile schools. From various backgrounds, people come to work in our industry knowing that much will be demanded from them, but that handsome rewards will come to those who excel.

A few professionals rise to the top and become nationally acclaimed portfolio managers, analysts, or strategists, earning their reputations with their consistently keen insights and instincts. Others drop out. They either can't keep up with the lightning-fast pace, don't have the savvy necessary to survive, or choose to apply themselves in a different field, for a variety of reasons.

The majority of professionals in the investment industry, however, live out their careers somewhere on the continuum between the extremes of icon and dropout. What determines where an investment professional will land on that continuum? Our experience in working with thousands of employees in the investment industry indicates that success and satisfaction are highly correlated with how well your job responsibilities and firm's culture fit your natural abilities.

Why Job Descriptions Fail

The typical approach to matching people with tasks is the traditional job description. With input from the hiring manager, someone in human resources compiles a list of duties and responsibilities for each position. A candidate is matched with an open position based on education and past experience. A career is born!

The weakness in this model is the lack of precision in degree of fit between a person's natural talent, the job description, and the environment in which he or she will work. Imagine buying a pair of shoes just by size alone. Try it sometime. A size 7 in one style is too big, while the same size in another style is too small, or too narrow, or has too high an arch. The only way to get a comfortable shoe is to try on numerous pairs until you find the one pair that fits. All the others will only create discomfort.

It is easy to see that many people have positions that are too big here or too tight there. They simply aren't a right fit. The symptoms of a poorly fitting job are obvious:

- Procrastination—tasks that you put off, or take much longer to do than is necessary.
- Mediocrity—things you simply don't do very well, yet are part of your job.
- Boredom—temptation to read the newspaper, visit the washroom, surf the Internet, or shoot the breeze with a co-worker.

The degree of fit is predictive not only of degree of success, but of job satisfaction as well. The hallmarks of a fulfilling career are to be so excited, engaged, and challenged by your work that the day flies by, leaving you with more energy than when you started that morning.

Genius: Your Place to Shine

The key to finding the perfect job fit is the concept of genius. Your personal genius is your unique collection of natural gifts and talents. By *genius*, we do not mean that you are better or smarter than anyone else. Rather, your genius defines where you are at the top of your game, the best you can be, your place to shine.

Our experience has clearly taught us that genius belongs to everyone. Those who excel in life are those individuals who understand their genius and live and work in that space rather than forcing themselves into roles outside the scope of their natural gifts and talents.

Warren Buffett has genius as a portfolio manager. Is this an accident? Is it luck? Was he simply in the right place at the right time? Or did he find his perfect fit early in life and follow that path faithfully? In fact, Warren Buffett was a paperboy as a child—but not a typical paperboy. He tried to cover more than one route at the same time. He started playing the stock market at age 11. In high school, he started his own business and used his profits to invest in Nebraska farmland. He recognized his genius early. The signs were clear, and following that path led to greater and greater success.

Buffett's story is a great example of recognizing and following your genius. He learned early what he loved to do. He paid attention to where success came easily and abundantly. He refined his understanding of his genius through his experiences until he understood his "sweet spot," that place where his natural talents, temperament, instincts, and creativity all came together. Then he stayed there and worked from that spot, building his life around his genius.

It is important to distinguish genius from success. Although genius usually leads to success, many other roads lead there as well. In addition to success, some of the signs of genius are a deep contentment, an honest modesty, and a lack of restlessness in those who are committed to their genius. We have worked with many industry leaders who have had tremendous personal and professional success, yet lack any sense of peace. Despite their success and financial wherewithal, they experience a persistent anxiety that all they have attained will suddenly disappear. They are obsessed with the outward signs of their success: social status, public and professional recognition, a residence in the "right" neighborhood, and belonging to the right clubs.

Contrast such restlessness with Buffett's attitude. He seems a little awed by his own personal wealth. He lives a modest life, as evidenced by the fact that he still lives in the first house he ever bought. Clearly, his joy is in doing what he loves to do, not in doing it for some other end. (Buffett once commented on his career satisfaction, saying, "I tap-dance to work each day!").

