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## Diversity and “Gifted” Adults

*This guest column is third in a four-part series on Diversity issues. Our thanks to Master Coach Jim Early for his thoughts.*

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In my 14 years of coaching, I've often worked with managers or executives who have ticked off too many of the wrong people.

There are lots of reasons why people can be impossible to work with – job stress, personal issues, etc. Sometimes, however, it's the down side of being super smart.

A couple of years ago, I was introduced to the idea of “giftedness.” The descriptions I read of gifted adults fit a lot of my clients; the challenges of being gifted explained a lot of the issues my clients were working on.

I'll focus here on the gift of high intelligence, often indicated by an IQ of 132 and above. Why? Being super smart can lead to trouble because of the lousy social/interpersonal skills typical in this group.

Super smart people often develop lousy social skills simply because, as kids, they often didn't hang out with others their age. Think about it. Anyone who is super smart will both be thinking about different things than others, and thinking about those things differently.

Consider a little girl whose first grade class was reading **See Spot Run**. She filled her free time by reading the **Rise and Fall of the**

**Roman Empire**. How do you think she fit, in playing dolls with her friends, when she wanted “Ken” to be Servius Tullius? Do you think the other little girls stayed friends?

So the super smart child might have been rejected by her peer group. Worse, she probably irritated and alienated her teachers, and may have freaked out her parents.

The result? She grows up isolated, confused, and without developing basic social and interpersonal skills that make relationships work.

***Abrasive executive  
on your staff?  
Could be the downside  
of being super smart.***

High intelligence manifests in different ways, often as a result of how it was handled in childhood. For some it's a burden rather than a gift.

So, if you have an executive or manager who generates complaints and criticism because s/he often:

- does not listen
- communicates poorly
- is impatient and abrasive
- intimidates others
- burns through support staff

this person might be super smart, and struggling. How can you tell?

In Marylou Kelly Streznewski's book, **Gifted Grown Ups**, she says one might be a gifted adult if they:

- Work faster, have more energy

- Are more curious, sensitive, empathetic

- Are OK being regarded as odd

- Have a lively sense of humor

- Have a very highly developed moral sense

- Have more insight and intuition

- Feel out of sync with the rest of the world

- See patterns/analogies quickly;

- are comfortable thinking abstractly

- Just seem more complicated

If these characteristics also fit your problem exec, you could seek out a psychologist for intelligence tests.

However, rather than establishing a clinically-tested, elevated IQ, I work to open my client's eyes to the possibility that s/he really is smart.

I find that my clients typically have known for years they are different, but usually have experienced only the downside. They have to work to find the upside.

When a struggling client realizes that s/he might be brilliant, and understands that s/he cannot expect others to see things the same way, s/he can then become more patient and less abrasive, because more comfortable in his/her own skin.

If someone in your organization is generating the kind of criticism discussed here, you already know s/he has poor interpersonal skills.

The opportunity is to help them, as well as the people around them, understand the cause, and hence some solutions. – Jim Early, MCC

### ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

If you or people you know are committed to having an impact in the world, and can use the services of a coach to help you stay on target amid myriad demands, or to subscribe to this newsletter, contact Dancing Star Productions, phone: +1 413.367.9416. Email: [info@DancingStar.com](mailto:info@DancingStar.com), or on the web at [www.DancingStar.com](http://www.DancingStar.com).

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*The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why.*

– Albert Einstein



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*One must embrace the chaos within to give birth to a dancing star – adapted from Nietzsche*

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### Advertising

Rates and deadlines available on request.

## RESOURCE CORNER

There's a multi-lingual website which lists a wide variety of articles on the subject of Giftedness, [www.kreimeier-smith.de/new.htm](http://www.kreimeier-smith.de/new.htm)

Recommended books on this topic include:

- **Gifted Grownups, the Mixed Blessings of Extraordinary Potential**, by Marylou Kelly Streznewski
- **The Gifted Adult, A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius**, by Mary-Elaine Jacobsen

## Deb's Corner



I'll never forget the day my boss sat me down in his office for a talk. I had a BA, was in my early thirties, and was rather blindly making a career for myself in high tech marketing.

He was younger than I, had a Stanford MBA, brought in with much fanfare, focused on his rising career.

He and I didn't always agree. If I saw something he'd missed or didn't understand, I would do my best to make my point, trying to do my job well. But when, in this sit-down session, he said to me "look, if you're trying to push me out or get me fired, just forget it – I'll fight you all the way", I was stunned. I had no clue I was any threat to him, and I was further surprised when, rather than fire me, the CEO later brought in a boss between me and Mr. Stanford, to smooth the waters so neither of us had to leave. Who, me?

How many talented people in your organization are similarly unaware? We all know it costs money to replace people when they leave. How do your Human Resources programs help people identify and differentiate their unique gifts, so they can become full, conscious, motivated contributors to your organization?

I personally find the idea of identifying only certain people as gifted hard to accept, because I believe that we all have gifts – that part of our journey is to understand what those gifts are, and fully express them.

In my example above, I hadn't gone

to an Ivy League school, or had someone to help me chart a career path. In fact, the type of recognition I had typically received for my intellectual gifts was rancor, for instance from my brother and sister at report card time, when my parent's monetary reward system meant I'd earn money and they'd have to pay. This did not make me popular with my siblings. Nor did my folks think to help us negotiate this minefield – I was left isolated, with strong ambivalence about that which came naturally to me. Fortunately, my CEO was wiser than my parents...are you?

What if we all were taught to look for and value the unique gifts in each one of us, and ourselves, as a group?

I wonder about separating people out, identifying them as special, more worthy, better than, or worse, as less than, dumber, less worthy. What purpose does this serve? It isolates us from each other – the powerful and wealthy just as much as the poor and working class. In fact, it can be more "lonely at the top" than the "bottom".

We know about the importance of "human capital". Companies have focused for years on finding the best and brightest to help them achieve their goals. What about developing those you already have?

Look around you. Who on your staff behaves in a way that doesn't make sense to you or others? How hard has your organization tried to understand what motivates them, and what could help them stop struggling?

## LETTERS

*The newsletter on Highly Sensitive People generated a flurry of emails, two excerpted below:*

– If it is true that 15-20% of the population is HSP, it certainly is not true that 15-20% of the general workforce is HSP. People self-select; they tend to naturally go where they feel comfortable when possible. It would be interesting to see where HSPs go. What professions have above-average [numbers of] HSPs? Should HSPs be uniformly distributed across all professions? Probably not. – *Bruce Lynskey*

– Wow, can I relay some horror stories for you on this subject. I have mistakenly hired a few of these hypersensitive people and they have all driven me and everyone around me nuts. Your comment about "the close relationship to neuroses" is right on the nose. – *Mark Beaubien*

*Reply: First, to clarify, my point was that high sensitivity and neurosis are NOT the same thing. Second, it seems you now have a wealth of experience to draw on. In retrospect, how might you and your HSPs have anticipated a "wrong fit"? Handled differently, perhaps directed to projects that capitalized on their sensitivity, how could they have contributed to collective success rather than driving you crazy?*