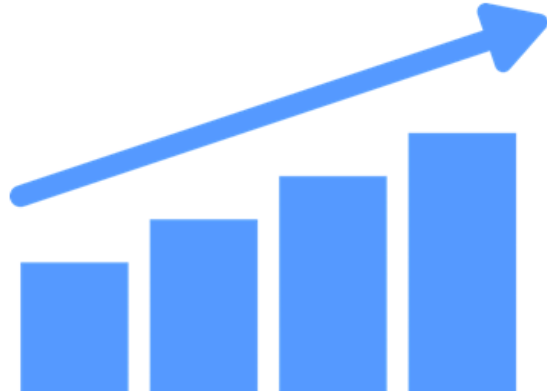


Timeless Excellence



**The Roadmap of Profitability
From Productivity to Innovation**

Rayne Wordsmith

Timeless Excellence

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First Edition

Rural Ontario, Canada

ELEMENTARY GENIUS

Looking like a genius is elementary – managing the traps of human nature that capture all of us. You look much smarter than the rest of us when you can do that. Your results will differ even if you only succeed at outsmarting some of the predictable pitfalls. When you do it in business, you become more efficient, more effective, more profitable with an ease that will shock you.

Genius is an acronym that helps you remember the six steps on the roadmap of profitability:

1. Generate delight
2. Equip processes
3. Navigate change
4. Ignite Innovation
5. Unleash Talent
6. Strengthen Teams

Whether you're looking for productivity improvements or the newest, next-best thing, putting your idea through this process ensures its survival through to successful execution, whether a product or a service.

In each of the six, we will cover the theory behind why this might be the case and why it's uncommon in thought and action. We will also discuss what geniuses do differently and the challenges they face on this leading edge. You will then be introduced to the three steps you can take today to look more like a genius.

1. GENERATE DELIGHT

Make the right people happy

To succeed, you must know who matters and what matters to them.

In business and life, the fastest and most straightforward way to make a difference is to listen to what people want from you and give it to them. This might be your manager, colleagues, or team lead for an employee. For an entrepreneur, this might be your venture capitalists, ideal customer, and employees.

HOW WE FAIL

Other people? Usually, we seek only to satisfy ourselves.

For anyone, we often fail. We pick the wrong people, hear what we want to, ignore helpful feedback or misinterpret what's being said - even if finding the truth was our entire objective.

THE THEORY

Business is all about the exchange of value.

The first interview question was, "If a customer walks in, spends \$3.75, and hands you a five, what do they walk out with?" I assumed the question was to test my math skills and replied with the correct change.

It was the wrong answer.

A customer who walks in with any amount of money expects to walk out with the same value—their change, yes, but also the converted potential of that currency, whatever they bought.

It was a lesson that served me from that first job at a fast-food joint to a career in Quality. What's Quality about? Value, as defined by the customer.

They would walk out with all their potential if the product cost one dollar and they thought it was worth half that. If they thought it was worth more than a dollar, they would likely purchase more than one and feel richer.

A customer is anyone who needs, wants, or gets something from you. The term stakeholder is chosen to reflect the reality that these people aren't always in it for you, don't always choose you, and are not confined to those outside of your organization.

Project managers learn stakeholder management, Six Sigma Black Belts learn the Voice of the Customer (VOC), and business analysts start with end-user requirements. No matter what you do, you are serving someone, and likely far more than one.

Genius workers generate delight, ensuring stakeholders feel richer for the experience. Generating delight is about creating a clear path to identify the people who matter and how to do more than satisfy their needs.

WHY

No man is an island, and you can't do everything yourself. Eventually, you have to include others to get what you need. Generating delight is about getting what you need quickly, easily and accurately. While this may sound like you are out to satisfy everyone else, what you need or want defines the "everyone else" here—no more, no less.

Customer satisfaction is core to business success because everything spent is ultimately the customer's dollar. The costs of running a business show up in the prices the customer is asked to pay. They go elsewhere if the customer doesn't feel that's a good use of their hard-earned money.

Many studies have proven that keeping a current customer is much more profitable than finding a new one, with estimates ranging from 3 to thirty times the cost of customer retention.

When you are inside the organization, your customer is defined by whom you work with and for. While there are many career options, you are where you are, and we will make the best of it. When you arrive at your list of the people who matter, look for the ones you like and want to serve, and don't worry so much if there are people on your list you'd prefer to ignore.

When you know who matters and what matters to them and are keen to do the work, you can work much smarter. You know how to drive efficiency and effectiveness in the work you do, how to adapt to change, and how to predict it. When you don't, change will create a lot of work.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

If there's one thing for sure in this social world, more people are talking than listening. Or rather, more blogs are written than read, more songs are shared than anyone would have time to hear, and more videos are uploaded than there is time to watch.

Moreover, some die with their art still inside, and some masterpieces go unnoticed. The Joshua Bell experiment showed how we would pay hundreds of dollars to listen in an amphitheatre, but we wouldn't stop if it were in a subway.

To listen to your customers' opinions, you must ignore your own. This is incredibly difficult to do.

We love our own opinions. When we talk about them, the reward center in the brain ignites. If you grew up being offered a penny for your thoughts, it seems you could reverse the market, up to a handful of change. Study participants chose the opportunity to self-disclose over small monetary payoffs. That is, we'll pay you to listen to our opinions. I do, as I pay for everything related to my website and ask for nothing in return.

Soliciting your customers' opinions is like eating broccoli. At first, you may not like the taste, but you will learn to love it very shortly.

Like broccoli, it has benefits that make it worth it. Immediately, you can cut out all the extra work you didn't realize you were unintentionally adding. You can ask pointed questions to get the requirements more precise. In the long term, you can navigate toward an audience that is your perfect fit and makes you happy to serve if you aren't there yet.

If you don't love broccoli yet, you haven't found the right recipe. Generating delight is also a matter of finding the right way to go about it.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

Geniuses make listening to others a win-win experience.

With a detailed and deliberate analysis, geniuses identify their potential stakeholders and seek appropriate insight into what those individuals or representative groups want and need from them.

They are adept at generating delight through stakeholder management, communication plans, and requirements gathering tools. They ensure they have identified who matters and stay alert to any changes.

Geniuses use stakeholder requirements to find their fit. They know what makes them happy and what defines their values, and they take that information where it serves the greatest good.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

Indexes have remained relatively flat despite focusing on customer satisfaction worldwide. It's easier and faster than ever to engage customers and get their feedback, so why aren't we seeing an increasing trend in customer satisfaction?

While understanding the fundamentalism of this business and success maxim, we still talk about it because it's not something easily achieved.

UNCLEAR BEST PRACTICES

Whether or not to include customers in developing new products is not straightforward. Procter and Gamble has used focus groups but is now using technology to provide better answers. In contrast, Apple famously does not.

The internet has its trolls, just as it has its valid customer complaints. How to resolve customer complaints isn't a new problem, but the transparency and platform available to a disgruntled customer are larger than ever.

The use of focus groups is in decline as researchers learn to doubt the validity of the answers. In focus groups, they would ask questions like how many swipes it takes to shave your face when doing research for Gillette. The answers would range from 10 to 15, when it is more like 30 to 40. While this can be easily and accurately

quantified through observation, market researchers have many stories of customers saying one thing and doing another, consciously and unconsciously.

DEFINING THE CUSTOMER

Entrepreneurs and small businesses need to serve customers keenly, but deep in an organization, this concept only applies to front-line staff tactically.

Despite a CEO's directive to focus on customer service, what does that mean to an accountant in finance, a manager in human resources or anyone removed from the front lines?

Getting 'the voice of the customer' is pivotal to the Six Sigma methodology, but it is not infallible. At one conference, I heard about an airline that'd saved money and reduced variation by improving the number of olives on their salads. As a customer, I might be annoyed if I got one and my neighbour got three, but it is not high on my list of irksome flying experiences.

When most of your work or decisions don't impact the paying customer, the customer that matters to you is the people you serve. You might serve a project lead, a manager, colleagues, and ideally everyone who needs something from you. When everyone does that, the front-line staff's ability to deliver customer satisfaction significantly increases because you need alignment throughout the organization to deliver. The front line can't do it alone, and leadership can't do it alone.

THE TRICK OF OPTIMIZATION

You can't make everyone happy. Sometimes, that fact is used to justify not even trying.

Others aim to decide whom they will satisfy and whom they will ignore. This is the min/max model of customer satisfaction. Think of it like the recommendations HR requires in the interview process. It's easy to keep three people – and only three – happy through your career; they even coach this, but I've seen some progress as companies realize the waste in that effort. It doesn't matter if they'd wronged everyone else; as long as they have those three testimonials, they have their ticket to enter your organization. Scary!

The optimization model makes everyone happy enough. That's a stunning one-off story, and you can generate more win/win solutions for everyone. It's a swell of satisfaction that matters more. Think of it like driving a long way – it's not your top speed that matters; it's your average speed that matters. Optimization is about getting the highest average speed you can get.

Lean says to slow down to speed up, and what they mean is to take all the resources you are using to maximize things and put those resources on the weakest links, and your average speed goes up.

The trick of optimization is the concept of the rolled throughput yield, which goes like this. If your sales experience is performing at 80%, your delivery of whatever you are selling is 80%, and customer satisfaction is 80%, the overall score end-to-end isn't that 80%; it's 80 times 80 times 80. It is 51%, and you are just barely passing.

Optimization is working on the 51%.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Automatic thinking throws up barriers and roadblocks, so open them up. Here's what they sound like.

1. It's obvious who they are

Executives have a board to satisfy those who want to see stock prices soar. They also have employees who like to see their paycheques increase year over year. They also have buying consumers who like to see prices decrease or at least stay the same. When it comes time to spread the profits, where do they go?

Every CEO balances these demands differently. We get places where we work but won't shop because more money goes back to benefits and salaries than keeping prices reasonable. Or we invest where we won't shop and definitely won't work.

Like the CEO solely focused on shareholders, you might be missing a key group or person or weighing one too heavily, while you set your priorities.

Priorities must be set. At some point, team members decide whether the team they are on or the team they lead is more critical.

Yes, we must set them, but we must do so in a way that more accurately reflects their appropriate weight and be able to manage that balance in the short and long terms. We must consciously decide to whom to give our time, attention and energy. We need to manage how we choose to generate delight in a way that reflects our own goals, values and needs.

2. I know them well enough

If the first failure is accuracy, this is precision. Accuracy is your ability to hit the center of a target, while precision is the difference between hitting the target with a bullet or with an arrow.

Precision is your ability to be exact. When it comes to those we serve, we fail to consider the whole and complete circle while not knowing them well enough.

You may have to differentiate them to get to know them well enough. When applied to customers, this concept can be used by any stakeholder group. Where numbers dictate, segmentation is required to be more descriptive of their wants and needs and to ensure that the descriptor applies to everyone in that group.

Where segmentation applies to groups, the big five personality model applies to people. Remembered by the acronym CANOE, everyone is on a scale of conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and extroversion.

I am highly conscientious – you can tell because I like to be on time, organized and productive. I am slightly lower on agreeableness, but still high. This shows up in my compassion and co-operation, but I say somewhat lower because I am willing to put myself out there, take a stand and say no.

