

Enabling Genius

'All children are born geniuses. 9,999 out of every 10,000 are swiftly, inadvertently degeniused by grownups'.

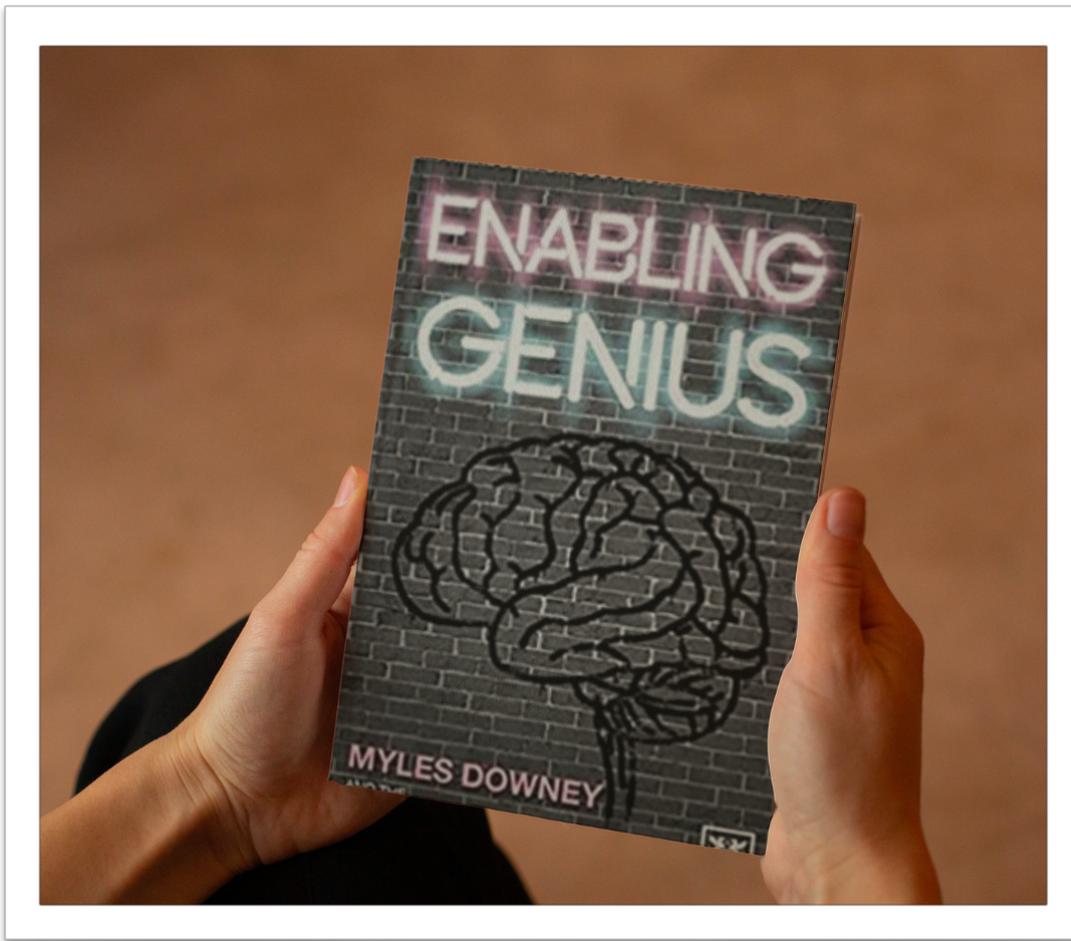
Buckminster Fuller

ENABLING
Myles Downey
GENIUS

Humanity has played a disastrous trick upon itself: we acknowledge that there is potential in everyone and then act as if that potential is capped. Capped somewhere short of genius. Now, in a world faced with many problems, some of which have the capacity to destroy us, putting a cap on potential is not what is needed. What is needed is a new understanding of genius, one which enables us and our communities, social and business, to survive and thrive.

Genius is normally used to describe someone of exceptional abilities, whose performance rises above that of the rest, usually in a specific domain. When you realise that most of the people considered to be geniuses are almost exclusively male, and dead, you might conclude that the criteria for genius status are somewhat ill-defined.

In my book 'Enabling Genius' I present an alternative proposition, that Genius is available to all. The book followed an 18-month research project with a team of more than 20 coaches, consultants and psychologists, to see if we could identify what enabled genius. What we found was that there is what could be described as a pathway to Genius that embraces Identity (understanding what you are great at); Desire (building the will to succeed or express oneself fully); Mindset (the attitudes and beliefs that inform how you behave) and Learning (constantly developing your abilities). This pathway is available to all. Genius is available to all.



