

HOW TO LEVERAGE YOUR STRENGTHS AND UNLOCK YOUR TEAM'S PERFORMANCE - PART 1

Over my 20-year career coaching and developing leaders, one of the most powerful lessons I ever learned was that I need to play to my strengths. There are some things I am naturally good at, and they just come easy to me. At the same time, there are some things that require a lot of focus and effort for me to do. I can deliver OK results on those things, but they aren't great. And worst of all, there are some things that I just cannot do, no matter how much effort I put into it.

This might seem like a common-sense insight to you, but to me, it was a hard-fought lesson to realize. I had to fail a lot more than I wanted. This was mainly due to two ideas that were stuck in my head. One, I focused the majority of my development on strengthening my weaknesses, in an attempt to become the 'ideal' employee/manager. Two, I focused my career on chasing jobs based on their title, level, compensation, and prestige, not on how aligned the role was to my strengths.

Unfortunately, these two ideas led me down a path of struggle and unhappiness. I would take jobs that were misaligned with my strengths. I would then struggle to improve on those critical weaknesses. Ultimately, I would end up being happy and high performing in part of my job, but miserable and underperforming in other parts. It was only after years of this kind of struggle that I finally learned I needed to spend less time worrying about my weaknesses, and instead find jobs that were perfectly aligned with what I was great at.

I needed to strengthen my strengths...

What is the Best Strength Based Model for Leaders?

For long-time readers of this Human Capital series, you know I've written many different articles on the importance of your personal and professional strengths, and how leaders should leverage the strengths of themselves and their teams. There are many great strength-based approaches to leadership and teamwork. The CliftonStrengths model is the original strength-based model and is still very useful today. The Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator is one of the most well-known and trusted personality models/assessments. Other valuable models for leveraging your strengths are the DISC personality test, the NEO Personality Inventory, and the Enneagram. All of these models can help you in understanding and leveraging your own strengths, but I always felt like they were missing something. For example, the CliftonStrengths model can tell you the different strengths you possess and the different strengths within your direct reports and colleagues. But CliftonStrengths cannot tell you how to build a team that leverages those strengths. Do you want a team with all the same strengths? Do you want to balance the strengths in your team? What strengths are needed in colleagues to counterbalance your strengths? None of the strength-based models I ever came across ever helped me answer those questions. That is, until I read Patrick Lencioni's new book, *The 6 Types of Working Genius*.

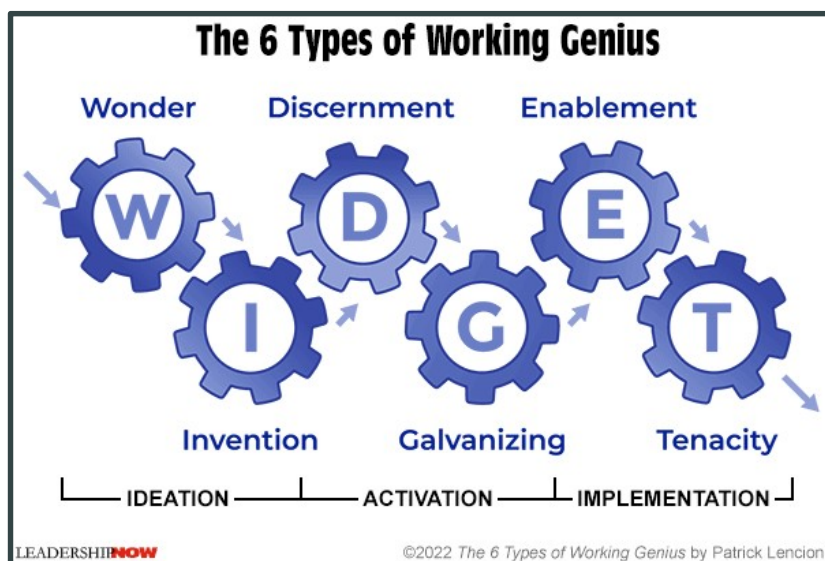
I am a big fan of the author and leadership thought leader Patrick Lencioni and have written about his books many times. *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*, *The Advantage*, and *The Ideal Team Player* are three books that I often recommend to leaders. Needless to say, I am always excited to read his next book. But when I actually read *The 6 Types of Working Genius*, I was blown away by the simplicity and effectiveness of his model. And even more importantly, *The 6 Types of Working Genius* actually provides a methodology on how teams should be structured, projects should be assigned, meetings should be conducted, and new teammates should be hired.