High neurotics are impulsive and emotional, and while I've had my moments for sure, overall, I am calm and confident. I am highly open, and you'll notice I actively seek out new experiences. I am low in extroversion, as I've mentioned my preference for deep ideas over casual conversation.

Where do you land on the matrix, and do you know how your key stakeholders map out?

It's the age of the long tail and the age of a lot of open and available information. I don't suggest you friend your employees on Facebook, although statistics show that those who have reported stronger relationships. While they

may have been on that track already, imagine a world in which it wouldn't be a creepy concept to let your manager in on your social life, or imagine an employee you'd like to get to know that well.

3. I know what they want

It's hard to put our opinions on the back burner and take someone else's instead. It happens so often that the authors of Tune In developed a phrase they used regularly with executives and business leaders: "Your opinion, while highly interesting, is largely irrelevant."

Your opinion can affect how you interpret what you hear, phrase questions to get the answers you want and even justify ignoring what you know you've heard.

Policies are just another form of opinion. Sure, they're documented opinions, but unthinkingly following them can get you in as much trouble as ignoring them altogether.

One CEO received internet accolades for supporting time off for one of his employees. When Madalyn Parker needed some time off to focus on her mental health, she sent an email stating that she would be taking two days towards that end.

Parker's CEO, Ben Congleton of Olark Live Chat Software, thanked her for doing that. Her story resulted in sharing more stories of people who had done similar things but had not had lovely results. Those rotten managers and executives who fired, threatened and otherwise retaliated stated they were following policy. Notice that I did not call them leaders.

The following of authority and doing what you've just been told is a powerful force. Stanley Milgram tested the propensity to follow orders after the holocaust. Fifty years ago, compliance rates in his experiments requiring subjects to inflict lethal doses of electricity on participants they couldn't see shocked the world. Last year, Polish scientists proved we are still willing to harm others in pursuit of obeying authority.

For what you think you know of what your stakeholders want, where did you get that information, and how much do you trust it?

4. I don't want to serve them

A focus on service is precisely what you need to succeed, but what if the idea of serving those people doesn't get you jazzed? You are not somewhere you can thrive. This goes for everyone, from entrepreneurs to employees.

Jamie Masters talks of her first client base when she started independently. After an exchange with one of them, she realized she needed to fire all her clients and hone her business model toward the people she wanted to serve.

When the idea of being of service to your stakeholder group humbles, excites, and inspires you, you are somewhere you can thrive.

If you haven't found this environment and entourage, don't despair – I've been there, and progress is possible anyway. I've found that no matter where I am, there is always someone to learn from, someone to help and someone in the same boat as you.

Both people and the environment have a more significant influence on you than you could think, and science is just beginning to learn the width and depth of these influences. I want you to know you deserve it, it's possible to find, and it might be taking more of a toll on you than you realize.

5. They can't help

It's true that if Henry Ford had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses. Sometimes, engaging them for their opinions is a waste. You will probably waste your time if you are looking for brand-new ideas.

Instead, you want to know and understand them so well that you know how to surprise them. When you buy a birthday present for your best friend, you don't ask what they like or need. You give it to them and watch their face light up.

Even when they want to help, they can't help but be unhelpful. Surely you know about lying to get through a survey, picking the fastest route to get through it, or giving the answers your Facebook self would provide.

Remember, their answers are as much about protecting the relationship, their reputation, and what's going on for them in the moment as they are about the truth. If they can't help, other ways exist to meet your needs.

THE ACTIONS

Think of where you are experiencing the most challenge right now. As you apply the following three ideas, it might be a specific project, a recurring deliverable, or your role in general.

DECIDE WHO MATTERS

Forget 360-degree feedback. That notion assumes everyone who technically should matter does matter. You can't make everyone happy, so be deliberate about whom you delight. If you are in Buckingham's eighty percent, you aren't likely interested in the opinions of some, even if you know you should. That's natural, and I think asking you to solicit their opinion and try to change it is inhumane.

One, it presumes that the person is more important in the world than you. I believe everyone is equally important. Argue that higher rank makes them more critical, and I'd say that randomness in life in general likely played a significant factor in how things worked out for either of you. For a business to run smoothly, every employee is essential.

Two, if you try to do it, it will only hurt. Behaving inauthentically leads to emotional suffering. Suppressing anger can lead to cancer. Who would wish that on someone?

The concept of "customer" applies to more than the final consumer. A customer is anyone who is receiving or benefiting from your work. It might be a peer who uses your information as an input for their report, the sponsor of your project or the person who signs your paycheck.

You need to decide where to focus in your job, discover your relevant stakeholders and finalize your list. Make the list as exhaustive as possible instead of trying to determine the right "one".

Who do you serve, and who do you want to serve?

ASK WHAT THEY WANT

As mentioned, people are willing to pay to be heard. They invest their time and money despite hearing crickets. They persevere because it's a lottery with a better chance of winning than the one where you only have to buy a ticket.

Listen to what they want. Record it in their own words—this also helps you stay focused on them instead of what you'd say if someone asked you.

Listen to what they need. People tell you their solutions, not their problems. They tell you their goals, not their pains. You need to know where they are coming from, not where they are going.

You can weigh in with your desires when you understand what they need. Satisfy the need, and you can do it however you want. Often, what you might imagine is fixed is only a tiny fraction of the available freedom.

Instead, the idea is to grow what is working, build your strengths, and lean into your opportunities and potential. Do more of what satisfies your delighted stakeholders in a way that satisfies you in return, not just financially.

DELIVER THE IMPROVEMENT

You've gone away, thought about their needs, and produced something. When you provide it, point out that you've tried to give them what they want.

When you do that, you trigger expectation and prime the recipient to look for reasons why what you said is right.

When people fill in the blank, they usually find why they would have liked it just the way you provided it. In the experiments, only 26 percent of the study participants recognized such a swap when it occurred only moments before¹.

Researchers had participants choose the more attractive person from two photos. After making the choice, the researcher would flip both photos down and act like they had given the participant the exact image they'd just chosen. Instead, the researchers were genuine magicians who pulled a switch and slid the rejected photo across the table.

Immediately flipping it back over, participants were asked to explain why they thought this face was more attractive than the one they had rejected. But wait, no. They offered reasons why the face they rejected was more appealing. These faces were not easily confused in a side-by-side test, and I've included the link to the study so you can check it out for yourself.

Forming preferences starts a pattern that will be repeated. So many things are random, and you are doing your best effort, so you might as well use every tool you can. At least it makes you aware of the tactics that others might use against your interests.

Social media allows you to choose your audience. Align with customers who support your growth and will even demand it sometimes. After all, how is it getting ahead if it's not simultaneously making you healthier, happier and brighter?

I've discussed several reasons customers are essential and outlined three ways to apply this theory.

2. EQUIP PROCESSES

Deliver with grace and ease every time

The benefits and uses of these processes are becoming widespread.

From freeing our minds for higher-order functioning to helping us get everything done better and faster, processes help us see opportunity, use data for feedback, and become optimally productive.

HOW WE FAIL

However, they can be a double-edged sword by cementing the status quo, reducing knowledge work to piece work and crippling real productivity with tons of added work and effort.

The most reliable way to maximize your productivity is to optimize your processes. Optimization means they are robust within budget, deliver within target, and traceable within interfaces.

THE THEORY

A process is a set of steps to achieve something specific.

Depending on the complexity of the final product, these steps may be simple actions or detailed instructions.

A recipe is an example of a process. It states what you need to begin—the ingredients and measures. Instructions describe how to combine these ingredients and often include a picture of the result that can serve as a quality standard.

When learning something new, we are typically taught a process and then repeat it. You learn to comply with what you should do until you've mastered it. While you are mastering it, did you find it helpful to use memory aids, markers, or other such triggers to help you do the right thing? Did you modify or tweak what you were taught to improve it?

Equipping a process means it has all of these things to ensure success. It also provides the same output no matter who does it, produces the correct data no matter who manages it, and has adequate governance over any changes. All of these attributes provide quality assurance.

Before quality assurance, there was quality control. Quality control exists at the end of the process. It tests the final result for conformity to targets and standards. Non-conforming products are reworked or trashed, which is expensive.

Quality assurance doesn't exist at the end of the process but throughout it. Instead of testing the final product to see if it conforms, you know it does because everything that needed to happen for it to be right did happen.

WHY

The use of processes in business is core to primary quality improvement methodologies, from Lean to Six Sigma. They reduce the demand on discipline, attention, and effort. For a growing business, processes help onboard and train new employees faster.

By ensuring consistency, they help create a foundation for improvement as they help you understand what to change when you want to change the output. This ensures that the difficulties of learning from experience and history are minimized. Availability bias, memory flaws and cognitive dissonance won't derail investigations into creating improvements.

If you are routinely late, spend hours a week searching for things, or lack the clarity to know exactly what you are doing right now and what you need to do next, processes will be your new secret advantage.

With the use of processes, it is clear how to do one step and how that leads to the step after that. If you've ever come up with your best ideas in the shower, you've had the experience of how processes can liberate your mind. You haven't documented your morning routine or shampooed your hair for the same amount of time daily, but you follow a routine. Processes only need to be as precise, measured or documented as is useful.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

In Saskatchewan, they say you can watch your dog run away for days. Driving across this flat province, the scenery hardly changes. When processes get confused with routine, no one is excited to get them in place.

Getting processes in place is about working on the work, not doing the work. When there is work to be done, orders to deliver, and customers to serve, there might not be any time left to consider how to do the job more easily, deliver orders faster, and serve customers better.

Without processes, there's always a fire to put out instead. Consider the bored and lonely Maytag repairman. He doesn't have any fires to put out. Boredom and loneliness aren't most people's objectives. Rewarding heroism is natural, but it also keeps the fires coming. Everyone wants to be a hero.

Preventing fires doesn't earn just desserts. Since the fire didn't happen, it can't be quantified. The impact of avoidance only matters when the problem is chronic because accountants can only attempt to quantify the value.

Omission bias is the tendency to judge harmful actions as morally worse than equally harmful inaction. It's harder to notice when someone doesn't do something. If John throws Sally a baseball and she misses catching it, the broken window is his fault. Sally could have jumped, lunged, or knocked the ball into a different trajectory, but she didn't. Society punishes John.

In 2017, in Florida, a video captured teenagers jeering a man as they watched him drown. They could have saved his life, been heroes forever, and achieved personal pride. They did not. By state law, they can't be prosecuted. In Florida, there's no law against doing nothing.

From a lifecycle perspective, the value of processes changes. At the launch of a company, you don't need very many or very robust processes. Learning is organic; testing and modifying things happen every day. It's not until stability is achieved that processes hit their stride. At that point, they become growth accelerators.

When a company grows without processes, implementing them requires commitment, capacity, and culture change. The call for processes is often tomorrow's job, and tomorrow never comes. Instead, the little fires take over, the heroes become too exhausted to put them out, and everything goes down in flames.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

Geniuses always make and break processes, connecting processes into systems, and systems into results.

They are continually improving how they do their work. Every time they loop through a process, it's slightly different than the last time. To them, processes don't create automatons but liberate their mind to focus on higher-level observations and solutions. The process is a foundation to leap, not a boundary line of constraints.

Data-savvy, they know what to measure using both qualitative and quantitative information, how to interpret scorecards, and how to track performance over time. They create time and space to work in and on the processes.