As defined in the book, Genius is the embodiment of your potential, making that potential real in the world.

Genius points to the innate capabilities of each and every individual, all the resources, skills and abilities that come with being human: Genius is the uninhibited expression of those capabilities.

More academically, Genius is about purposeful achievement through self-actualisation - becoming who you can be, and being successful from that base.

The idea that people have potential has become almost meaningless, it's no call to action! On the other hand, stating that Genius is available to all, stops people and makes them think.

Genius is a challenge and a provocation - find out what you are naturally good at and nurture and develop that with intent and intensity. This is your Unique Individual Genius

Your Unique Individual Genius is about identity. Identity, our sense of self, is essential to our individual evolution as human beings: it governs how we perform, learn, promote ourselves, and take our place in the world. We have such a strong sense of ourselves, our identity, that we do not often question it or reflect upon it, other than the occasional moment as when looking with awe at the stars in night sky, we ask ourselves "who am I?" I just am, it's a given. This 'givenness' finds an echo in the expression: "Just be yourself".

But you can't be yourself until you know who and what that self is. And the better

you know, the easier it is to express yourself and, critically, be successful

Federer and Nadal, two of the greatest tennis player of all time, know precisely who they are - on the court at least. On the foundation of this identity they build their unique approach to playing the game. It defines their strategies and tactics and what they need to learn and develop. Two Unique Individual Geniuses.

The received notion is that there is a part of me, my identity, at my centre. Something that has persisted through the years, unchanging. We meet old childhood or school friends and immediately recognize them through a certain configuration of facial parts, a posture, a way of speaking or an attitude. In this understanding, identity is kind of core running through you, like a stick of rock, the confection you buy at the seaside, which has the name of the town where it was bought running down the middle. This has been labelled 'the pearl view', the jewel at the centre of the oyster.



But there is an insurmountable problem with the pearl view - nobody has found the Pearl! There is no place in the body or mind where the self is located: scientists cannot identify a part of the brain that might be labelled a 'unified centre of

consciousness', a self.

The primary competing view is that of identity as a construct. A construct is something that is put together in one's mind, a mental model, as opposed to a tangible object. The suggestion is that your identity is something that emerges as a function

of what you inherit physically and mentally, what you absorb from your family environment, your social environment and then from all your experiences and also your memories. Memories are different from the experiences that gave birth to them. What you retain, delete or distort from the original experiences - your memories - become a part of how you think of yourself. Add to this the unique manner in which you construe all of this: how exactly you put it together, understand it,

hold it. Unconsciously, you are constructing an identity, a sense of self, which will survive and, with luck, thrive in its environment - that 'is fitting', to borrow from Darwin.

Julian Baggini, philosopher and author, in his book 'The ego trick' writes:

"There is no single thing which comprises the self but we need to function as though

there were. As it happens, the mind, thanks to the brain and body, has all sorts of tricks up its sleeve that enable us to do this. Because it succeeds, selves really do exist. We only go wrong if we are too impressed by this unity and assume that it means that underlying it is a single thing. But self is not a substance or thing, it is a function of what a certain collection of stuff does."

From a purely practical place, the notion that identity is a construct is most useful as it takes us away from identity as fixed unchangeable thing and suggests that it is something that emerges over time, is far more plastic than commonly thought and that can, to a significant degree, be shaped. Crucially, an individual can choose to 'turn up the volume' on some components of the 'bundle' that is your construct and turn it down on others. In this way identity can and does evolve, and can be done consciously.

Ten years ago, as I was re-learning to play tennis, my coach asked what my signature was as a player. When I asked what he meant he said, "How do you play? Are you a McEnroe, an Edberg, a Connors?" This caused me to look at what I did well on the court, what I did when I was winning, what I enjoyed, what my physical capabilities enabled, what my mindset was. I took me a few months to come to a construct, a clear identity. Once this was clear I could now plan what aspects of my game I needed to develop, what my strategies and tactics were, and crucially, how I go about winning.

It's the same with your Leadership Identify: what do you uniquely bring to leadership; who are your role models, what's unique about them, what does all this suggest in terms of behaviours?

The idea of a fixed me, an unchanging core is, to some, quite comforting - it means I cannot really change and therefore need not bother. As a coach I have on many, many occasions worked with senior people in leadership positions who have a need, often because the organisation for which they work demands it, to examine their leadership approach. In this context I hear about authenticity; the change 'must be authentic'. There is truth in that, but, in more than half these cases, what I was really being told was that the person was unwilling to change. To be fair, there have been many understandable reasons behind the unwillingness: fear of failure, fear of success, fear of change, fear of the cost of change.

Rising above these barriers brings Genius.

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