

The Problem

I could see the frustration in her face, and I could hear it in her voice. As I sat there listening to Lina describe her current level of satisfaction with her life, her job and her success, it was glaringly apparent that she was tired, frustrated and just plain spent from working harder than she thought she should have to, only to achieve less than she wanted to. She didn't feel her current job was allowing her to reach her full potential.

Lina and I were sitting in a coffee bar in downtown Zurich, Switzerland where earlier that day I had given a lecture to a group of executives and entrepreneurs on the key drivers of individual performance and excellence. At the end of the lecture I asked the simple question, "How many of you feel satisfied with your current level of personal performance and believe that your role allows you to reach your fullest potential?" The show of hands throughout the room might have represented half of the attendees at best—a room containing over 300 individuals. And there I stood, yet again, staring out into a room full of people with both hands on their laps, looking around somewhat sheepishly, not very excited about their inability to raise their hands up high.

I say “yet again” because this wasn’t the first time I had asked this question. I’ve asked it all over the world, and the response is pretty much the same no matter where I go—from Istanbul to Sydney, New York to Hong Kong, Johannesburg to Zurich. And every time I’ve asked that relatively simple question (a question one would hope is not asking too much), at best 50% of the crowd raises their hands while the rest remain timidly still, indicating more to themselves than anyone else that when they really think about it, they do not feel truly fulfilled in their work or fully satisfied with their own performance and success.

In talking more closely with many of these people, I find that they:

- Feel frustrated and unfulfilled;
- Feel that they put in more effort than they get out in results;
- Feel they have lots of unrealized potential;
- Are dissatisfied with their performance and success; and
- Know they can be happier and more passionate.

Simply put, they don’t feel their current roles allow them to maximize their full potential.

Perhaps even scarier than the percentages is the realization of whom I am talking to in these presentations. I typically present only to executives and entrepreneurs, so if the leaders of the world’s organizations aren’t fully satisfied and passionate about what they do, what does that mean for the organizations and people they lead?

~ I feel like I put in more than I get out. ~

For Lina, the vice president of Human Resources at a mid-sized retail company, one of the most telling indicators of her lack of fulfillment and satisfaction came in her acknowledgment that more weeks than not, she looked forward to the weekends but dreaded Mondays. Lina had a first-class case of the “golden handcuffs.” As the primary breadwinner for her family, and with three young children at home and a husband out of work, she needed the financial rewards her

job provided. Unfortunately those were some of the only rewards it provided. Outside of providing her with the money she needed and some dear friends, Lina's job left her constantly battling to achieve the results and success she wanted. In her own words, she didn't feel that her job allowed her to be "true" to herself. This feeling of being "untrue," it turns out, is a constant theme among far too many unhappy people around the world.

Lina was cuffed to a job that she couldn't afford to leave, financially, but couldn't afford to stay in emotionally either. As a result, her dissatisfaction was up and her passion and results were down—way down.

Lina isn't alone. In my work as a business consultant and coach, I have met too many people who feel unfulfilled in their roles and are frustrated with the lack of performance and success they achieve. All too often I meet people who work to live instead of the other way around. I'm not alone in these observations.

A recent Harris poll¹ of 23,000 individuals revealed that only half were satisfied with the work they had accomplished by the end of the week. It's so common for people not to be fully in love with what they do that we've even developed cliché's like: Mental Health Days, the Monday morning blues, Hump day and TGIF.

How many times have you heard someone make the following kind of statement:

- "I can't wait for retirement";
- "Tell me again why I'm here";
- "I never seem to get ahead";
- "I'm just going through the paces, I'm bored"; or
- "Something's missing"?

How many times have you made a similar statement? How fulfilled are you in your current role? Do you feel like you are free to use all of your natural talents and potential in the work you do every day? If you found yourself in one of my lectures, would you raise your hand?

¹ For more information about the Harris Poll, visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

Over the past ten years, I've seen so many people suffering from the same kinds of issues that eventually I gave it a name. Now I just refer to it as *The Problem*. The formal definition of The Problem is “a growing trend of people who feel unfulfilled in their roles and dissatisfied and frustrated with results or success.”

Regardless of the level of performance, any individual who feels unable to improve for long enough will start to become uninspired, impassionate and dissatisfied with their performance. They will eventually begin to suffer from The Problem.

Today, too many people are suffering from The Problem. And, given the increasing frequency and globalization of this problem, I decided to try to find out what was behind it in the first place. I wanted to better understand the differences between those who did and did not suffer from The Problem. Why did some, despite great effort, constantly struggle to achieve moderate levels of performance and success, while others achieved significantly more success much more frequently and with less effort and frustration?

I knew I had to find some answers. Otherwise, more Linas of the world would be dreading Mondays, and more people would be leaving their hands on their laps and their true potential unrealized.

And so was born the Genius Project.

~ The Problem is an epidemic of people who feel frustrated and dissatisfied with their own performance and success. ~

R Chapter 1 Review

- “The Problem” is an epidemic of people that feel unfulfilled, dissatisfied and frustrated with their performance.

CG Chapter 1 Gut Check

How fulfilled are you? Many times people have a passionate reason for getting into a line of work, but then something happens. Things get added. You take on new roles and new responsibilities, and before you know it you are off course. These new additions are like tiny steps, each one taking them just a little bit further away from their original objective. Because these steps are so tiny, and because they are often driven by positive desires, they are easy to miss. But they add up, and the next thing you know you are way off course. In the military, we had a term for getting off-course like this. We called it “Mission Creep.”

Have you gotten off course? Has your original objective grown into something you don’t recognize or like anymore? When you stop to look up, are you where you thought you would be, or wanted to be, five years ago?

How far have you crept from where you intended to be? (circle one)

Very far away 1 2 3 4 5 *Right where I want to be*

To help you determine how significant The Problem may or may not be for you, please go online now and take the first Genius Action Step. If you haven’t set up your account, please do that first, then you can complete this short exercise to help you assess objectively just how satisfied you are with your own level of performance and how fulfilled you feel in your roles.



Genius Action Step 1: Please log into your WYG Online workbook and complete the Problem Pre-Assessment.

"The Problem" Self-assessment results

Now that you have completed Genius Action Step #1, let's go over what the results mean. This self-assessment has eight categories designed to help create a comprehensive overview of your level of satisfaction in life. Some of the categories covered are things we have not yet discussed, but it's good that we gather them all at the same time, up front, to get the most objective and unbiased opinion possible. Those categories are:

- Self-awareness—How aware are you of your talents and non-talents?
- Authenticity—How true to those talents are you in your roles and work?
- Level of Performance—At what level do you feel you are performing?
- Self-Direction—How clear is your vision for where you want to go?
- Role Awareness—How well do you understand your roles in life?
- Self-Belief—How much belief do you have in your ability to succeed?
- Effort/Ease—How much effort do you have to put in to get results?
- Levels of Satisfaction—How satisfied are you with your overall success?

Your assessment gives you an overall score for each category. If you scored less than four (4) on the overall score then The Problem is a significant one for you, and the lessons in this book will be significant for you. If you scored less than four in any single category, then that category should become a primary focus in the exercises to come. To that end, I recommend that you print a copy of this self-assessment out so you can refer back to it from time to time throughout the rest of this book.

Simply put, the lower you scored on the Problem Pre-Assessment, the more you probably need this book.

Note: If you know someone whom you think is also suffering from The Problem, you can invite him or her to take the same self-assessment for free. Check out the “share with a friend” button online.