When mistakes and defects happen, geniuses blame the process, not the person, and gather the right people to determine corrective and preventative action. Geniuses apply processes in ways that enable and support them to achieve mastery.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

For all their good as a tool for the more competent worker, they are a double-edged sword.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMING

You are now looking at a sizeable challenge implemented late in a business's growth phase. For instance, Fortune 500 companies are now implementing Lean-type initiatives. When processes haven't organically grown from the bottom up within the industry, they can be complex, expensive, and overwhelming, as top-down implementation becomes the preferred method.

Often, the culprit is a new customer who requires the supplier to attain ISO certification. The motivating factor is speed, with cost a close second and quality not a thought in the wind. For all the ironies in business, attaining ISO quality management certification does not promise a return on investment.

Starting process maintenance at size is not easy either. Again, when maintenance hasn't organically grown with the business, it is new work. Instead of shifting tasks for the right people to have the capacity to do them, full-time employees or consultants audit, train, and mentor process users and owners with an obvious cost and not very visible benefits. That new customer has to be profitable enough to cover the expense.

ADHERENCE VERSUS DEVIANCE

Processes guide your actions, but also allow you to disconnect from thought. Not having to think about what you are doing will enable you to consider where improvements or innovations can be made, but no one can force anyone to think, engage and contribute.

Barry Schwartz explains that rules and procedures that save you from thinking destroy morality. Job duties that omit the ability to ignore responsibilities in favour of other objectives result in driving the wrong behaviour. We need practical wisdom, and overuse of process destroys the freedom required.

They can hamstring real productivity with tons of added work and effort, and people aren't that excited about that, among other typical responses. They can prevent you from doing what you know is right, even when you are sure all your stakeholders would agree that deviation is called for.

One thing that makes deviation very difficult is technology. Technology is often leveraged to support process management. When these systems are too complex or expensive to tweak, processes can become overly restrictive and tightly governed. In this way, they cement the status quo—a slow death for any business.

Leaders use processes to ensure quality, but excessive governance eliminates the potential and opportunity for challenge. When employees don't have an opportunity for challenge, more significant problems are about to arrive.

ELIMINATION OF CHALLENGE

Engaging or caring about the work is hard when people aren't challenged. They show up and put in the time, but like it sounds, this is more like jail than developing a career.

Leaders fear that challenges will result in poor quality. You are a little out of your comfort zone when challenged, not a lot. You have one of the ingredients for getting in the zone – one of the coveted places of optimal performance. While you are primed to perform optimally, everyone else knows you haven't done this before. Will it be beginner's luck or an epic fail? In business, that can be too much to wager.

The process is meant to be like scaffolding, allowing you to tackle work you usually couldn't. To achieve great heights, you must leap from the shoulders of giants. Processes are those shoulders.

Processes offer consistent solutions to use more people to get more done. However, cutting the work in the wrong places and producing handoffs can easily result in lower worker morale. This usually translates into higher costs, lower productivity, and difficulty identifying the root of the problem. With handoffs in the wrong places, you reduce knowledge work to piecework.

Dan Ariely explains that we need recognition when we surmount a challenge to feel good about our work. When your work is ignored or shredded, if you retaliate, you would respond just as a group of engineers working for a Seattle software company did.

Processes should be used to right-size the level of challenge. Growth requires challenge, and the growing employee is the valuable employee.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Process thinking means being deliberate, observant, and curious, no matter how the brain gets in the way.

1. It's not applicable

You may have been introduced to some heavy forms of process management. A process can be used to verify against a checklist or a list of bullet points, or quickly and easily retrieve critical information at a moment's notice, such as a password locker. How much process you need depends on the required quality of the result and the time and effort available to achieve it.

It's not so much that you need a process; it's that you need process thinking. The realization is that factors are related in predictable and likely quantifiable ways. The realization is that nothing is being done for the first time, so there is always historical knowledge from which to form a starting point. The realization is that once you have that starting point, you can adapt and test it any way you want with deliberate experimentation.

2. I can't get it down

Where there is a will, there is a way.

When you've reached expert status, you've forgotten what you know. This may be why you can't get it down – you no longer see what you know. You've lost a beginner's mind and are suffering from the curse of knowledge. Again, someone else can help. Find a novice who wants to learn; they will be the right foil for your expertise.

More often, the "can't" has less to do with ability and more with overcoming emotional barriers. Some people fear that they are irrelevant once they have acquired their knowledge. Keeping knowledge to themselves is sometimes called job security. Taking that idea of security also means you won't be promoted or otherwise given liberating opportunities. This is not always irrational, but it also misuses processes. Instead, it should set them up to further their subject matter knowledge and become positioned as the coach for others.

It also arises from using the tool dictated corporately for such purposes. Again, there is more than one way to do it, and there should be freedom and autonomy to use the tool or way that best suits the need. While there are arguments for standardizing such tools, these arguments apply to specific situations. In that case, communicate on a situation-by-situation basis.

Getting it done should be a multi-iterative process. It's not something you do once, and it's like that forever. Instead, it should be tweaked each time it's used and polished toward requirements, not perfection.

3. I don't want to be limited or controlled

If a process limits or controls you, it's too much of a process. Too much process is called governance. Governance is when other people's fear or distrust is layered into whatever you do, such that their fears are calmed. You are being held back and controlled, not assisted and lifted.

When you manage your processes, they are your assistants. They form a foundation to free your thinking to tackle the deeper, less noticeable issues. They help remind you, support you, and focus you. Or so they should.

They aren't working right if they aren't helping your memory, focus and attention. You shouldn't be limited or controlled, so don't let anyone or anything try.

4. I can't get compliance

This is a widespread reason why processes are abandoned altogether, and where conflict usually arises. People, including you, are not lazy, mean or dumb. When you accept that, you can blame the process for its less-than-adequate design.

The issue of compliance concerns the quality of the process itself. If you and others can't comply, it fails from a practical point of view. You might need a better trigger or a better method. A better design is possible if it's awkward to do or doesn't drive automatic behaviour.

Managing processes consisting only of machines producing tangible outputs is straightforward. Statistical tools, process control devices, and technology work amazingly well to ensure that one ball bearing is the same as the next and the one before.

People are not machines. Knowledge work is intangible and perishable. Unlike that ball bearing, you can't take it to a lab and study it for hours or days. You can't measure it with scientific devices.

However, we are appropriating the management approaches that work on the factory floor for use on people. Unintentionally, we drive the wrong results due to a flawed proxy measurement. We are getting better at leveraging old tools and practices, but we are nowhere near the ease and simplicity of machine process management.

We need different tools and approaches when working with hearts, heads and hands.

5. I don't want to manage by data

Data, dashboards, and scorecards seem inseparable from processes, but they carry their baggage.

As in the inability or lack of desire to comply, the notion to turn all work into measurements, and all measurements into reports for management, there needs to be a different approach to knowledge work, while the ability to measure catches up.

Technology is catching up with the things we wish we could measure. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) is helping scientists decipher what is going on in our brains and what we think is happening.

They say if you can't measure it, you can't improve it, but sometimes, what you measure or can measure is a mere proxy for the truth. When that's the case, metrics can be gamed or otherwise open to leading managers astray.

Some managers are comfortable with numbers but know they can be unreliable. Some managers are not comfortable with numbers. This second group is bigger than you would think.

Math anxiety is real for many adults, but everyone with a brain has problems with numbers. Words matter more. Scientists found this while testing responses equal in risk but opposite in representation. We have a fundamental difficulty with numbers. This is a new concept in the history of brain development, and we haven't quite integrated it into our hard wiring.

Numbers fool us into thinking we have absolute accuracy when surrounded by ambiguity. Confidence intervals are far and wide, yet we push for another decimal place. We divide companies into portions, then have one side fighting to spend money so they won't lose it out of their budgets, while another is determining what is essential as they cut to meet their limits. Numbers drive us into the decimals while we decimate the larger picture.

As we enter the world of big data, we need to master the foundations of management through data.

THE ACTIONS

If you don't know where a documented process would assist you, think of the complex, the rare or the shared things you do. When it's complex, you'll likely miss seeing where there's an opportunity to cut out work. Rare things are hard to remember. Shared responsibilities clarify and come together through the process of getting it done.

GET THE FIRST DRAFT DOWN

There's no time like now to start.

When it comes to detail, aim for something between what you wished you had when you first started on the job or at the task and what you'd need if you went on sabbatical for a year and it was your first time back.

Get someone else to observe you, be deliberate about recording your actions and be curious about your thinking as you work. Take notes next time you do it, or collect the artifacts and reverse engineer their creation. There are many ways to go about it. Check out the download *Simple Streamlining* for ideas.

Don't let the first draft sit for long. Have the document at hand each time you go through the process. You should make updates, clarifications, and additions.

If many people perform the same process, start with documentation, not standardization. Each person can record their own. The emerging commonalities show the differences between approaches and can reveal better ways for everyone.

OWN IT

Process owners are accountable for a process defined by a specific boundary, not scope.

A single person should carry overall accountability. In silos, the accountability is spread out, with multiple owners of different parts of the process. Like being tugged in many directions, the results of this process are usually all over the place. A typical scenario is people management separated from financial management and cost management. The people, the capital investments and the day-to-day operations are interdependent yet separated.

Scopes, like silos, create a tendency to draw lines that can't exist. They attempt to separate intertwined things that must be treated as a whole.

One owner is required to make any leap into excellence. A committee can write a mission statement, but it sounds watered down to satisfy everyone because it had to meet more than one person in the first place. An artist's beautiful work doesn't happen in isolation or without the artist's ownership.

Every risk and every new idea comes out of one person's imagination. The ability to have individual and original ideas is what keeps progress moving forward. Genius lives in aligning a person's circle of control with their unique talents and skills.

OPTIMIZE IT

Optimization isn't about extremes; it's about what's best for the overall system to function.

Project managers learn the triple constraints. If you want something fast and high-quality, you should expect to pay for it. Fast food should serve as an alternative example. It is quick and cheap but not of high quality.

Getting to optimization usually requires some experimentation. Experimentation isn't free. In addition to the setup and analysis, there is the data collection. The more data you can get, the more scientifically sound your conclusions. However, this isn't a linear relationship, and the rule of thumb is to get as much as you can afford.

Surpassing customers' expectations isn't free, either. Indeed, there are costs to making things right, but there's also a cost to that as a business mandate.

It's one thing to deliver a wow experience; it's another to hold a higher quality standard than the customer's. Packaging might instill luxury in one consumer, while another might only see the money they will throw in the recycling bin, or worse, the trash.

If something is already out the door and you must recall it, traceability is necessary. Just like a food manufacturer can trace ingredients to the final product, a knowledge worker must understand their tools and technology, including everything from their brain to their laptop.

Processes touch people, tools, and technology. Working together, all three create an optimized system. Using the Pareto principle, what is the next improvement that matters?

We've covered a lot of theory and ideas. You've learned the importance of equipping processes, and now you've got some activities to complete.

3. NAVIGATE CHANGE

Assess the need for change and take the lead.

If there are constants in this world, some would say they are death, taxes and change.

Nothing stays the same, and trying to make it go your way is both an art and a science. The art remains elusive, and the science is still being studied.