Another sign of genius is the desire to do what you're doing forever. Those whose careers are not a great fit long for the day they can do something else. They plan to hit it hard, and to create enough success that they can retire early. Such people live as if they were holding their breaths through some of the most wonderful years of their lives.

People who find their genius rarely want to retire. They love what they do and hope to keep doing it in some form or fashion for the rest of their days. As the years go by, they might adjust their hours to fit declining energy, but they will be in their game as long as they have breath. It is simply too much fun to quit!

Buffett is certainly not the only investor to work in his genius. Peter Lynch, Charles Brandes, Bill Miller, Dean LeBaron, Ralph Wanger, and John Rogers, to name just a few, found their perfect fit as well. Nevertheless, many investment professionals we've worked with look enviously on those who have found and work in their genius, because they have very few clues as to how to find their own.

Keys to Finding Genius

There are several ways, or *keys*, to identify your genius gifts:

- Success
- Delight
- Creativity
- Ease
- Feedback

The Success Key

Success is a wonderful indicator of genius. Success is the barometer that indicates where your instincts and talents interface with the world in the most productive ways. Think through your history, all the way back to childhood. What have you done that has worked very well?

I have a friend whose financial worth is more than \$100 million. He made his money building and running retirement communities. As we looked at his life together, he noticed that he has had the knack of buying low and selling high all his life. He has the nose for the deal—he just does.

Once you know what you do that works, the next step is easy: Do it more, and do other things less. Don't let your time become occupied with bureaucracy, politics, or anything else that distracts you from what you do best. If you are a deal maker, do deals!

When we at the Focus Consulting Group work with clients on succession planning, the most common situation we encounter is that of the investment or technical specialist: someone who has a genius for investment research or portfolio management and has no interest in, talent for, or aspiration to manage people. Many of our clients forced these investment professionals to take on people management so they could be promoted, make more money, or be positioned for future leadership. Their companies' succession planning, performance management, and incentive systems did not allow for two separate yet equally valuable career paths: research analyst/portfolio manager *or* team leader. Many of these situations result in terminations (voluntary and involuntary); junior staff who are not being developed by the reluctantly promoted group manager; or demotions, when the group manager begs to be returned to her or his former role as a research analyst or portfolio manager.

In these instances, our first step with the client is to review the concept of genius. Forcing someone to take on responsibilities for which he or she has no natural abilities results in misery, as well as significantly reduced efficiency and success, for everyone.

Take a moment with the following exercise to think it through for yourself and get as clear as you can about precisely what you do that creates the most success.

Exercise:

1. List all your successes in the past.
2. List where or how you experience the most success in your current role.
3. What conclusions can you draw about your genius?
4. What can you do to test your conclusions?

The Delight Key

What do you do that puts a smile on your face and a bounce in your step? What a great question! One of the signs of being out of your genius is energy drain. You can't wait for the work day to end. When it is over, you are tired, frustrated, irritated, and grumpy. It is as if the day drained you of vitality and life. If this is your common experience, we can tell you that you have not yet found your genius or that you have not yet committed to living in it.

What are those things in life that delight you, add to your energy, and make it feel as though time is flying by when you are doing them? All of these are indicators of genius. You know you are in your genius when you are so engrossed in what you're doing that you finally notice you're hungry, realize you missed lunch, and know that you don't care. What you are doing simply brings you too much delight to put it down. At the end of the day, you have more energy than at the beginning. You go home smiling, happy, and ready to take on the world.

Exercise:

1. What did you do today that drained you of energy? How can you *not* do that tomorrow?
2. When did you feel delight today? What were you doing?
3. How can you design tomorrow to have delight again?

The Creativity Key

Another way to discover your genius is to notice which things engage all of your creativity. You are detached from your genius when you are doing things that you experience as boring, laborious, mundane, and tiresome. Procrastination is the primary symptom of detachment from creativity. Have you ever found yourself looking at your to-do list and finally starting a task that you have put off over and over? That is a bad first step. At that point, notice how you engage the task.

