

“The 6 Types of Working Genius”
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Book Note by Dave Kraft

What happens to so many of us has to do with doing work that drains us of our energy, and which, in turn, prevents us from doing the work that gives us energy.

“The first stage we call “Ideation.”

The third circle—I drew it over to the right—is implementation. This is where we get things done. That’s pretty clear, right?

I drew the second circle, between the other two. We’re calling it “Activation.”

So, here at work, we have to ideate, activate, and implement. They’re all equally important, but it starts with ideation. The first thing is to question or ponder or wonder about something. The second is to create or invent a solution or a new idea. The third is to—she paused, trying to summarize the discussion we had just had—evaluate and assess whether it’s a good idea.

I just realized something. Just because you’re good at a task or an activity doesn’t mean you like doing it all the time.

So, how many of these different skills does a person have? If it’s about the things you love doing, and that give you energy, I can’t imagine having more than a couple.

Basically, what we’ve figured out here is that there are six different kinds of work that someone has to do in order for us to get anything done. No one is great at all of them, which means most people are pretty bad at some of those things.

Galvanizing, is all about rallying the troops, getting people excited, exhorting them to keep going.

Tenacity is about the task itself, while galvanizing is about rallying people. Tenacity is about staying on top of the work until it’s done, on time, and up to standards.

Remember, it’s about understanding what gives you joy and energy.

From time to time, everyone has to do things they don’t like. But if we put someone in a job that requires them to do a lot of what they hate doing, we’re not being smart.

There are six categories of genius. Each of us will have a couple geniuses, a couple of competencies, and a couple of frustrations.

When I was running Tahoe Builders, we did semi-annual reviews of our work with the goal of killing any projects that were preventing us from doing other, more important ones.

A genius is a God-given talent, a natural gift that gives you energy and joy and that you’re usually good at doing.

Invention. Someone has to come up with a solution, a new idea, a proposal.

In fact, if you're going to galvanize, this is exactly what I want you to do. Push. Take risks. Make us a little uncomfortable.

This is what it was like in so many of the agencies that I knew. They hire people to do one job, and the ones who are good at it get promoted to different jobs requiring different skills. Often, they don't do well in their new jobs because they were much better suited for their old jobs, and the people who would be great at the new jobs never get promoted because they were bad at the old jobs.

When you put a group of people together on a project, you want to have all the geniuses covered. If you focus too much on job descriptions or experience levels, it gets screwed up.

All of us have to find a way to push through and do our best when we're not in our areas of genius, or even competency. But if that's twenty or thirty percent of the time, instead of seventy, we're all going to be a lot happier. And more effective.

The galvanizers, enablers and tenacity people find themselves often saying to the wonder, invention and discernment people—I'm not sure you really appreciate what it takes to execute on all of your ideas. You often underestimate what goes into the implementation part of work.

I learned that jobs were often a source of frustration for people, and that the causes of this included bad managers, poor company leadership, broken relationships with colleagues, and people—having to do jobs that didn't match their natural talents and gifts.

Understanding that each of us enjoys different kinds of work, and then figuring out which kind suits us best.

There are three categories the six fit into for each individual:

1. Working Genius is where we shine and at our best.
2. Working Competency is where we are okay, but it's a stretch. Most of us can manage to operate in our working competencies fairly well for a while, but we will eventually grow weary if we are not allowed to exercise our true geniuses.
3. Working Frustration is what we should avoid as much as possible.

Of course, no one can completely avoid working in our areas of frustration from time to time, but if we find ourselves spending meaningful time engaged in these activities, we are bound to experience misery at work, and ultimately, struggle or even fail. When we work in our areas of frustration, it's difficult to sustain a level of passion or energy for any length of time.

The first stage of work, Ideation,

The second stage of work, Activation,

The third and final stage of work, Implementation,

The activation phase exists so that we can avoid jumping straight from Ideation to Implementation.

Without proper activation, even good ideas won't get properly vetted, modified, and improved (discernment), and people won't be properly educated and inspired (galvanizing).

Each type of genius gives something one of the other geniuses needs—a well rounded team! Every successful team, at every level, needs people who simply enjoy seeing things completed—tenacity

To start with there is brainstorming and vetting new ideas.

Then there is Decision-making—deciding on which new ideas we will pursue.

During decision-making sessions, it's a good idea to avoid wonder, as the time for that kind of conversation has ended. It's also important to avoid the temptation to begin implementation, which involves enablement and tenacity, as those geniuses may tempt people to settle for a suboptimal decision simply to gain closure.

When team members try to exercise wonder or invention during the galvanizing, enabling and tenacity part of the work, they usually create chaos and frustration.

Even discernment should be limited to the process of overcoming tactical obstacles rather than reevaluating the original idea or proposal.

I (Patrick) was getting burned out by having to galvanize too much. That's what happens when we spend too much time doing something we're good at (competency) but that isn't an area of genius.

Within most organizations, there is a need for more people to be getting things done than there is for them to be coming up with new ideas.

At times, we will need to do things outside of our geniuses—it's about reducing them to a manageable level.

By minimizing politics and confusion, leaders can improve productivity, engagement, and loyalty, which will allow them to fully tap into their strategic advantages and accomplish what dysfunctional organizations could never dream of.

A leadership team cannot be cohesive if its members don't understand and tap into one another's geniuses.

The difference between a leadership team that adjusts its roles and work based on its members' geniuses and one that relies only on job titles and generic expectations is almost beyond description.

When people in an organization understand and are transparent about their areas of genius—and competencies/frustrations—leaders can make adjustments that bring about significantly greater contributions from employees.

For so many people, one of the biggest stealers of peace is having to do work that doesn't suit their natural, God-given strengths.

But in so many of the cases I see, people who struggle are unaware of how their work and their gifts are misaligned.

What's interesting about all of this is that the type of work that a person does turns out to be much more important in regard to burnout than the volume of work.