HOW WE FAIL

Death and taxes are not welcome, but change? Some say no one likes change, but what about fresh clothing, winning the lottery or something other than leftovers for dinner?

If there's a truth about change that no one likes, it's that no one likes loss. No one likes to be controlled, because to be controlled is to lose agency. No one likes to be excluded, shut out, minimized or expected to comply without contribution. No one likes to be worse off, and everyone evaluates differences themselves.

To successfully navigate change, minimize the losses.

THE THEORY

Navigating change ensures your processes remain robust from outside influences, including others.

The term change management can be ambiguous. It is not about changing what we control or minor improvements to existing processes, features, or benefits. It is not about change because you are innovating and must navigate affordances. It is about change, and when you need other people to accompany you.

This kind of change has not been constant; it's been growing exponentially. This also means the knowledge of navigating change successfully has been increasing at a similar rate. Change may happen to you and cause you to adapt, or you might introduce change and disrupt someone else. Either way, you need ways to minimize losses and maximize motivation and rewards.

For knowledge workers, failing because you didn't know better adds to the pain. After all, the true leader is the one who defines the path, not just follows it. What are the best ways to introduce and manage change for optimal, long-term, sustainable success?

WHY

When you are a business leader, your followers might be your customers, employees, or shareholders—maybe even all three. But this is not about identifying who they are, but getting people to follow you.

First, people follow when it's logical to do so. You don't have to tell people to get out of a burning building, get away from rising waters, or get out of the way of cars.

You may have to help people find a way out when the floors below them are engulfed. You may have to give people another place to go, and the hope that their stuff will be protected. You have to explain to people what motion looks like from different angles, especially if you are going to be crossing the road or taking photographs of moving objects.

When you lead others into change, you must accept that you lead logical and emotional human beings.

You are also leading a group that is not that much different from animals or yourself. They have the exact basic human needs and responses you would probably have in similar situations.

The reigns of change may not be for everyone, but everyone should be able to accept the moment when they see the emperor has no clothes, dare to bring that to the right person's attention, and persevere until the wrong has been righted.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

The ability to successfully navigate change requires overcoming many natural shortcomings.

First, change requires seeing the future and what's coming and deciding that something different would be better. The brain doesn't do well at forecasting the future, whether we are predicting it or planning it.

Gathering unbiased, relevant information requires overcoming confirmation bias. "When trying to solve a problem, or troubleshoot a problem, we get fixated on a solution or a hypothesis and ignore contradictory evidence," explains Jason Kring, president of The Society for Human Performance in Extreme Environments².

The capacity for self-denial and the ability to tell and believe our own stories are unappreciated. Instead of tuning into contradictory information, we use intuition to convince ourselves that things are going right. When contradictory information is front and center, how easily it can be explained away is wild.

It took science 104 years to accept the existence of bacteria in the stomach. Thousands of witnesses had seen it, yet they had been educated that bacteria couldn't exist in the stomach. Doctors like the Emperor's clothes didn't see it for over a century. It took two years for the Barry Marshall and Robin Warren team to shake the bedrock belief of medicine with proof, for which they won a Nobel prize.

In hindsight, it was clear they were there all the time. With reflection, decisions crystallize, and patterns are exposed. When it's someone else's problem, it's easy to solve.

For Brian Stevenson, onlookers could easily see how to solve his problem. The 33-year-old Brit was watching a hot air balloon launch in California. The ground crew untethered the inflated balloon, and he likely grabbed hold of the basket in an attempt to help.

Unfortunately, the basket rose, and both his feet left the ground. The crowd urged him to let go. At first, Stevenson would have contemplated the broken bones and thought he'd hold on until it's lower. But the balloon didn't lower; at 300 meters, he couldn't hold on longer. Instead of a few bones, it cost him his life.

This runaway balloon problem is one of the five common irrationalities that result in tragic outcomes. Balloon crews have a rule of never letting both feet leave the ground.

To navigate change successfully, you have to make some decisions while knowing those decisions will be fraught with unreliable emotions.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

Geniuses learn from the past, plan proactively, including making decision trees based on historical information, front-line input, and cross-functional collaboration, and stay present in the fluidity. Always, they take time to learn from the experience before moving forward.

Nothing stays the same; managers need to know when, what, and how to change in a way that attracts the right people, leads them along in a unified fashion and arrives at a future that is better than the past, no matter which team member is polled. The journey is smooth, and the destination is worth the time and effort.

When it comes to change, it requires a strategic vision and an ongoing assessment of the current landscape—they look out, not up, for direction from leadership.

Monitoring the external landscape for change isn't only about risk and opportunity; it's about control and stability. Competent knowledge workers protect their domains from external upset.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

Change gets a bad rap in reception and response. There are many high-profile failures when it comes to leading others through change.

EASIER TO FOLLOW

Should you lead or follow? When it comes to innovation, the bankable choice is not clear. Amazon was first and crushed it. Friendster, MySpace and LinkedIn preceded Facebook.

First movers quickly get swamped by fast followers. The one who dominates in the long term is not always the first. Researchers found that only 7% of the market was captured by innovators. Improvers take the market, like Facebook. Like Snapchat did with Twitter, those who merely follow the requirements of successful companies are fast and easy success stories.

Innovative companies faced with this decision invest in becoming the fastest to bring a new idea to market, learning as much as they can from their pioneering efforts, and deciding ahead of time when to quit. Of course, it's much easier to follow and still focus on speed, learning, and abandonment. There may even be a day when all this hard work will allow you to leapfrog over the leader.

DEAF TO THE CALL

If you wait to follow for too long or ignore the signs, you might miss the chance.

Detroit is famous for its belief in its immunity to change. In 2008, car manufacturers continued to produce vast parking lots full of cars no one wanted. Mitt Romney, a son of Detroit and chief executive of American Motors, took to the New York Times with his plea to let Detroit go bankrupt. In his view, this would force a massive restructuring.

Instead, General Motors and Chrysler received their bailout. Michael Capuano stated, "My fear is you're going to take this money and continue making the same stupid decisions you've made for 25 years. Detroit still carries the legacy of the biggest urban bankruptcy and the departure of half its peak population.

The Space Shuttle Challenger disaster stands as another example. Roger Boisjoly raised strenuous objections to the launch. The booster rocket engineer authored a memo to his managers predicting "a catastrophe of the highest order" based on disturbing data from the O-rings.

On the morning of the launch, 15 engineers agreed unanimously to postpone the launch. The O-ring's performance at that morning's low temperatures hadn't been tested. Footage shows the failure immediately, but despite the

fears, no contingency plans were put in place, and the astronauts died, not in the explosion but when they hit the water minutes later.

Ignoring piles of evidence calling for change or proceeding when you don't have the proof you need are both situations when someone needs to slow down the forward motion and have a fresh think about where things are headed.

PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY

As pressures mount, it's easy to understand how some poorly thought-out actions are taken. Even if we can understand them, we can't rationalize them.

You might think that the public backlash against the manufacturer of the O-rings would have started in 1986, but instead, they were up for an award from NASA.

Sears faced mounting criticism 2017 as it cut staff and benefits to workers to save the company, only to give retention bonuses to executives in a move that sparked consumer backlash. Target quietly exposed their policy of letting customers use the washroom of the gender with which they identified, only to result in a call for boycotts from customers fearing for the safety of children, which created an impact lasting for a year. Coke, responding to fresh competition from Pepsi, introduced a new formulation of Coke, with a result that few on the globe haven't heard about.

With the introduction and widespread use of social media, citizens have a voice and a platform should they decide to use it. In the past, perceptions and reputations could be tightly controlled. Now, anyone interested can know the reality of customer experiences and executives' responses.

United breaks guitars, airlines overbook, and physically drag passengers off planes. The potential exposure of actions and decisions has to weigh on the minds of today's leaders. Public speaking might only be usurped by public decisions if public speaking is the number one fear.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Within every leader at every level of these changes is a person. How individuals respond to the call to lead change and the call to see the need comes down to some fairly consistent conversations.

1. What change?

Denial is powerful. It's easy to ignore or avoid seeing reasons for change. We all have done it personally, and when there's something of an audience involved, be it our colleagues or the media, the stakes are higher. Fear of public speaking is number one, way past death, and when you lead change, you are up there on the platform, and people are waiting to see what you will say and do.

So is the urge to rush into action. When we feel threatened, like Coke might have when Pepsi first started marketing their wins in taste tests, we rush into action. The market loss at risk was massive. A slower urge to rush into action might have exposed the fact that the taste tests were based on a few sips. Pepsi is sweeter than Coke, which is more pleasurable with only a few sips. Yet, when the whole can is consumed, it's overpowering.

Nothing changed about how consumers responded to Pepsi; only the marketed message. The change was the message, not the product. People don't want a whole can of sweet pop; markets are about quantity. When we rush into action, we target the wrong problems and usually make things worse.

This leads us to when this is a perfectly valid response. When you haven't identified the required change and made a plan to implement and evaluate it, you still need to ask this question. Otherwise, the change effort will fail to address the complete problem, and not only will you still have the original one, but you will also have the repercussions of the change you make. Patience is a virtue because it pays off and takes leadership courage.

Other times, the problem might be the elephant in the room, something everyone knows about, but the topic is strictly off the table. When that's the case, you will likely be aware of the taboo nature of the problem, but even when you think the problem is obvious, you could face denial.

Other times, the question is innocent. It's hard for people to identify something as a problem until they have a vision of something better. Other times, they've been infected by leaders who've stated they only want to know about solutions, not problems. However, solutions are complex things that require skill, time, and collaboration. So, we stop seeing problems. Know the person and personalize the problem.

2. There is no other way

Once you've established a problem, you may face a disagreement about whether room for improvement is attainable.

If nothing has ever been tried, they may think there's nothing they can do about it, no one can, and hence, no other way. Humans are the only species able to realize how insignificant one person is and believe in the imperative to try. One person is the one who causes change.

There may be a history of attempts to improve things in the past, and each of those failed experiments cemented the notion that things are best left alone or the formation of the opinion that there is nothing they can do about it. Learned helplessness can be overcome by learning to be successful in new ways through available training, support, and coaching.

Any expert who is faced with the possibility of looking like a moron in front of his peers will be understandably resistant. Make sure learners' needs are well represented. Please include them in the process. Resist the urge to provide more information and access to resources. This can be overwhelming. The easier and simpler the training, the easier it is for the learner. Encourage them and build on small successes as you go. Ensure to incorporate time to learn in the transition period.

If arguments are about how things didn't work before, realize that time and everything else have changed, too. It's a different world with different tools, perspectives on the past, and people we can include. Try again, as success is just one more step after failure.

I should know; I'm the expert. The law states that distinguished but elderly scientists are usually wrong. However, ensuring their competence is required and pivotal, gives them the safety of a reputation and respect for wisdom. Just don't let experts become a barrier.

Persistence is something we work at because it doesn't come naturally. Your job here is to build persistence. Depending on what type of decision maker they are, you might decide to point out why each previous attempt

failed and why this one will be different. Or you might focus on how they are brighter, stronger, and better than the person they were in those previous attempts. What you choose will depend on the unique situation.

3. It's not worth it

If people don't think the leader will get there, there is little chance they will follow on their own accord. With a low chance of success, you need your inner Ernest Shackleton, your inner Cortés, or your speech of a dream to convince people.