For example, it should take about an hour to complete this particular chore. As soon as you start, though, you realize that you need to use the restroom. You are back in 15 minutes and reengage the task. A few minutes later, you decide that you're thirsty, so you take a coffee break and end up talking to someone in the hall. You are back in 30 minutes and reengage the task. A few minutes later, it's time for lunch . . .

actually, it's a little early, and you really aren't hungry, but you go to lunch anyway. You come back in an hour and again take up the task. Now you have spent two and a half hours and still aren't finished. You put the chore back on your to-do list and push it off to some other day. All these are clear signs of trying to make yourself do what is not in your genius.

In contrast, some tasks are fun to do. You look forward to them. You engage them and drive them to completion. You also just seem to do them better than most other people do. You add your touch, your flare—or, in our language, your creativity.

Creativity is critical to success and satisfaction. It defines what we do differently than others and, hence, where we get the most success and recognition. Also, it is where we engage life most openly and freely, thereby creating for ourselves the most satisfaction and happiness. Working from your genius engages all your cylinders with the opportunities of life. Nothing within you is wasted.

Exercise:

1. List all the things you did today that felt boring or were not satisfying.
2. List all the things you did today that engaged your creativity.
3. Design the perfect job to fit your creativity.

The Ease Key

Your genius comes to you easily. It does not take a lot of effort, strain, or drama. I have met many successful people who have just worn themselves out in their efforts to get ahead. They have reached their destination, but at great cost. They have wealth and freedom to do whatever they want, but are unhappy and detached from what they want to do. They are so burned out that they lack the energy or creativity to use the opportunities they fought so hard to secure. It is as if they are hacking their way through a jungle, working hard and covered with sweat, while 30 feet away is a flowing river that winds toward the destination they are working so hard to attain.

“Why not just jump in the river and float to where you want to go?” I ask.

“You can't get there that way,” they answer.

“How do you know?” I ask.

I get no reply.

Genius is what you do without exerting a lot of effort. Michael Jordan was easeful at playing basketball. He didn't get to where he was by working harder than everyone else. He got to his level of play by doing what was easy for him to do. That does not mean that genius is not work. Jordan spent a lot of hours practicing. No matter how good he was, he never got past the need to practice. Still, even practice comes easily when you are practicing your genius. In short, genius defines the space where work is easy and life comes to us easily.

Exercise:

1. Of the things you did today, what was hard? Write whatever comes into your head. Don't critique it or give it second thoughts.
2. What did you do today that came easily to you? List everything; big and small.
3. If you chose to design your day tomorrow to make it as easeful as possible, what would it look like?

The Feedback Key

We like to say that the world is giving you feedback all the time. The question is not "Are you getting feedback?" Rather, it's "Are you listening?" One great way of discovering your genius is simply to ask the people in your life for their answer to the question, "What do you think is my genius?" You will be amazed at what you learn. Go back through your old report cards and the feedback you remember from teachers, coaches, and the parents of your friends. What did they tell you about your gifts and talents? Where did they advise you *not* to go? What nicknames did they call you? Ask the people in your life today: subordinates, peers, managers (past and present), friends, children, and significant others. Is there a pattern in their answers?

Too often we guide our lives by the course prescribed by the world rather than seeking the one that fits our uniqueness. We get caught up like a surfer on a wave and struggle to navigate it without falling off. For instance, in the investment world, you might start your career doing research. If you succeed, you become a portfolio manager. If you do that well, you might try your hand at running a hedge fund. Somewhere in between, you're also tapped to run the team, so now you're managing people as well as investments.

Though this might describe the typical notion of the ideal progression, it assumes that the higher position is built on the skills obtained in the succession of lower ones. Furthermore, it requires either that you have genius at each position, or that you do something successfully that does not engage you fully, drains you of energy, and teaches you how to compromise your greatest gifts so as to fit into the system. How much better if, rather than climbing that ladder, you seek and hold out for the place that fits you the best?

Exercise:

1. List all the feedback you have received throughout your life. Linger over this. What have others said that you do really well? What have they said that you don't do very well?
2. List what the people in your present life say is your genius. If you don't know, ask them.
3. What patterns do you see?
4. What do you conclude?
5. How can you move your life more in the direction of that which you have identified as being your genius?

