

Catalyst

Catalyst is published every two months, for alumni of our seminars and workshops to remain connected, and for coaching clients, prospective clients, and other interested parties to learn about who we are and what we do. Also available electronically in Writings at www.DancingStar.com

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The Burden of Giftedness – A Leadership Issue

This is the fifth in a series exploring gifted adults in business.

Much has been written about gifted children – less about what happens when they grow up, even less about how they become effective business leaders.

Often one of the first things we hear from business leaders awakening to the idea they might be gifted is *I've always thought I was weird or wrong – what a relief to hear that there are others like me, and to begin to understand what's made me so different all these years.* This understanding is key to identifying what they have to offer, and learning how best to offer it in their work.

Many people – including graduates of Gifted and Talented, Advanced Placement, or Honors programs – hear the term gifted and think *oh, THEY'VE got it made. All those brains, they can do anything, I should be so lucky.* Disbelief is common even among those whose gifts are identified, and inability to believe in oneself painful, particularly if it has blocked them from realizing their full potential.

The gifted often have great expectations placed on them, both others' and their own. While told they can do anything, the gifted are often not told *how* to do this anything, or perhaps more challenging, *how to get along with others who can't 'do anything'.* The gifted are often told

to change, to fit in with the rest of the team, thus negating their greatest strength – uniqueness. Those gifts which help them “think different” give them no road maps to follow and few role models. Too much struggle can demotivate or derail even the strongest.

The gifted can typically see what's possible with great clarity. It puzzles them to find that others don't see as clearly; to have to convince others of what they see or wait for them to catch up; have to educate others; or worst of all have to watch others appropriate and capitalize on

The gifted live with major opportunity masquerading as major challenge

their ideas while they themselves receive no credit. Such experiences cause them to hide out, play small – robbing them and their organizations of a unique, valuable resource.

A common lament I hear from gifted clients is *how do I choose, focus? So much is possible, which of the many priorities should I pursue?* Learning to say no can be one of the simplest yet most powerful lessons we work on.

Another executive says, *I cringe at the word gifted. My guess is that the most adjusted 'gifted' people – those that fit 'with' others – are uncomfortable calling themselves gifted. Those who self-identify as gifted*

would be seen by most of the world as odd at best, or vain at worst, potentially alienating ungifted people. Such alienation can take physical forms – one executive spoke with fresh pain of a threatened beating for being so smart, saying he'd be cautious about exploring this arena, given the impact it's had in his life.

Another whose IQ puts him at or near genius looked at me in horror at the idea of sharing that information with others, yet indicated *sotto voce* that he'd like to know more about giftedness. These folks are living with a major opportunity masquerading as a major challenge, with few resources to help them understand that dichotomy.

Many gifted leaders achieve great things in their careers, only to find themselves crashing at the peak. Often there are associated unresolved emotional or psychological issues entwined with their gifts, for some of the reasons already indicated in this and previous newsletters.

Gifted and talented leaders could be some of the greatest resources a company could have in today's rapidly-changing business arena – many just need a leg up to identify and capitalize on their gifts. To some, it can mean learning practical ways to deal with one's talents and differences. To others, it may mean seeing that practice does not make perfect, AND that perfection is not required.

– Deborah Huisken

ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

If you and your company are committed to having an impact in the world, and can use the services of a block-busting coach, consultant, or team facilitator to help you stay on target amid myriad demands, contact Dancing Star International, US landline: +1 413.367.9416; UK cell: +44 798 521-4520; e-mail: info@DancingStar.com, or find us on the web at www.DancingStar.com.

Done is better than perfect – Mark LeBlanc



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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.

RESOURCES

Presentations, workshops, tele-
classes, and one-on-one sessions
around gifted leadership are current-
ly available in the US and the UK.
For information, contact deborah@dancingstar.com. Also see
www.everydaygenius.com, or get a
copy of **The Gifted Adult** by Dr.
Mary-Elaine Jacobsen, which can
be ordered at www.dancingstar.com

Deb's Corner



Here are a few of the
letters we see regard-
ing giftedness. The
first Dr. Jacobsen
received from a reader,
and exemplifies many
she receives:

I learnt I was gifted about two years ago, and since then have been trying to integrate that knowledge without becoming egotistical. This has been difficult because of the dearth of information here in the UK. I finally obtained your book a couple of weeks ago. At first I could hardly read it for the grief it triggered – even as I write I feel it flowing upwards. Despite the pain at times, what a wonderful feeling to finally feel validated after so long. Reading your book I found something to relate to in almost every case study. Before I'd ever heard of giftedness, I had come to see that my most fundamental need was to find balance between my extremes – perhaps this is one of the many benefits of being gifted: knowing exactly what we need if only we can hear the voice telling us and trust it. Now after reading your descriptions of collapsed and exaggerated traits I can see where I still need to take actions – but most of all why I tend towards these extremes. I also saw that there were areas where I was already becoming more balanced. This was affirming, but perhaps most of all I feel now I've got a framework which will help me address

the deepest untruth I was told – that difference equals wrongness. I'm aware this is not so and have been addressing this issue for others. Now finally I can get down to addressing it for myself.

This from a colleague: *The book arrived yesterday - I opened the first page, read the list of characteristics and burst into tears - at last something that describes exactly how I feel. I am currently struggling with this sense of identity and resisting my community's subtle pressure to stop being so difficult and to settle down to my job as mum and wife. AAGGHHH!*

As I've thought back over people I've known, I've realized I've known a lot who are gifted. Some have made a mark and had success, but often I've sensed that there's still something missing. Others became entrepreneurs whose inventions offer much-needed solutions yet who can't pull together or maintain the team needed to bring that product to market and sustain its development through manufacture and commercialization. Others are gurus who enjoy some success creating an approach to one of life's problems, yet who can't quite resolve their own fully.

My heart goes out the gifted. The world needs healthy, functional, and whole gifted contributors of what each alone can contribute.

LETTERS

I found the part about addictions in your latest newsletter very interesting. I was actually wondering about that this morning because we are aware of a few people at our tennis club that are drinking heavily and frequently, and it had me thinking. This explained it very nicely. I don't know if you are familiar with Thomas Keating's work, but he talks about "Emotional programmes for happiness." They are: Security; Approval/Esteem; Power/control. He says that when one or more of these programmes are frustrated, it can lead to addictions and the addictions are engaged in, to avoid pain. They also form the basis of decisions we make in our lives. To me there were some overlaps between what you were saying and Keating's emotional programmes for happiness. Are there any books you can recommend about how to deal with addictions? – Bennie Pienaar, S. Africa

*Thank you for the opportunity to point out a feature of this newsletter. Each issue when I address a topic I try to include a reference to a book or books which I have found to be particularly useful in the subject area in the "Resources" section. Regarding Addictions, there are a few I've found to be helpful. To understand some of the dynamics of alcoholism and its impact on a family system (which can be extrapolated to the impact on a team), Sharon Wegscheider's **Another Chance, Help and Hope for the Alcoholic Family** stands out. Regarding addictions within a larger organizational structure, Ann Wilson-Schaefer has co-authored a couple of thought-provoking books - *The Addictive Organization*, and *When Society Becomes an Addict*. Although I don't agree with all of it, she makes many interesting points worth thinking about. These can all be ordered from my website. – Deborah*