I'm unsure what you're asking, and I won't bother trying to figure it out. Clarify your call to action.

There might be a difficult person they'd have to work with to make it happen, or some other activity equally off-putting. What are you going to do to make it easier and worthwhile?

There may be no reward for them at all. Some people want to go to work and do the same thing every day. Changing job roles is the most significant source of stress, and it takes the longest to recover from. Not everyone in every organization will want to be included in change, or will be forced to do it. You might find agreeable win/win solutions for everyone when you recognize that. If you can't negotiate to improve the final result or the joy in the journey, recognize that not everyone may want to go with you, while most people require a day job.

4. I like it this way

The predictability is comforting; the devil you know is better than the one you haven't met yet. This problem gives me something to complain about, making me feel important and special. Although I may sound like I am complaining, I am bragging. My safety and comfort are at stake, and my identity is on the line.

You're only doing this because...Whatever motive you are accused of, realize the other person may be projecting. Realize you can do nothing about projection because it is not about you.

Avoid getting tangled up in it by respectfully disengaging. Listen fully because everyone wants to be heard. That may be enough to diffuse the objection. Aim for alignment if you can't achieve agreement. Can they get along anyway?

5. There are more significant problems than mine

This is a deflection response, where they are asking for time to fix it themselves. If you go pick on someone else, by the time you come back, it might all be moot, or at least that's the sales pitch. It's all about the desire to shift the focus. They might even give you a list of problems that don't impact them and seem like worse problems than this one.

Deflecting the problem onto someone else is also easier when you minimize the problem; you have to make the comparison more obvious.

Therefore, this problem should be accepted for now. Delaying the problem until some future date is a creative form of procrastination.

THE ACTIONS

As a knowledge worker, you have a specific niche in the world. Think of that niche and connect with it on a scale outside your job, company and community.

LOOK EXTERNALLY

No more navel-gazing.

One of the things that should be on your radar is any change of bargaining power upstream or downstream. Should your buyers suddenly have more control, they can increase their demands. Should your supply base become flooded, you can demand more.

New entrants are the bane of most businesses. The disruptors are the ones you don't see coming because they change the core foundation of the current model or structure. Online banks gave brick-and-mortar ones a run for their money. Crowdfunding changes a bank's whole income model.

Substitutes can be hard to see when you hold the thing being substituted. Kodak long believed digital photos wouldn't go far because quality must be the top priority, and film was untouchable. What might not look like a competition might be a better alternative.

Competitive benchmarking helps you learn from leaders you may otherwise never discover. Core business processes like accounting and customer service can exist as a gold standard, no matter the performance of the rest of the company. Glimmers of brilliance can be found in the roughest locations.

DIRECT EXPECTATIONS

Use the power of expectation to grease your case for change.

It's common knowledge that leaders must paint a vision of a future to get people to fall in line. They need the information for many reasons, but you also need them in ways you may not appreciate.

When you expect something, it's more likely to manifest than things that weren't on your subconscious, unconscious or conscious. Expectation is a powerful thing. If you can get lots of people expecting the same things as you want to have happen, you've got an army of help.

The placebo effect is just as real as the nocebo effect. If you believe in what you've been told about how the future will unfold, your body acts as if that belief is true. You think sugar pills are just as effective as aspirin, and if the doctor told you that you have six months to live, on day 183, you will drop dead.

If you can rally yourself and others, you will have the motivation to persevere.

EDIT TACTICS

Monitor and change what's working with a pre-set action plan, with milestones and decision trees.

For all the biases that await a change leader, they are prepared for them. They have thought through plans and analyzed how Mother Nature, other people, technology, and other potential sources of surprise might crop up.

Given genuine constraints, they've assigned realistic possibilities to the likelihood of that event and concentrated on the most they could afford.

They plan to monitor potential risks by developing and comparing real-time data against a pre-determined decision tree to make timely decisions.

They pay attention, stay focused and act in flow in the face of change.

We covered a lot of theory, and I've given you an overview of three ideas for implementing them. However, your action guide provides more detail.

4. IGNITE INNOVATION

Load the gamble on new ideas

When you've latched onto your stakeholders and are reliably giving them what they need, with creative thinking and a reliable way to go from idea to reality, you've got innovation.

Bright, shiny, new things capture our attention, and that's the way the brain is supposed to work by design, to keep us alive in the face of a predator and feed in the presence of an apple tree.

HOW WE FAIL

Instead, we support the wrong ideas and crush the right ones. We try to quantify too early, stigmatize failure, and fail to see possibilities beyond the obvious ones.

We've got to get it right, if only for the environment. Innovation has the potential to use up resources and produce waste, satisfy needs that aren't there, create things no one needs, and fill warehouses with junk.

THE THEORY

No one ever stays satisfied; therefore, we innovate.

As human beings, we always want more. We want our stocks and investments to keep climbing. We want our dollars to go farther. We all complain that there is never enough time. We also want more from our experiences. We grow bored with what we have and seek new and exciting things. For all these reasons, business has to innovate. When you get to the edge with change, you start to see new problems and new ideas.

How does a business give more to its employees, shareholders and customers? Through finding new ways to do things, new markets to do things in, and new things to do in existing markets. Otherwise known as innovation.

Adaptation sometimes requires innovation to keep up with the changes around us. We've just looked at the need for knowledge workers to understand, appreciate, and continue to scan the external environment for the need to change. Sometimes, those changes can be made with tweaks or improvements, but more often, they demand an innovative response.

The difference between new and better is the difference between innovation and improvement. While there is often overlap, innovation is alone when it boldly demands entering new territory. This territory can include new markets, products, processes, customers, or the business model.

Innovation is all about creating something of value where none existed before. This can mean anything from a way to do things that produces the same output but is more fun to a killer new app.

WHY

Innovation allows you to create your demand. New products can create new markets or enter existing markets faster and deeper.

Innovation can create demand or provide an outlet for a preexisting demand. Marketing can create short-term demand, but the sustainable demand that offsets the cost of innovation is a long-term demand-tapping type of innovation.

All this innovation creates new capabilities, technical and otherwise. The pursuit will also deepen knowledge of existing capabilities. Pursuing innovation also requires deepening and clarifying what “value” means in the arena you are attempting to impact. This ability translates into a way to do everything better, from collaborating to managing.

In addition to a clear and solid understanding of value, creativity, problem-solving, and dissatisfaction with the status quo are required. Comfort with failure becomes a necessity and by-product.

A culture of innovation grows the company in ways traditional methods don't. Mergers and acquisitions can lead to innovations, but leaders who emphasize this growth method are negotiators and deal makers, not creative thinkers pushing the edge of the envelope.

Innovative cultures spring from trust, inspiration, communication, and high-quality knowledge work, where workers decide how to do the job. These kinds of cultures attract and retain top talent.

A culture of innovation provides a competitive edge for long-term advantage.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

Tall poppies get chopped down. Many cultures have their variations on this warning. If you stick out above everyone else, you will be attacked, resented, cut down or criticized simply because, in some respect, you were classified as superior to your peers.

Society doesn't have an excellent track record of supporting innovators. Copernicus was brilliant enough to figure out that the Earth revolved around the sun, and he was also astute enough to avoid punishment for that idea: he waited until he was on his deathbed.

Organizational transformations are notoriously unsuccessful, with popularized failure rates of 70 percent. Failure is the well-worn path, the expected result, and maintaining the status quo is the path of least resistance when it's all about change.

However, no valid and reliable empirical evidence supports such a story³. We know that some are epic failures, some succeed, but most fall somewhere in between, with a distinct predominance in the lower end.

Transformations, like innovation, require someone to take the helm. Instead, transformations are staffed with too many managers and not enough leaders⁴. Managers don't cause change or support innovative new ways; they ensure steady and smooth operation daily. Repetition and the status quo are their zone.

The goal isn't to succeed. The goal is to maintain status and group membership. The internal, individual goal is in direct conflict to transform if that is not the desire and objective of the entire group.

The ambiguity aversion disappears completely when the fear of negative evaluation by others is removed⁵. We are willing to explore, test and fail in private. Still, there is no way to privately arrive at a better transformation strategy when the very nature of the solution has to involve other people. It will evolve slowly, as organizations do.

In the face of ambiguity, as long as you do what's expected, it's no one's fault, failure, or problem.

A stigma of failure might be at the heart of our fear of negative evaluation by others. Failure is advantageous for society because it pushes the envelope. The boom of entrepreneurship in the United States compared to Europe is attributed to a greater acceptance of initial risk in the United States⁶.

The fear of negative evaluation by others hinders innovation, but if we can change our attitudes about failure, maybe we can eliminate it.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

Genius knowledge workers share knowledge, resources, and connections to inspire creative thinking, risk-taking, and dedicated perseverance through new product offerings or new ways of doing things.

They understand that creative pursuits take time and space, and don't always come to fruition.

Geniuses don't enforce standardization prematurely; when they do, they apply standardization to the result, not the method.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

Turning the drop of a new idea into the flood of a new market still represents a wild frontier.

BUYING OR RENTING NEW IDEAS

The first challenge is coming up with new ideas. There are three choices regarding new ideas: buy, rent, or grow.

To choose to buy ideas is to grow through mergers and acquisitions or hiring employees. Renting ideas is growth through consultants and professional services. They are the same for everyone. While "everyone" may be a select elite class who can afford them, they aren't the competitive edge you can have when you grow ideas.

Buying and renting are common, and common by definition means you don't have an advantage. If innovation aims to achieve advantage, then the return on investment in these scenarios should be carefully considered.

Growing ideas is growth through experienced employees keenly tuned to customers' deep desires and core needs, who can combine that with their subject matter expertise to create a new solution.

Without the bridge, things don't line up right. Engineers create things that are fun to prove possible. Factory workers make reproducible things. Customers buy things. When the three don't line up, they don't get bought, there's a lot of waste and defects, and they do more than anyone would need.

When it introduced New Coke, Coke was not keenly tuned to customers' needs. As mentioned earlier, it was reacting to the threat Pepsi had just posed with its taste test advertisements. Innovators of the Segway and other category-creating markets fail due to imagined customers, not ones willing to pay. Growing ideas are no riskier than buying or renting, but they have a much greater upside potential.

UNFORESEEN AFFORDANCES

Introducing new subjects to learn, with a fixed timeline to know them, means some subjects disappear. Cursive writing is the latest to disappear. When you learn how to do something new, which becomes standard, it no longer serves anyone to know how to do it the old way. Does it?

Every time something new comes along, something old dies. Affordances are the term used to describe the state. Tom Wujec describes how we once used astrolabes to tell time, whereas now it's on our phones. At the time, that meant we understood the sky, directions, and mathematical concepts we no longer needed to know. As we innovate, we need to be conscious of the swaps, be good citizens with the risks, and start with wow, not marketing for real success.

Every new development creates an impact we can't foresee. We try hard to improve, but the future is fundamentally unknown. Things heralded at the time for the advancement they allowed also became banned for the destruction they caused.

As mentioned, people don't fear change – they fear loss. Innovation can have detrimental downsides when the affordances aren't clear and acceptable.

EXCESSIVE DIFFICULTY

Inside organizations, we say we want innovation and then make it hard. Do we like this?