Moving into Genius

Some people are sufficiently fortunate and/or insightful to know, embrace, and follow their genius from childhood. They experience solid success, satisfaction, and peace. The majority of us understand and approve the concept of knowing and following one's genius, but need to know how to get there or how to do it.

The most important myth to dispel in this regard is that to live in your genius requires quitting your job, buying a loft, and embarking on an oil-painting career; or some other radical and disruptive change. Rarely have we strayed as far off our paths as we imagine or fear. The strength of our genius exerts such a strong influence on our lives that it unconsciously guides our choices even if we have not been paying attention. However, clarity, conviction, and commitment to live in alignment with our genius is what unleashes its full potential in our lives. There are three steps in that alignment:

Step 1: Get as clear as you can about your genius.

Step 2: Set your intention to live in your genius.

Step 3: Complete the quadrant exercise.

Step 1: Get as clear as You Can about Your Genius

No one can peg his or her genius with absolute certainty. After all, our lives are a work of art in perpetual progress, and we don't need to have life that well defined. It is enough if we know the general direction and are open to learning about and refining that knowledge as we progress. Surely you can construct a list as long as your arm of things you are currently doing that you know are not reflective of your genius. Knowing what it is not is helpful, too.

Now, review the work you did earlier in the chapter and complete these sentences:

"To the best of my knowledge, at this point in my life, my genius is NOT _____."

"To the best of my knowledge, at this point in my life, my genius IS _____."

Simply taking this step puts you far ahead of many people who are committed to stumbling along without clarity as to what lights their fire and defines their greatness.

Step 2: Set Your Intention to Live in Your Genius

Intention is a powerful concept. Intention defines how we utilize our energy. More than merely what one has in mind to do or bring about, *intention* for our purposes includes those issues we truly care about in our lives. These issues may be far different from the ones we believe or are told we should care about.

For example, almost everyone who is overweight believes that losing weight is a good idea, but not everyone who is overweight has the intention to lose weight. Only when you see your overweight friend at the gym and eating salads can you know that he or she has the intention to lose weight.

The same is true of genius. Almost everyone in the investment world to whom we introduce the idea of genius sees it as powerful and potentially helpful, yet not everyone puts it to use. Those who do not have some commitment other than to live in their genius. The following list notes some of the common intentions that compete with the genius intention:

- The intention to do what I am told and keep my head down.
- The intention to live for an early retirement.
- The intention to do enough to get by.
- The intention to build character by doing what is hard.
- The intention to do as little as possible.
- The intention to hate work and live for the weekends.
- The intention to complain about the firm and engage in gossip.
- The intention to “kiss up” to get ahead.
- The intention to be mediocre.
- The intention to be comfortable.

Though it might not be pleasant to admit to yourself what your current intention is in relation to your genius, doing so is extremely helpful. Intentions don’t change by guilt, pressure, or shame. They don’t yield to change because you come across a good idea. The best way to shift your intention is to:

- Bring your current intention to *conscious attention*.
- Accept it as *true*.
- Believe that it has *served you well* in some regard.
- Be open to the idea that a *new intention might now serve you better*.
- Live with the issue *unsettled* until you know you are ready to change.
- When you are ready, *commit* to changing your intention to live in your genius.

That is how it works with a diet, isn’t it? No diet works when you aren’t really committed to it. You always find ways to bend the rules until you have eroded its entire efficacy. No matter what others want you to do, or how good an idea the diet seems to be, you know you are undermining its potential benefit. Then, one day, you wake up and you have a new intention: “Today, I want to be on a diet.” You feel it from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. When that intention is in place, any diet will work.

The point is to *get clear about your intention regarding your genius*. If you are not ready to know it and live committed to it, give yourself freedom to say so. If, however, your intention is to embrace your genius, you have taken Step 2.

Step 3: Complete the Quadrant Exercise

Once we intend to live in our genius, we begin to notice all the interference and competition for our time that, previously, went completely unnoticed. Genius requires becoming aware of and intentional about how you use your time. One of the best tools we have found in working with those in the investment community is the Task Quadrants.