The 6 Types of Working Genius

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

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In **The 6 Types of Working Genius**, Lencioni starts with the belief that the majority of projects and initiatives within your company follow three main phases: Ideation, Activation, and Implementation. The Ideation phase is when you or your team need to identify problems you are facing, the needs of your critical shareholders, and begin proposing solutions. Ideation leads to Activation, where you start evaluating the different proposed solutions and select which one is best. Finally, you enter the Implementation phase, where you get things done and ultimately execute the solution.



Each phase of work requires a different set of skills. What might be great in the Ideation stage is horrible during the Implementation stage. We all know those people who get a million ideas but can never turn any of them into reality. This is where Lencioni's model further breaks down the three phases of work into six sets of skills and tasks that are required. These sets of skills/tasks are what Lencioni calls Working Geniuses. Below are brief descriptions of the six Geniuses. Read through the descriptions and identify which two are your strongest.

1. Wonder - The genius of Wonder is all about identifying the need to improve or change. If you are a genius at Wonder, then you naturally see the potential in a situation. You question the state of things and ask provocative questions.
2. Invention - The genius of Invention is all about translating needs into possible ideas and solutions. If you are a genius at Invention, then you are seen as a great ideas person. You are always coming up with new ideas and solutions.
3. Discernment - The genius of Discernment is all about evaluating the benefits and practicality of an idea or solution. If you are a genius at Discernment, then you have a great ability to make decisions and judge what is right for a situation. Often this is a combination of pattern recognition, data analysis, and even a little bit of gut feel.
4. Galvanizing - The genius of Galvanizing is all about building excitement and enthusiasm behind the chosen solution. Nothing gets done on its own. People make stuff happen, and people who are a genius at Galvanizing are great at rallying people behind an idea and motivating them to take action and get things done.
5. Enablement - The genius of Enablement is all about supporting the execution of a solution. If you are a genius at Enablement, then you are naturally inclined to respond to the needs of others and support them in accomplishing their goals. You often anticipate what kind of help others may need before they even ask.
6. Tenacity - The genius of Tenacity is all about finishing the job. If you are a genius at Tenacity, then you are known for getting stuff done and pushing projects across the finish line. You are the person that makes sure all the i's are dotted and t's crossed. Ultimately, you are the one focused on getting the results that were desired.



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Finding Your Geniuses and Your Frustrations

After going through the list, you probably already see that some of the Geniuses really speak to you, while others are probably areas where you struggle. Lencioni's company, the Table Group, actually researched this model across thousands of people and found that no one has all the Geniuses. In fact, people tend to have only two areas of real genius, and on the flip side, they will have two areas of frustration (Lencioni's term for weakness).

Now, some of you might have read through the six Geniuses and immediately knew your two areas of genius and two areas of frustration. Others might have struggled. For those people (and really for everyone), in next month's article, we will continue our deep dive into the "6 Types of Working Genius." We will share with you a simple assessment tool that can help you determine your Geniuses, your areas of competence, and your areas of frustration. We will also dive in detail into each of the Geniuses and discuss how you can best leverage your Genius at work. So look out for next month's Newsletter.

Cary Bailey-Findley has spent the past decade building the Human Capital within three Fortune 500 companies and was awarded the ranking of #1 development organization in the world by the Association of Talent Development. He is currently the Talent Manager for SimCorp the world's leading provider of integrated investment management solutions for investment and asset managers. He holds a Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and a Master's degree in Business Administration.

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