PROFESSIONAL CORNER

HOW TO LEVERAGE YOUR STRENGTHS AND UNLOCK YOUR TEAM'S PERFORMANCE - PART 2

When I was in my 20s, I pursued jobs because they made me look good (i.e., loftier titles, higher salaries, more responsibilities, etc.). After many hard life lessons, I learned that picking jobs based on those factors led to more stress and misery than happiness. In my 30s, I only went after roles that I knew I would be good at. While better than my 20s, I still felt like I hadn't cracked the code. Now that I am in my 40s, I only look for jobs that I believe I can be truly great in.

Looking back, I realize that my evolution was due to my desire to play more and more to my strengths. In parts of my jobs, I was leveraging my strengths, loving life, and high performing. But in other parts of my jobs, I was struggling, frustrated, and ultimately hating specific aspects. Now, some of you might think that I am just whining, and that everyone has aspects of their job that they don't love. And the truth is, those people are right. It is unlikely that all of us will find jobs that 100% match up with our strengths, but we should always aim to increase the percentage of our job tasks that make us truly happy.

Moving Myself from Good to Great

This "aha" moment didn't just come out of the blue. It was something that was brewing over the years, especially as I read more and more about strength-based leadership. For long-time readers of this Human Capital series, you know I've written many different articles on the importance of your personal and professional strengths, and how leaders should leverage the strengths of themselves and their teams. But, recently, I read Patrick Lencioni's book *The 6 Types of Working Genius*, and it solidified my 40s approach to work.

Instead of taking the job that was 75% aligned with my strengths, I aimed for roles that were over 90% aligned. Even though I knew I could be really good in the 75% role, in my heart I knew I could do something great in the 90%+ role. In fact, I put my money where my mouth is. My current company wanted to promote me into a senior HR role, a role I knew I would be good at. But I took some of the insights from Lencioni's book, and I proposed a different role—a role that better leverages my strengths and would give me the best opportunity for greatness.

And the crazy thing is, it worked. I got the role I proposed, not the role I was offered. Sure, the title isn't as fancy, and the pay is good but not as great as the other role, but by tapping more and more into my strengths, I have been increasing my performance, my engagement, and, ultimately, my happiness. Lencioni's *The 6 Types of Working Genius* is all about helping you find happiness and fulfillment at work. I know for a fact that it helped me, and I truly believe that it can help you, too. That is why I introduced the concept in last month's Newsletter article, and I plan on exploring the topic further in this month's article and next month's.

The Six Types of Working Genius

For a more detailed overview of *The 6 Types of Working Genius*, you can read the previous month's edition of the Newsletter. But if you don't have last month's copy on hand, here is a basic overview.

Lencioni's approach is based around finding happiness and fulfillment at work. In short, you should spend more time doing things you are good at and less time doing what frustrates you. This is pretty much common sense, but where he differentiates his approach is that the strengths within his model are built around how work gets done. This is radically different from other models that usually categorize strengths based on individual traits or characteristics (i.e., a strength in discipline, analytical ability, or focus).

In *The 6 Types of Working Genius*, Lencioni starts with the belief that the majority of projects and initiatives within your company follow three main phases: Ideation, Activation, and Implementation. The Ideation phase is when you or your team need to identify problems you are facing, the needs of your critical stakeholders, and begin proposing solutions. Ideation leads into Activation, where you start evaluating the different proposed solutions and select which one is best. Finally, you enter the Implementation phase, where you get things done and ultimately execute the solution.
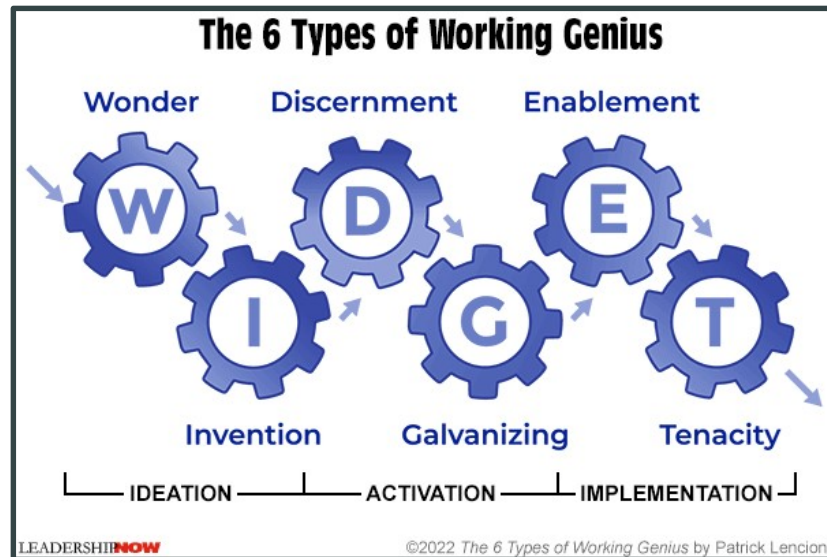
Each phase of work requires a different set of skills. What might be great in the Ideation stage is horrible during the Implementation stage. We all know those people who get a million ideas but can never turn any of them into reality. This is where Lencioni's model further breaks down the three phases of work into six sets of skills and tasks that are required. These sets of skills/tasks are what Lencioni calls Working Geniuses. Below are brief descriptions of the six Geniuses. Read through the descriptions and identify which two are your strongest.