The Quadrants help to concretely identify how you use and misuse your giftedness on a daily basis. First let's examine each one.

Incompetent. This quadrant asks two questions:

- What are you doing that almost everyone else can do better than you?
- What are you doing about which you get negative feedback?

We all know people who are committed to incompetence or mediocrity. They spend their days doing things at which they just aren't very good. Their work is plain vanilla. They don't distinguish themselves in any way. It is very difficult for someone who lives in this quadrant to survive in the kinds of firms with which we work. These people are flushed through the system quickly. There simply is no place for individuals who fill their work lives with tasks and responsibilities that are far removed from their genius. When we are brought in to coach such a misplaced hire, the task is to help him see that his true commitment is to suffering and frustration. He is bringing on failure and failure is headed his way.

Now, look at your day. What do you do in your day at which you are, at best, only mediocre? Take the time to make a list. Everything on your list is a drain on your genius, a diversion from living in a place of high energy, creativity, success, and satisfaction. Often you can identify these tasks by noticing when you procrastinate.

Shifting to genius means offloading as many of these tasks as is possible to someone whose genius gifts cover that task. It might take a little creativity to do this, and you might not be able to shift everything. Still, whatever progress you make will give you a great return on investment.

Competent. This quadrant is defined by slightly different questions:

- What work do you do that others can do as well or better?
- What work do you do well, but is not totally satisfying?

Again, take the time to make a list of things you do regularly that fall into the Competent Quadrant.

If almost everything you do in your day fits into this quadrant, we suggest that you are unconsciously committed to sleepwalking, going through the motions, maintaining the status quo. Folks in this quadrant have given up on the dream of success and have settled for riding out their careers in some safe corner of the firm where they will not be noticed. They have lost sight of their tremendous gifts and the joy they

could have from making their full contribution. (When Jim Ware determined that he was going to leave his steady job to found the Focus Consulting Group, one of his investment peers said, “Jim, be serious! Only seven more years and you’ll be fully vested!” In the seven years following Jim’s departure, he has authored 4 books, spoken in 15 countries, and appeared many times on national television. Living in one’s genius involves a wholly different set of priorities than living a safe and secure life.)

We have found that many people handle a fair number of tasks and responsibilities that fall within this quadrant. Don’t be surprised if you are one of them. Realize, though, that these tasks are not within your genius. They will never lead to your wild success! They will never bring you great satisfaction and fulfillment. In fact, they are crowding your schedule and stealing the opportunity for you to spend time in more productive ways. They are weeds in the garden of your life, and it is up to you to pluck them out so that the flowers can grow unencumbered.

Which of the tasks on your “competent” list could you simply stop doing, or delegate or shift to someone else? You won’t know until you try. Every success you create opens space for work that is much more useful and productive.

We say that both the Competent and Incompetent Quadrants are *below the line*. By that we mean that anyone who allocates the majority of her time to such tasks has set her sail either for failure or for simply getting by. No high achiever allows such a waste of resources. People committed to their genius perpetually keep one eye on these two quadrants and are always finding new strategies to offload the tasks therein.

We recently coached an executive of a large investment firm on the use of the quadrants. He discovered that he spent one to two hours a day wading through and answering e-mail. It certainly was not energizing for him. It also clearly fit in the Competent Quadrant: he was competent at the task, but it was not satisfying. After giving some thought to the issue, he gave the task to his administrative assistant, who excels at quickly sorting the messages and reviewing them with him twice a day. The executive thereby recovered 90 minutes each day that he now spends working in the areas of his genius.

Excellent. In this quadrant, we are finally above the line. Everything above the line feels much more positive and useful. The questions asked in this quadrant are:

- What do you do better than just about everyone else?
- What do you do in your work that consistently gets you positive feedback?

Most people consider this to be the highest level of work. People operating in their Excellent Quadrant are succeeding and excelling, gaining recognition and standing out from the crowd.

But still there is more.

People committed to working out of the Excellent Quadrant are unconsciously committed to doing well by playing it safe. They like the feeling of success and the rewards that success brings, but they have not pulled out all the stops. This gap defines the difference between a very good player and an all-star. To some extent, people in this quadrant are still playing a game defined by someone else. They have not yet fully committed to working and living out of the guiding empowerment of their own personal genius.