When it comes to budgeting resources, there's never enough. You get fewer people than you said you needed, a smaller budget than you requested or a more compressed timeframe than what is realistic. How do you innovate when you are struggling to keep the lights on?

To get more, you have to prove a return on investment. How can you do that when you don't know if it will be successful? Innovation is more experimentation than validation, failure than success and more guesswork than bankability.

When people take risks and present an idea, they can be an example to everyone else of why bother. The innovator is excited and passionate, and the receiver is doubtful, questioning, and enthusiasm-draining.

Ideas that don't make it aren't clearly explained as to why they didn't cut it. Management might say something like "we didn't think it would work" or something vague that doesn't help clarify what they think would not work. Back to the drawing board with ambiguous feedback isn't a recipe for enthusiasm or success.

If an idea gets to the end, what was the reward, and what was the effort? People will watch to see if it is worth it. Often, that answer is no. Too much effort, no credit, and no reward. Besides, why reward the idea? Everyone knows that 99% of perspiration matters, and too many innovation processes ensure the maximum amount of perspiration possible.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

We get in our ways regarding innovation, but we can equally get in the way of others' progress. Society has a long track record of not being so welcoming initially before gaining traction.

1. I am not creative

As Sir Ken Robinson tells in his TED talk, children stop believing they are artists as they get educated. Tom Wujec has harder evidence that kindergarten children are more creative than adults. He presents them with the marshmallow problem.

The marshmallow problem involves building the tallest freestanding structure using dried spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string, and, on top, the marshmallow. The best problem solvers for the marshmallow problem are kindergarten children.

Being creative wanes as you age. Children have a more active imagination than adults. As you age, you develop patterns of thought that serve you well, but also restrict your creativity. You learn what is socially acceptable and normal. You know what “works”, which might solve the problem and be maladaptive.

However, people who say they aren’t creative might be referring to craft, not creativity. To execute creativity, you need the skill. That might be drawing or painting, but it could also apply to whatever you do to make a living.

2. It's not my job

If you were in the accounting department of a financial company, with all its regulations and specific ways, it would be easy to think so. However, there’s always some degree of freedom to innovate, which doesn’t refer to Enron.

Those who govern can give you all kinds of restraints, making you more creative. Necessity is the mother of invention, but constraints might be the mother of innovation.

Forget all the mandates to think outside the box; let constraints define the box and believe in the ways you already know how. It’s your craft, and it’s up to you to take it to the next level.

3. It’s too difficult to bother

It’s more acceptable to follow the pack to failure than to break out and try. It’s faster to get ahead by constantly validating a superior than to build a solid reputation of professionalism and craft. Internal policies, procedures, and processes don’t make it easy or rewarding, so why bother?

There comes a time when you can see something better, so different, yet clearly, that you are propelled to bother. Instead of letting the idea bother you, you have to get other people bothered by the notion as well.

4. I am a mushroom

Innovation requires light. Insight, hindsight and a higher-level understanding of their role in the whole attention to warranty lifecycle of the customer experience are necessary to see where a value need exists that could easily be served.

You don't get that light when you are kept in the dark.

Innovation requires the food of information. When you are fed what mushrooms eat, it’s garbage in, garbage out. Find out if this is by design or omission, as it might be easily rectifiable.

5. It’s not the right time

There’s a good pace, a yin and yang between disruption and stability, innovation and stagnation. Feel and flow with the right pace of your stakeholders, market and personal tolerance.

THE ACTIONS

Yes, you are creative, and there are opportunities for you to be innovative in your work.

MAKE THE EFFORT

Innovation is less the product of an aha moment than a deliberate process. Dedicating time, energy and resources is required for everything from understanding the market's concept of value to implementing the new product or service.

Instead, daily pressures trap us into solving only the immediate problems at hand, leaving us little time to consider how to prevent those problems.

Problems and innovation go hand in hand. Necessity is the mother of invention, and innovation can come from eliminating or avoiding problems. A problem fuels the creative mind; every situation needs time and space.

ACCELERATE DEVELOPMENT

Initial ideas are much easier to evaluate with a prototype. Rapid prototyping methods produce something for you and your potential customers to assess.

Scope creep is a constant challenge with innovations. One more button, another function, or more features become possible and exciting throughout development. Still, the scope must freeze at some point, and all these excellent additions become part of the next model.

Pre-typing can help stop this, like Jeff Hawkins did when the first Palm Pilot was under development. A simple block of wood functioned as a stand-in for the device. When engineers wanted to add something, he would pull it out and ask where it would go. A prototype is a later version.

Hawkins used that block of wood as if it were functional, pulling it out of his pocket just as you see people do today. Pretend use will expose genuine user stories faster than sitting in a conference room dreaming about how people might engage. What buttons and menus are needed? Pretending can accelerate development as it provides a concrete way to resolve conflicts, test new ideas, and point out voids of lack.

A prototype isn't functional; it's fake. Development doesn't have to be long and involved. Fake it, fail faster and find that gem.

LEARN WIDELY

Innovators marry what's needed and wanted in the world with what is possible. If they don't know what is possible, they don't have the materials to innovate.

A carpenter views wood as his material, a welder metal, and an artist paint. Innovators cannot stay within one domain of technology, process, or material; they need broad knowledge about what's possible and upcoming.

Genius innovators like Leonardo da Vinci, Steve Jobs, and Ben Franklin are interested in and knowledgeable about diverse fields. They are also in the scene—a part of society. This gives them insight into the pulse of needs, wants, and other great minds. They network and know people who can add fresh insight or technological information.

An insatiable curiosity feeds innovative minds and keeps them continually learning.

You've learned why it's essential to know you are creative and have the opportunity to do so in your role, including the three steps you can take now to make it happen.

5. UNLEASH TALENT

Find and develop unique significance

There's a value in employees that everyone wastes. It's crushing to be that employee, mentally and physically. If you are stressed, exhausted, drained or frustrated, that's you. Disengagement is far too prevalent and costly.

Bringing out the best of yourself in your work is far too rare. Great managers can help, but they, too, are rare.

HOW WE FAIL

Managers are only human. We do our best based on what we know and have experienced and what's expected of us.

Sometimes, being a great manager isn't valued as part of a job description for someone with direct reports; that behaviour gets learned and passed on. Culturally, the organization values hands, not heads. Leaders are heroes, and direct reports are there to do as their Director directs them. It's a hierarchy, a traditional corporate structure.

THE THEORY

Every one of us seeks uniqueness to some degree. Some people have a naturally high need for uniqueness, while others tend to want to blend in. Everyone has their level of discomfort in the sequential beer ordering game.

Dan Ariely and Jonathan Levav found that a need for individuality emerges when we order a beer publicly. We can't order the same thing when someone else has already ordered a beer. It's as if they've claimed it, and we must find a new one or risk being branded a follower.

Progress wouldn't happen without uniqueness. We are back in the cave. When everyone conforms, nothing new emerges. New ideas might happen, but conformity ensures you toe the line.

Those who need uniqueness more are usually extroverted, social, and optimistic about life. They are also more satisfied, perhaps because they care less about other people's opinions.⁷

Going against your nature is sure to court stress⁸. When we choose what others want us to do, we risk burnout. Burnout is ultimately a mismatch between a job and the person⁹.

We stay in jobs where we lack the control we need, do things against our principles because that's how they want it done, and try to get by without the resources we need. All of these lead to burnout.

Stress lowers people's quality of life, and health costs significantly impact society. How does management need to change as the standard workplace culture pivots from focusing on weaknesses to individualized career development?

WHY

Using strengths is fun, easy and insightful. It results in higher productivity, meaningful insights, and fewer days absent. Engaged employees who engage customers can create consumer loyalty.

If you are stressed, exhausted, drained or frustrated, you might not be using your strengths, or worse, depending on your weaknesses. You feel crushed when your skills are wasted, like they don't matter. That exhaustion that becomes depression becomes a constant numbness in your day.

When we are in a mental state of not using our strengths, we turn to our vices. Our willpower is depleted from the day, and we overeat, watch TV, and shop online. These three common and destructive habits are affecting the economy because of the sheer size of the problem.

Eight in ten aren't using their strengths at work. Obesity has been declared an epidemic. Rare is the individual who isn't living pay to pay. The cost of workplace stress in the United States alone is about \$200 billion annually and 120,000 deaths. Yet another type of workplace stress isn't reflected in these numbers.

Every workplace has a degree of ethics. I've yet to see a workplace that is 100% moral. We all individually have our ethics setpoints as well. Conflict between what we value and what goes on in our workplaces creates a separate kind of stress, moral stress, as Robert Cialdini calls it.

Cialdini, the noted researcher and author on influence and persuasion, describes three strikes workplaces take when they are less than ethical. The first is the cost of stress on their employees. The second is turnover, which results when those employees leave because they do. It's this stress that pushes them to leave. The other emphasis of work might exist no matter where we go, but ethical people believe there are ethical alternatives to employment to be found, and they are right. Strike three is employee fraud and malfeasance. Unethical treatment can be paid back. Cialdini found that individuals comfortable enough with cheating to want to stay in a dishonest work unit were especially willing to cheat the members of that unit.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

One executive remarked that he didn't know why his employees left their brains at home when they came to work. Since the manufacturing age, employees have been doing this and are expected to do it. Henry Ford was known to have lamented, "Why is it every time I ask for a pair of hands they come with a brain attached?"

With the age of automation, Toyota quickly emerged as a leader in the transition. While Toyota used operational excellence as a strategic weapon, they used humans to program the machines, not to be them.

By 1987, underutilized creativity was identified as a waste in Lean Manufacturing. If you aren't getting a worker's input and engagement, you aren't improving as you could be. They actively create a culture of engagement and the ability to contribute.

Elon Musk's Tesla plant demonstrates the car manufacturing plant of today. Robots perform work where quality, precision, and speed matter. A robot can be programmed with the best of many passes, allowing for a level of excellence no human could produce, let alone all day long, like the machine will for every one of the pre-ordered cars.

With the age of technology, the definition of advantageous is shifting again. You don't need hands so much as ideas. You don't need their presence so much as their ability to collaborate with you - the tools and technology allow distance to diminish immediately. These days, you need broad and diverse networks where people are treated equally and interdependently.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

Talent is a manner of process, not endowment or adaptation. Genius organizations do not rely on gut instinct and charisma, but have reliable practices such as role descriptions, goal setting, and performance feedback to standardize the ability to grow others.

When people get to use their strengths, they are happier and healthier. We should use technology to enhance and create the perfection human beings can't achieve, but we should use humans for their creativity, compassion, and curiosity to accomplish what technology can't. Hire for strengths and fit, and make every employee the domain owner.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

There's no one correct answer for what makes a great boss, and everyone has to do it in their own, authentic ways.

ILLUSION OF EFFICIENCY

One of the contrary behaviours is telling people what to do. This may take the form of micromanaging, where close monitoring and instruction virtually remove all freedoms. Standards might exist, with strict enforcement and detection.

One of the principles of Lean is standardization. When taken at face value, standards become constrictive. Lean views standards as the way we can all do it the best today and a baseline for tomorrow. They see it as a platform, and the view from the top keeps getting better.

When employees are new, untrained, or otherwise unprepared, it might look like the fastest way to get results. Instead, fix the problems of recruiting, hiring, and onboarding, and you won't have to jump in and micromanage. Effectiveness is better than efficiency, because quality lasts and speed evaporates.