1. **Wonder** - The genius of Wonder is all about identifying the need to improve or change. If you are a genius at Wonder, then you naturally see the potential in a situation. You question the state of things and ask provocative questions.

2. **Invention** - The genius of Invention is all about translating needs into possible ideas and solutions. If you are a genius at Invention, then you are seen as a great ideas person. You are always coming up with new ideas and solutions.

3. **Discernment** - The genius of Discernment is all about evaluating the benefits and practicality of an idea or solution. If you are a genius at Discernment, then you have a great ability to make decisions and judge what is right for a situation. Often this is a combination of pattern recognition, data analysis, and even a little bit of gut feel.

4. **Galvanizing** - The genius of Galvanizing is all about building excitement and enthusiasm behind the chosen solution. Nothing gets done on its own. People make stuff happen, and people who are a genius at Galvanizing are great at rallying people behind an idea and motivating them to take action and get things done.

5. **Enablement** - The genius of Enablement is all about supporting the execution of a solution. If you are a genius at Enablement, then you are naturally inclined to respond to the needs of others and support them in accomplishing their goals. You often anticipate what kind of help others may need before they even ask.

6. **Tenacity** - The genius of Tenacity is all about finishing the job. If you are a genius at Tenacity, then you are known for getting stuff done and pushing projects across the finish line. You are the person that makes sure all the i's are dotted and t's crossed. Ultimately, you are the one focused on getting the results that were desired.

How to Identify Your Type of Working Genius

After going through the list, you probably already see that some of the Geniuses really speak to you, while others are probably areas where you struggle. Lencioni's company, the Table Group, actually researched this model across thousands of people and found that no one has all the Geniuses. In fact, people tend to

only have two areas of real genius, and on the flip side, they will have two areas of frustration (Lencioni's term for weakness). They also built a great assessment tool that you can find at https://www.workinggenius.com/about/assessment.

But for the sake of this article, I wanted to give you a quick tool to help you identify your two areas of genius, your two areas of competence, and your two areas of frustration. Below is a list of statements most associated with each of the Working Genius Types. Go through the statements and put a + or a - next to each statement based on how likely you would say something like this at work. In the end, add up the + statements and the - statements, and this should indicate which type is a Genius, which is a Competence, and which is a Frustration.

W - Wonder	D - Discernment	E - Enablement
● Is there a better way? ● Is this the best company we can be? ● Does anyone else feel like something is wrong with the way we deal with a customer?	● My gut tells me that would be a great idea. ● I have a strong feeling that something is not quite right about those values. ● I think we need to tweak your product idea a little more before it's ready.	● I'm onboard to help with that idea. ● Count me in with those values ● I'd love to help with customers; let me know when you need me.
I - Invention	G - Galvanizing	T - Tenacity
● I have an idea! ● How does this plan sound? ● What if we helped our customers like this?	● Hey everyone, listen to her ideas. ● Let's all rally around these values. ● Who's ready to help us make the customer service program work.	● Let's keep pushing because this new idea isn't a reality yet. ● Okay let's wrap this up and lock in on those values so we can send them to the board. ● Move over, I'll finish the customer database for you.

Responsive vs Disruptive

When I was rereading *The 6 Types of Working Genius* in preparation for this article, I noticed something that had always bothered me a little bit in the back of my mind. When Lencioni visually portrays the WIDGET Geniuses, he always positions them in two rows. WDE were always on the top row, and IGT were on the bottom. In my second reading, I caught something I had missed. This separation was purposeful, not just a graphic choice. Lencioni uses those separations to highlight one other important difference between the 6 Types. Some of the Genius Types are 'Responsive' and some are 'Disruptive.'

The Wonder, Discernment, and Enablement types are identified as Responsive types. Basically, these genius types react to the environment and situation they are in. They respond to external stimuli and react based on what they see. For example, people with the Discernment type aren't necessarily the person who gets the idea in the first place, but they are key in determining which idea is best. This is very different from the Disruptive types of Genius like Invention, Galvanizing, and Tenacity. People with these Genius types tend to initiate or proactively make change happen. Even if no one is saying a change is necessary, if they see a need, they will jump into action.

Both the Responsive types and the Disruptive types of Genius are critical to delivering projects, but leaders and companies don't always see it that way. The Disruptive types tend to be overvalued compared to the Responsive types, and I get why. We want to reward people who make things happen. Inventors come up with ideas, Galvanizers drive teams, and Tenacious people deliver results. Those are super easy things for leaders to see in their teams, and it is easy to think that those are the more valuable Genius types. But this is naive. Without the Responsive types, people are at risk of getting into execution mode without having any clarity on what they are trying to do.

And here we come to my favorite part of *The 6 Types of Working Genius*. Sure, it is valuable to know your individual Geniuses and Frustrations, but in all likelihood, you don't work alone. You work with others, and that means you should have an understanding of your colleagues' Geniuses and Frustrations. Unlike many other strength- based models, the Working Genius model actually provides a recommendation for how teams should

be constructed. A team with all the same Genius Types might sound great, but in reality, that is an underperforming team. What you really need is for your team to have a balanced approach to Genius Types.

For that reason, we will continue our Working Genius mini-series for one more month. In next month's article, we will dive into how you can use this in a team setting. How can you help your team identify their Geniuses and Frustrations, and what you as a leader can do to create a balanced team? Only then can you truly reach sustainable high performance.

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