What do you do that is excellent? Again, take the time to make a list. Write down whatever comes to mind. Don't let false modesty stand in the way of acknowledging what you do that is excellent. Don't offload these tasks. Know that they lie close enough to your genius that some small shift in what you are doing or how you are doing it will be enough to maximize your talent and satisfaction.

Genius. The greatest of all ways to live is in full and complete commitment to your genius. Genius asks these questions:

- What do you so love doing that it doesn't feel like work?
- What aspects of your work produce the highest ratio of positive results for time spent?

Here is a place to linger for a while. What do you do that doesn't feel like work? What work do you do that you would choose to do even if you didn't get paid? In other words, what do you do that provides innate satisfaction, where the greatest satisfaction is in doing the task, not in what you get in return? This concept is perhaps best understood in the world of artists and craftspersons, where monetary compensation may sometimes be lacking but the fulfillment of the work is enormous. The satisfaction is in the doing.

Operating in the Genius Quadrant means you can get really good results without having to kill yourself or turn your life inside out. You can do this easefully, playfully, and creatively. This is work that gives you energy rather than draining it, that uses and expands your creativity so you get better and better every day. Remember, everyone has such a place; such excitement and satisfaction really is available to everyone.

Write down those things you do that satisfy the criteria for using your genius gifts; that is, you do them effortlessly and experience great success with your creativity fully engaged.

Personal Alignment

Although genius is available to everyone, the question is, "Are you committed to shift?" If so, what will you do to make that shift happen? We find that the difference between successful and mediocre people is that successful people don't run across a good idea without putting it to use. If you think the ideas presented here are useful and put them to use in your life, that's evidence of your intention to be successful.

At this point, we invite you to make a shift in the way you are working and living that will bring you into closer alignment with your genius.

- Bring all your lists from the preceding exercises together and assign the tasks identified there into the four quadrants, as appropriate. Write down your best guess about your genius.
- Brainstorm and prioritize concrete plans to offload as many of your mediocre and competent tasks as possible. To the best of your ability, assign names and dates to who and when these will be assigned. Don't let your fear of letting go get in your way.

- Now, consider what changes you can make that will allow you more time and energy for your genius gifts. Can you carve out an hour to do what you do best? Can you redistribute responsibilities with your peers so that each person is doing more of what he or she does best?
- Next, write dates next to the top three to five changes you want to make. Check with yourself. Do you really want to do these things? If so, experiment with these changes. For example, one experiment is to make these changes when you are going to be out of the office or on vacation. Then keep the changes in place when you return. How does it feel? Can these changes become permanent? See how these changes work for you.
- After you have been shifting your work for a month, check in with yourself. How are you doing? How is your interest? Your energy? Do you feel more alive? Are you getting better results? Are you happier?

This is the pathway to aligning with your genius.

Team Alignment

Another opportunity to shift into greater alignment with your genius creates a win for others as well. In our work with investment teams to improve cooperation, efficiency, and effectiveness, we have discovered that work assignments are most often made based on title and position, not genius. Everyone has a list of responsibilities that are often distributed as follows:

- Incompetent Quadrant—some
- Competent Quadrant—many
- Excellent Quadrant—most
- Genius Quadrant—few

We see this as a tremendous waste of human capital and money. A recent survey reported that the average American worker wastes 2.5 hours per day while on the job.² Rather than being fully engaged in their tasks, they are finding other things to do: personal research on the Internet, chatting with friends, or shopping during lunch breaks. Much of this waste results from the assignment of work that is not interesting, challenging, and growth-producing.

We work with firms to maximize everyone's contribution and efficiency. One process change we advocate is to bring projects to the team and allow the team to distribute the work according to genius. Each team member is encouraged to take on whatever tasks lie in his or her areas of either excellence or genius. Two wonderful outcomes result from this change:

1. People are far more engaged in their work. They work more efficiently, bring more creativity to what they do, and produce a better product.
2. Staffing needs become obvious. The tasks that no one wants indicate the need to hire someone for whom these tasks lie in the genius quadrant. Rather than asking people to do things at which they are not very good, will procrastinate, and will avoid, the team will be significantly strengthened by a new hire filling that void with his or her own genius.