COMFORT OF DISENGAGEMENT

Not all employees desire engagement at work. They might have a busy life outside of work and need a predictable monotony to make it. When a team is involved in a decision, who is accountable?

Western students are educated to repeat the expert's voice and actions; why would they do any differently when they graduate?

Doing what you are told gives you an excuse to disengage and follow orders, but it also gives you that as an excuse. When a moment occurs demanding something different, the follower may only act to get out of the way.

EXPLOITATION OF AMBIGUITY

What do you trust when you can't see or measure the work? When the idea of standardized work was misapplied, managers had to find alternative approaches.

Smoke and mirrors are used to craft ambiguity to look in your favour. You might call it spin, but sometimes it's harder to spot. When people's livelihoods are at stake at work, you can't guess what they might do.

Everyone with a social media account uses perception management. We all put on "as-if," if people try to rely on that image, they will be in for a reality check. This knowledge and how it all goes around create a mistrust culture.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Through your own experience and what others wanted you to do, you have forgotten how to unleash your talent, and maybe even that it's there.

1. I have to go along

Intimidation is just one leash that pushes people into roles and behaviours that aren't right or suited. It can be downright organizational bullying. The Challenger engineers who asked NASA to delay the launch were asked, "Are you trying to interfere with my schedule?"

When we say that people need to be able to play to their strengths, we mean that just having it and being asked to use it isn't enough. It means we must listen when they say things we don't want to hear.

Conditions must exist to enable talent. Introverts will have a hard time injecting during meetings, and extroverts will have a hard time if you ask them to sit alone and document their knowledge or opinion. Too much employee potential is lost by people thinking they have to adapt themselves to go along with things that aren't going to let them perform at their best.

2. I have to fix my weaknesses

You will have to augment specific weaknesses, depending on your ambitions.

If one of your weaknesses is managing people and you have ambitions to go to the top, you must learn to do your best while minimizing your involvement. Throughout middle management, there should be the ability to determine the salary and rank of a manager by making contributions equal to those of one's colleagues and team.

Some weaknesses can be entirely avoided for the duration of one's career. When that's a possibility, please take it.

Fixing weaknesses takes a lot of effort and will never catapult you into high-class performance. Instead, take a strength that manifests as a weakness, change your perspective, and then build that strength.

3. Asking for help is a weakness

For some individuals, their strengths naturally lend themselves to being strong on teams, while for others, their strengths shine in their own company. Either way, their preference will reveal their comfort zone. The goal is knowing when to force what doesn't come naturally, whether working alone or involving others.

Luckily for introverts, that's true for some types of work. However, most people cannot stand social isolation. The default mistake is the contrary, including others and using teams when just one person should take full accountability.

These changes occur in overcrowded environments. People turn inward, not helping or interfering with each other. However, asking for help will always be a strength.

4. I will get stuck in dependence

Talent needs to grow and develop, but at times can stagnate.

Non-compete clauses can keep a pivotal employee from leaving, but also destroy the motivation that created and honed that intellectual property. In one *Suits* episode, we see someone get stuck out of a legal agreement and another stuck out of the necessity to keep a secret, and neither is happy with their contracts or circumstances.

The idea of unleashing talent is to ensure that glass ceilings are smashed, barriers are broken, and no one is held back from making their most significant contributions to our world.

5. I am on my way out

While it's excellent advice to hire slowly and fire fast, we often need someone immediately, have inherent borderline employees, and must follow appropriate and fair due process.

As an employee, similar factors can create a lag between unleashing our talent and giving up trying to unleash it. Recruitment is a slow process; it should not be done slowly. We aren't trying to learn as much as we can about each other over time, but rather waiting for the right people to get coordinated.

Unleashing talent is rarely possible without the willing help of others, and that willingness needs to exist on both sides.

THE ACTIONS

When it comes to yourself, your direct reports and the people around you, it's time to shed a little conformity and embrace what makes us unique.

PRIORITIZE FIT

Regarding culture, one person's fit is another person's misery. An introvert will prefer quiet individual pursuits and dread day-long group sessions, but an extrovert in that place would choose the opposite.

Psychologists use a model of five personality traits that define the spectrums of self-identified behaviour, such as extroversion.

Going against your grain of personality will take its toll. Suppressing your natural urges and conforming to the group's expectations causes stress and emotional pain. Being inauthentic hurts.

On the other hand, find a career that matches your personality, and you will earn more. Researchers used data from 8,458 employed individuals, their actual personality traits and personality demands on their earnings. For individuals who held jobs that matched their personality, the difference was more than their annual salary¹⁰.

Managers hire for fit and, in doing so, also hire for delegation. They hire motivated, competent individuals and trust them to do the work well. Their role is coaching, developing, and facilitating the work of others.

Managers contribute by navigating the organization, whereas individual contributors navigate issues, problems, and opportunities. The difference is in the mode of contribution, not in the hierarchy.

QUESTION INTENTION

When it comes to others, the tendency is to judge them by what they do rather than what they didn't do but could have, and to judge others by their actions and results instead of the intention behind the action.

Judging ourselves is comparatively easy – we know what we were trying to do when we did something. When Mother Nature intervenes and something bad happens, we understand and forgive ourselves. We don't always see the intervention of random forces for others, but they are there. If we don't see the luck, we assume they are gifted, intelligent, or deserving. We are more apt to notice the luck when it happens to us.

It's human nature to sort people into friend or foe. Our brain circuitry does this for us; however, consciousness has the power to overrule automatic thinking.

Be on the lookout for automatic judgment about what someone does or what happens to them. Before the gavel falls, put yourself in that person's shoes. What might have been the intention, and where might that have been lost? As you know, a lot can happen between intention and implementation.

ENDLESSLY IMPROVE

Personal transformation is a monumental task, but taking it briefly makes it probable and almost assured.

The path of improvement is one of trial and error, until success is scored. Repeating that success is the next stage, until the behaviour is ingrained.

Choking happens under pressure because we revert to basics. We repeat the lessons we knew before we were awesome naturals, and then we are surprised when our performance is similar to when we were first learning.

The thing about change is that it is constant. You aren't the same person you will be next year; you assume you will be, and you will discover that you are not next year. Some of those changes will require you to support a higher need. Some you will choose, and many will happen without notice or fanfare.

Geniuses know they will change that much and control some of those changes. They understand the cycle of change. A mindset of forgiveness and flexibility rules at the start of any change and doesn't end until perseverance has achieved a sustained level of confidence. Self-awareness and comfort with the cycle of change keep geniuses improving.

6. STRENGTHEN TEAMS

Link talent and collaborate effectively.

We think two heads are better than one, yet we commonly see and even experience times when the team's output is worse than any individual member could have done alone.

We know that contributions are essential. We are hired for our experience and then told what to do. Please keep your opinion at home. If you'd like to criticize, there's the door and an invitation to take it.

HOW WE FAIL

We use teams when we don't need them, set them up for failure and wonder what went wrong. When are teams the best option, and how can we collaborate effectively? We must figure this out, as our problems are only getting more complex.

When talent is unleashed and individuals are set up for success with the opportunity and ability to use their strengths, they will still need to come together to solve broad and profound problems.

THE THEORY

Teams are a specific organization of a group of people such that they are interdependent.

We use the label "team" whenever individuals join in joint action. Still, this generality misses the nuances that elevate this collection to a higher status. Teams depend on each other and are oriented toward the same objective or against a common side.

Teams are not a group. Groups do not depend on each other. Reporting to the same manager does not define a team, even if they share their manager's objectives. Committees depend on each other, but only as democracy demands, not the logic of the solution.

After eliminating the noise of groups, committees, and other such "non-teams," there seem to be few bright teams in the organizational chandelier. Bright teams hold such promise that Itay Adams secured \$2 million in seed funding based not on a product but on his team.

Stronger teams result from deliberate decision-making about membership, expected results, and setting up the team to achieve those goals.

WHY

Teams, like organizations, are mini-replicas of the agricultural community design.

As hunter-gatherers, researchers at the University of Oxford have found that equality is the norm in contemporary tribes. Men and women have equal influence on their community membership and where they live.

In equal societies, networks are spread farther. A further network has advantages for spreading innovation and for being innovative. More ideas get circulated, more problems are shared, and more solutions are generated.

The researchers argue that inequality only emerged with agriculture and the ability to accumulate resources.

We started farming as humans realized hunting was much easier when you could make the herd come to you—in this agricultural age, having a family as neighbours became advantageous. Hearing about the novel invention on the other coast wasn't as beneficial as having your brother and his five kids with helping hands across the street—even better, if those kids were all strong boys.

The mindset created in agriculture carried over into early manufacturing, when people were akin to machines. Women only gained a foothold in the workforce when the men went to war.

Best practices for leading teams or participating in them have remained relatively stable despite Hackman's call to action almost twenty years ago. Team-specific training doesn't exist in most organizations, and strong employees hired in an isolated context are left to figure it out for themselves.

Dysfunctional teams are costly, and people on dysfunctional teams suffer. The wrong people getting ahead push the right people out the door. Clarify expected practices and team norms. Value the differences, don't evaluate the differences.

WHY IT'S UNCOMMON

We use teams when we don't need them, set them up for failure and wonder what went wrong.

Our brains have evolved for a world in which we lived in small groups. You needed that group to live. No one could survive on their own. In caveman days, rejection equalled death. Any herd animal knows the safest place to be is in the pack's center, while those at the periphery are at most risk.

Therefore, we have internal unconscious mechanisms that prevent us from getting rejected. You've already read about self-verification, where we conform to our expectations. We are built to conform to the group and others' expectations, which is where our expectations originate.

Our ability to conform gives us automatic skills in getting along with others. We know how to tell the story the audience wants to hear. We keep the raw, unwelcome truth to ourselves. Our relationships stay protected, no matter the uncertain, but inevitable, price. Groupthink results when many minds think the same, even when they wouldn't think that way on their own.

In the famous Asch experiments, subjects were asked to answer simple questions with obvious answers. They did so in the presence of others and after others had responded.

When the others all gave the same, but the wrong answer, the subject followed suit an alarming 38 percent of the time. Throughout 12 trials, 3 out of 4 participants yielded to the majority at least once.

It's important to know, though, just how ingrained conformity is.

After they'd changed their answers, subjects estimated they had changed their answers by only a small fraction of the amount they had. Brain scans now reveal that when people conform to group expectations, they change their minds, not just go along for show¹¹.

As Clifford Nass and his team discovered, we even lie to protect a laptop's feelings. We expect technology to behave like a person, but we also treat it as if it were one.

The farther in the future, the more likely we are to go along with the group¹², which might be why all projects seem to start rosy, but the closer it gets to launch day, the more people change their minds.

Progress happens when one person defies the status quo and brings everyone along, so how does that happen? To break through, the presence of another person who disagrees with the group is all you need. Regarding equality, one is a loner, two is an anomaly, but three starts a movement.

Instead, we staff our teams with like-minded people, treat conflict as a productivity killer, and use the term "we" to avoid personal accountability.

WHAT GENIUSES DO

When talent is unleashed and individuals are set up for success with the opportunity and ability to use their strengths, they will still need to come together to solve complex problems.

