

The Answer—Two Directions In Life

What Geniuses Do

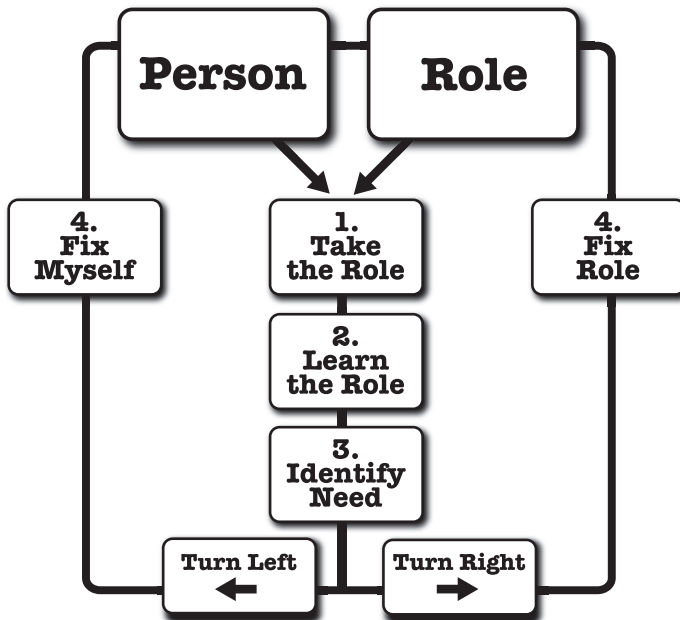
Geniuses don't make that simple mistake. They don't spend their lives trying to become the A+ student in that difficult class I mentioned in the introduction. They understand they are who they are, so instead of wasting energy trying to become something they are not, they invest it in trying to better apply the natural talents they already possess. In a sense, they stop trying to put in what God left out and instead work with what He put in. This frees up a lot of extra energy. Imagine how much more successful you would be if 100% of your energy was directed toward using your natural talents more effectively.

To illustrate the different perspective that the most successful take, here's a simple visual diagram.

Below are the four universal steps that everyone goes through in any role:

- Step 1—The person accepts a job/role.
- Step 2—They get to know the role better and figure out what it really takes to be successful in it.

- Step 3—Inevitably, they identify gaps between what the job requires and what they can provide (e.g. talents, knowledge, skills, etc.).
- Step 4—They attempt to close the gaps between what is needed and what they possess.



Step #4 is where the crucial difference lies between top performers and the rest. Less successful people mistakenly assume that they *can* develop natural thinking talents, so they focus on changing themselves by attempting to develop the natural talents the role requires. They mistakenly assume that with enough hard work and intelligence they can develop everything they need, so they set off trying to fix themselves. In other words, they *turn left* and focus on changing themselves while the job remains the same.

Geniuses, however, do the exact opposite. First, they appreciate the differences between talents and skills, so they don't spend their time trying to develop new natural talents. Second, they don't assume

that the role is fixed either. Because of this, instead of focusing on changing themselves, they focus on changing the role.

In the diagram above, Geniuses *turn right* and focus on how to change the role so it doesn't depend on talents they don't already possess. They ensure their success depends on their talents, not their non-talents.

This is not to say that geniuses never turn left to focus on changing themselves. To develop new knowledge or skills, Geniuses absolutely turn left, but they understand that they are developing new skills—not new natural thinking talents.

If they need to acquire new knowledge or experience, Geniuses definitely do. But if the job calls for natural talents that they don't already possess, they either find another way to do that job, or they find another job. Geniuses may identify weaknesses between what they possess and what the role requires, but whereas non-geniuses seek to eliminate that weakness by developing themselves, Geniuses eliminate the weakness by removing their dependence on it.

~ The single biggest differentiating characteristic of a Genius is the habit of turning right far more than turning left. ~

The Myth of Strengths and Weaknesses

There is a myth about strengths and weaknesses that states that we all naturally possess them. In reality, we don't. No human possesses any single strength or weakness. What we *do* possess are natural talents and non-talents, but these are not the same as strengths and weaknesses.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not one of those who thinks it is too negative to tell someone he or she has a weakness and wants to call it "an opportunity for development." I actually dislike this phrase, because more often than not, it supports the incorrect view that someone can fix a weakness by developing a new natural talent for something. If one of my clients is suffering from a weakness, I tell

him or her straight up. But the key is that this weakness isn't natural, it is *manufactured*.

Weaknesses and strengths don't exist naturally, only talents and non-talents. If, however, I rely on a non-talent, then I create a weakness for myself. Likewise, if I don't rely on my talents then they are never strengths for me. In this way, I manufacture strengths and weaknesses.

In other words, you are ultimately in control of your strengths and weaknesses. You may be born with talents and non-talents, but you are in charge of whether or not those talents and non-talents are used to become strengths or weaknesses. When you allow your success to depend on your talents, you create strengths. When you allow your success to depend on your non-talents, you create weaknesses.

This might seem like I'm talking about some minor, semantic difference, but I assure you that this is much more than a simple play on words. Understanding this concept requires a total change of perspective. Most people buy into the myth that they *possess* their strengths and weaknesses and fail to understand that they don't actually possess them, they create them. The power is theirs as to whether these strengths and weaknesses exist or not.

The thing that controls how these potentials turn out is how you apply yourself. Just as Mom used to say, "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out," so you, too, bring your weaknesses into this world, and you, too, can take them out. But instead of trying to take them out by developing new natural talents, you're simply going to remove your dependency on them.

Think of talents and non-talents like two boxes. The first box contains a gift and comes wrapped in pretty gift paper with a bow. The second box contains trouble and is marked *Pandora's Box*. Regardless of the contents, though, each box only contains potential. The first box is only potential for good, the latter only potential for bad. Nothing happens until you actually open the boxes. If you never open the gift box, you never receive the gift contained inside. Likewise, if you never open Pandora's Box, you never suffer the consequences. Talents and non-talents work in very much the same way.

This understanding is important, because once you realize that you create your strengths and weaknesses, you realize that you are in control. You realize that you don't have to suffer from weaknesses which were given to you and about which you can do nothing. You are in control because, while you definitely have non-talents, nothing in the universe states that you have to depend on them. And if you don't depend on them, then they aren't weaknesses, are they?

Geniuses understand this. They know that they are the only ones responsible for whether they benefit from strengths or suffer from weaknesses. They do not allow their success to become dependent on their non-talents.

Instead, they focus on *maximizing* their dependence on talents and *minimizing* their dependence on non-talents.

The elder statesman of management, Peter Drucker, said much the same thing when he told leaders, "Your job is to make the strengths of your people effective and their weaknesses irrelevant." He didn't talk about correcting their weaknesses by developing new natural talents. He championed making them irrelevant by not depending on non-talents.

The Unasked Question

A great example of someone manufacturing a weakness can be found in the story of Beth, an executive coach. On a recent teleconference with Beth and twelve other coaches, as we talked about the concept of manufacturing weaknesses, Beth spoke up with a challenge and said that sometimes you don't have a choice but to rely on a non-talent. She went on to explain that she couldn't turn right in one aspect of her job, and that it was "just a part of [her] job."

The part of her role she was referring to was the task of selling. As an independent business consultant, in order to grow her practice, she had to find new clients. Beth's natural talents, however, didn't support the typical definition of "selling." She didn't like prospecting, she wasn't comfortable cold calling or closing aggressively. Her natural talents were such that much of what it takes to *sell* was just not a strong suit for her.