We were working on genius with two leaders at K.G. Redding, both extremely gifted and skilled in the REIT world. One leader's genius is that he has a creative mind and finds absolute delight in solving puzzles. This gift equips him to quickly, effortlessly, and accurately understand a seller's motives and anxieties. His intuitive understanding, combined with research and financial analysis, has given Redding a huge competitive advantage. His counterpart is gifted at visualizing and building a business from conception to implementation. Together they are a dynamic duo.

They had not considered, however, how the genius of one created laborious and burdensome work streams for others. With the assistance of Focus Consulting Group, they divided their tasks to better honor their individual geniuses. Once that was done, they discovered the need to search for a new hire whose genius is to do the implementations tasks that neither leader delighted in doing.

Another genius matched pair was Gary Brinson and Jeff Diermeier, when they worked together at Brinson Partners. Gary loved the analytical, process-driven side of investing, whereas Jeff enjoyed the creative, big-picture pursuits.

Conclusion

Genius is a very powerful, and often overlooked, concept. Those who understand it and use it well create for themselves substantial success, satisfaction, and contentment. Those who don't use their genius find their careers taxing, anxiety-producing, wearing, and noxious. Those who live in their genius are energized by their work, creatively engaged in ways that only sharpen their skills and improve their performance. Those who don't are just hanging on waiting for retirement.

The shift to genius can be challenging. It demands courage. It requires taking ownership of your life and creating something positive. Every firm that makes this shift part of its culture, by encouraging personal growth, insight, and fluid distribution of responsibilities, will capitalize on the brightness of each person's innate potential. Waste will be dramatically reduced. Your firm will be known for the efficiency, creativity, and collaboration of its people.

Summary

- Success and satisfaction are highly correlated with how well your job responsibilities and firm's culture fit your natural skills and abilities—that is, your genius.
- Your genius is indicated by those things that bring you success, that give you delight, that utilize your creativity, that you do with ease, and for which you consistently receive positive feedback.
- The steps to living in your genius are:
 - Step 1:* Get as clear as you can about your genius.
 - Step 2:* Set your intention to live in your genius.
 - Step 3:* Complete the quadrant exercise.

- How and where you spend your time can be categorized into four quadrant zones: Mediocre, Competent, Excellent, or Genius.
- Teams are more efficient and effective when work assignments are made based on Excellent- or Genius-Quadrant capabilities rather than titles.

Next Steps

- Determine if you are willing to identify and commit to living more fully in your genius. If you are willing, then make a personal “I commit” statement to shift into living in your Excellent and Genius zones.
- Create lists of those things mentioned in the “Keys to Finding Genius” section (success, delight, creativity, ease, and feedback). Analyze the lists and see if you can determine a pattern or underlying commonality in the five lists. Is a clear message coming through about your genius?
- Complete the quadrant exercise (incompetent, competent, excellent, and genius) and identify in which quadrant your tasks belong. Then, for one week, diligently track how much time you spend on those tasks. (This is easier than you think; most of the information is already on your Outlook calendar or PDA.) At the end of the week, tally your times and determine what percentage of your time you are spending in each quadrant. How does that ratio of time spent compare to your commitment to live in your genius?
- Introduce the quadrant exercise to your team members and ask them to complete it based on their current and past responsibilities. Ask them if they each want to debrief their quadrants with the team. (Careful: make this totally voluntary.) Compile the individual quadrants into a master “Team Quadrant” and use that as one tool when determining work assignments for your next project. When the project is completed, debrief and refine this process with the team.
- When determining the skills and cultural fit of the next new hire on your team, use the Team Quadrant document created in the previous step to identify gaps in the team. Focus your attention on skills appearing in the mediocre and competent zones of the current team members. If those are skills needed by the team, focus on looking for candidates who culturally fit the team and have a genius in those gap skills.

End Notes:

¹www.berkshirehathaway.com

²Salary.com 2014 wasted time survey