Geniuses are highly tuned into when an individual is needed and when a team is the better option.

They evaluate and value differences without judging them. They define membership, allot resources, and set teams up for success. They know well-functioning teams happen by design, and they can't do it themselves.

THE LEADING-EDGE CHALLENGES

Watching people come together in a way that produces synergies is a marvel, but the magic ingredient remains elusive.

COMPLIANCE WITH POPULARITY

As human beings, we are oriented socially instead of logically. This predisposition leads to relationship-protecting biases.

If there's a reliable way to protect relationships, it's when we pick what's popular.

We jump on the bandwagon and cave to social pressure. It's conformity, but how does it happen?

Familiar-minded people coming together will result in solidification and a move toward a more extreme point¹³. As the group's opinion becomes clear, group members become more reluctant to bring up items of contradictory information. Instead, only additional supporting information comes to light.

In 1974, Noelle-Neumann postulated the spiral of silence theory. Our willingness to express our opinions openly depends on how we perceive the public. If we don't express our views, we hope others assume compliance.

Albert Einstein said, "If A is a success in life, then $A=x+y+z$. Work is x, y is play, and z is keeping your mouth shut."

During the O.J. Simpson trial, reporters triggered this effect. When minority (black) reporters interviewed majority (white) members, they were significantly more willing to share their opinions than in the reverse situation¹⁴.

Herding behaviour happens when we look to our peers to figure out what to do instead of independently seeking information and making an informed decision. We act like someone else did the analysis and can copy their answer.

When we unthinkingly follow, bubbles form and markets crash. The housing bubble happened because few looked into what a subprime mortgage meant.

DILUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Groupthink occurs when popularity itself gives an idea weight. To break groupthink, simply calling them "people in a group" instead of "a group of people" liberates people to be just as smart as they would be on their own¹⁵.

Marketers use social proof to project trustworthiness and make you feel like you are being left out. If everyone else says it's a good idea, that's enough evidence for many people to follow.

An orientation that protects relationships might seem best for the community, but it also makes everyone believe someone else will take action when no one will. The bystander effect is the tendency for the presence of other people to absolve us of responsibility.

Introductory psychology textbooks eternalize the headline announcing the murder of Kitty Genovese. "37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police. Apathy at Stabbing of Queens Woman Shocks Inspector". Her attack lasted more than half an hour, and no one intervened¹⁶.

This story, published in 1980, founded the idea of the bystander effect, which was repeated in laboratory experiments 1964. If other people are available to help, we don't.

When smoke enters the room we are sitting in, the effect of other people induces passivity. Researchers found that we report it 75 percent of the time when alone. With three others, only 38 percent of the time. If those others don't seem to share our concern regarding the smoke, reporting drops to 10 percent¹⁷.

Real or imagined persons induce the effect. Participants primed with the presence of groups showed greater affiliation to words such as "unaccountable." Even when the others cannot possibly help, researchers observed the dilution of responsibility¹⁸.

In teams, there is a need to create individual and personal accountability deliberately.

SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

We are happy to have rules, white coats and bureaucracy to follow.

Centralia, Pennsylvania, is still burning after over 50 years, the town that was. While many factors could have prevented it from starting or spreading, bureaucracy prevented swift resolution. They adhered to the standard three-bid process while procuring contracts to do the necessary work. The competitive bid process took three precious months while the fire spread. Sometimes, going rogue is the right move.

Unwieldy processes and over-governance are kept in place and followed when rationality calls for rebellion. We say “they” instead of finding out the names of the people who have the accountability and ability to navigate change.

In 1961, Stanley Milgram demonstrated our willingness to give up power in his search to understand how ordinary Germans could have done such things. Milgram found that healthy, well-adjusted people were willing to inflict massive, even deadly, electric shocks.

Participants had to administer a memory test to an actor on the other side of the wall. When the answers were wrong, a person in a white coat would tell the participant to deliver a shock. For each incorrect answer, the dial went up 15 volts. The end of the dial was labeled “XXX.” At the instruction of the researcher in the white coat, participants turned the dial right up to the end.

This person in a white coat was simply a “teacher,” this was merely an experiment with nothing on the line.

The results were not welcomed. Some explained Milgram’s results as something only Yale students would do. By 1974, he replicated the results with the broader American public in 18 variations.

He found that breaking authority requires seeing the effect, having two other people with you, personally forcing someone to do it, or watching authority break down, such as watching an argument between two authority figures.

Another insight from Milgram’s experiment came later. When subjects objected but were told, “You must go on, you have no choice,” experiments terminated. Just priming a subject with “choice” may have helped them realize they had one.

Bullies can use their opinions in compelling ways. When leaders state an opinion, they challenge subordinates with an unconscious struggle of acceptance. Agree, and you know you are golden. Disagree, and do it carefully.

Some leaders seek authority to feel the submission of others, falsely thinking of it as power. Real power is an engaged army. Leaders speak last and cheer when they hear, “I don’t know, but let’s find out.”

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Our historical experiences working with others have created some legacy thinking about teams.

1. I don’t need others

Between people objecting that they need others around them or objecting to being assigned to a team, there is a balance between what work is individual and what work is teamwork.

Personal accountability is on the line, and it only matters because of why we work in the first place—for credit. We want to ensure we get the raise we deserve and the praise we anticipated. As mentioned earlier, asking for help will always be a strength.

2. Working with others is killing me

Relationships are complex, and we don't always get to choose our colleagues. Like family, they can be people you have no common ground with. They have different values, communication styles, and personalities. That's the fault of a hiring manager who didn't know what they were doing, but you are stuck with it.

I used to think there were two choices: quit or stay. Use your newfound conflict to identify the values you may not have realized were there and start your search for a better fit. Stay and go through the personal development waiting for you, like what family forces on us. However, someone offered me a third option when I was on this threshold.

Quit and stay. Yes, this advice came from human resources. They suggested disengagement as an alternative. If you take this alternative, use your energy toward a long-term exit plan because that is truly what it is.

3. The team is in place instead of the right person

You've realized you have a task best suited for an individual, but you don't have someone competent to complete it. It goes like this: You need a high jumper, but no such person exists. Instead, a team of four people is created. They stand on each other's shoulders so the one on top can make it over the bar, but only that one does. It has a success rate of 25%.

A failure before the start, in most cases, but in some, 25% is better than nothing. How much excellence do you need? If it's 100%, you better get recruiting.

4. I have to make do with what I have

As a project manager, I never had any control over who was on my team. Personalities were random and wrong, values conflicted, and agendas were personal. That's why I had a job: to create the cohesion the right team would have had on their own.

You don't have a team. That's the first reality. Don't expect people to help each other and collaborate. Everything that should happen because they are tied into mutual success doesn't happen because they aren't. Everyone defines success differently, and it's your job to be the negotiator, influencer, mediator, and everything else required, possibly even parenting skills.

When you do get a chance to lead a team, these skills will come in handy, but won't be required nearly at the level you are building them now. Think of this time as rapid leadership training, not team leading.

5. I have to keep the peace

Peace is a wonderful goal, but only pursuing it is a worthy goal. Peace in itself as a goal squashes conflict. You need conflict to grow. Conflict will happen if there is diversity, and without diversity, why are you bothering?

A team's goals should be growth, learning, and support, but not maintaining peace. It should be a safe place where people can change their minds in a moment, be vulnerable in exposing their ideas, and be assured that personal attacks will be dealt with swiftly and severely.

THE ACTIONS

We don't always get to pick who we work with, but when you get to decide, make the most of your opportunity to assure success.

RECRUIT MEMBERSHIP

When is it essential to get the best result possible, and when is it necessary for the result to reflect the equal and balanced contribution of the members? Unleash talent for the former, and strengthen teams for the latter.

The objective of the investigation into the Challenger disaster was to get the best result possible. It had nothing to do with ensuring the equality and independence of the appointed people. You can also expect that different parties might have individual interests to protect. In comes Richard Feynman, without bias. As his behaviour is frowned upon by other appointed representatives and he runs into conflicts with the commissioner, he also arrives at the truth. What might look like a team to the untrained eye is individual talent at work.

Contrast a retrospective analysis such as that with the business situations played out on *The Apprentice*. Teams are given a complex problem, appointed a leader and must align and co-operate to accomplish the task. No one person can do this alone. These are the situations in which we want to use a team. If there is no need for interdependence, there is no team.

Starting with the knowledge of the type of work to be accomplished, genius knowledge workers first determine if interdependency is involved. If so, you need the right experts with the right personalities. If not, you need the right experts. When the work is that of a team, personality makes all the difference for collaboration.

ANCHOR AUTHORITY

At Google, Eric Schmidt exemplifies team leadership. Larry Page and Sergey Brin promised their venture capitalists that they would hire an experienced CEO once the company began to take off. After two years of searching, they insisted they could scale Google themselves. Then they met Eric Schmidt.

In 2001, Schmidt became Google's CEO. He stepped down in 2018 after 17 years of successfully balancing providing leadership expertise without levelling authority over the founders' brilliance. He determined early on that exercising authority over Page and Brin would lead to disaster.

Notably, he didn't put his mark on the company, but valued the culture already created. "It would have been foolish of me to try to change them much, because it wouldn't have worked, and it would've been bad. It's a given that this is how the company works now. If you changed it, you'd lose all its great things." Schmidt operates in support, but doesn't overstep.

With teamwork, authority is often granted at the onset, but when things get concerning for the hierarchy or sponsors, they tend to step in and take over for the crisis, only to hand things back again when the stickiness has passed. Teams need clear and consistent authority, while being recognized for the team's contribution as a whole. Authority that vacillates will only erode the team's performance over time.

EMBED GROWTH

Teamwork isn't just about the work's product; it's about the personal growth of the individual team members. Some individuals' strengths will naturally lend themselves to being effective team members. For others, these skills will not come as easily.

People need skills when working with others that they don't require when working alone. Visual thinkers don't have to learn how to describe their thoughts, people-pleasers don't have to learn how to be assertive, and closed thinkers don't have to absorb new ideas. Teams put us in situations and with people that help us grow.

Geniuses approach teamwork with the perspective of continually learning. They learn more about themselves, their colleagues, and their coworkers while gaining a higher-level perspective. Interdependency, where talent relies on other skills, is an experience everyone should be able to say was a part of their day. Everyone has a different appetite for feedback and growth—make sure you meet your needs while respecting our differences.

You've learned many theories about teams here, when you should use them, and when you shouldn't, and three ways to improve yours. If you've always thought the world could be better, welcome to Team Let's Get It Done.

EXCELLENCE, IN NEVER-ENDING PURSUIT

It's progress, six sustainable steps at a time. What is automatic today will become standard tomorrow, and one day, just like cars, there will be no more need for a driver. Driving will become a sport instead of a necessity.

Now that you know how, it's time to pick the weakest link in your systems, according to whatever priority system urges you to act. If there's a list, keep it. Pick the worst, and when you are done, start with the second one.

If you encounter a new one before you've completed the one you are currently focused on, it will remain on the list until the next time you pick a priority.

A crisis can pause the action and make you re-focus for a while, but now you know how to stop running from one crisis to another. Over time, you go from having a few minutes to focus on this project, to having a few hours, to days, weeks and beyond.

It is up to you how you spend all that time you are bound to find. I hope I've given you some helpful ideas.

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