



BUSINESS BOOK Summaries

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Practical Genius

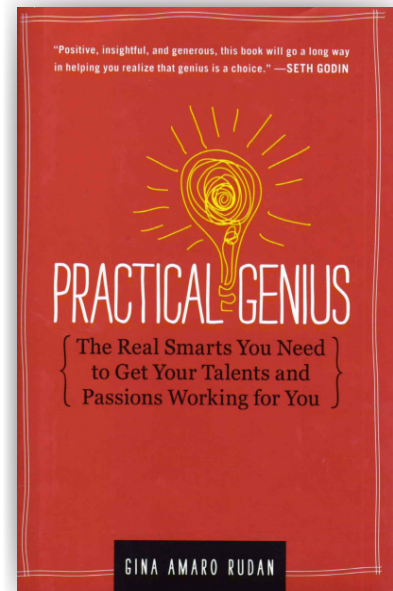
The Real Smarts You Need to Get Your Talents and Passions Working for You

Gina Amaro Rudan

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INTRODUCTION

Genius is often considered to be a quality that is not obtainable by everyone. It is viewed as something special that is exclusive to people like Einstein or Mozart. In **Practical Genius**, Gina Amaro Rudan argues that everyone has the capacity for genius and can achieve the extraordinary. However, genius does not rise to the surface unaided; it is up to everyone to find their genius and to put it to work. Rudan helps readers identify their genius, express it in everyday life, and market that genius for personal and professional growth.

A SPARK OF GENIUS

Practical genius is a composition of an individual's unique talents and skills that can be developed, honed, and put to practical use in a person's personal and professional life. According to American engineer and futurist Buckminster Fuller, "Everyone is

born a genius, but the process of living de-geniuses you." This process of living makes many people unconsciously compromise some of their greatest natural assets because of the expectations and influence of others. Most of these de-geniused individuals believe that genius is a quality like creativity that not everyone has—it is a gift that is not bestowed on the masses. Rudan believes that "Anyone can achieve or discuss or express something so extraordinary that it could change the world." However, she tempers that statement by saying that not everyone has an inner Isaac Newton or Leonardo da Vinci within them, but that everyone *does* have the opportunity to be a fully realized person with a practical, everyday genius that can change their life.

Traditionally, the definition of genius has meant someone who was gifted with an exceptional skill, talent, or an extremely high IQ. The word "genius"

was originally derived from the same Latin root as the words “gene” and “genetic,” and the first definition of the word “genius” referred to a spirit given to every person at birth. It was not until 1711 when Joseph Addison wrote his essay “On Genius” and defined the term as “exceptional talent” that the word became popularized.

Rudan imagines that if people were granted the title of genius they would be motivated to perform at their highest ability. Individuals, communities, and even whole societies would make better, bolder, more confident choices. However, finding a more personal, practical genius is not a small task. Practical genius is about people combining their strengths, passions, and values to achieve success. To discover one’s practical genius, people must:

- *Identify genius:* Consciously acknowledge and take active responsibility for unique strengths, skills, expertise, passions, creativity, and values. The intersection of these quantitative and qualitative characteristics is where practical genius lives.
- *Express genius:* The greatest challenge for most people is visibility. It is important to actively and purposefully share a unique narrative with the world.
- *Surround themselves with genius:* Network with others who are living purposeful, inspired lives by reaching out in non-transactional ways and cultivating deeply valuable relationships.
- *Sustain their genius:* Cultivate and focus on activities that promote critical thinking.
- *Market their genius:* Project and broadcast genius consistently with clear purpose and passion to attract, engage, and grow an audience.

IDENTIFY THE PRACTICAL GENIUS

People should try to find their practical genius in order to become the master of their legacy and think of their legacy as what is in their hearts, what they really love, and what their mind is capable of accomplishing. To begin the process of identifying practical genius, it might help to begin with the end in mind by taking time to visualize a desired destiny. This visualization helps provide motivation for people to establish goals, create agendas, and seek opportuni-

KEY CONCEPTS

Practical genius is all about identifying and leveraging unique personal assets. It is also about using those assets to open doors, attract opportunity, leverage personal power, and succeed. To achieve this, people must:

- *Identify their genius.* Consciously acknowledge and take active responsibility for unique strengths, skills, expertise, and passions.
- *Express their genius.* Actively and purposefully share genius with the world.
- *Surround themselves with genius.* Network with other people who live purposeful, inspired lives.
- *Sustain their genius.* Dedicate and commit to a practice that suits genius.
- *Market their genius.* Project and broadcast both hard and soft assets. Hard skills include skills, strengths, and expertise. Soft skills include passion, creativity, and values.



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ties that will push them closer to their main objective in life.

Another step in the process of identifying and finding practical genius is recognizing both hard and soft assets. Hard assets are skills, strengths, and expertise that are usually developed on the job, while soft assets include passions, creativity, and values that are tougher to quantify but are just as important as hard assets. The point where hard and soft assets intersect in a person is the place where practical genius lives.

Identifying hard and soft assets requires taking a personal inventory. Hard assets are generally those things that are identified in a job description or on a résumé. They are the qualities that are measurable within a common context of accomplishment. Hard assets are comprised of:

- *Skills:* The functional abilities that are learned in school and have been honed and sharpened in professional life. These include communications, problem-solving, and analysis.
- *Strengths:* These are often expressed in adjectives and might be identified as areas of excellence during performance evaluations.
- *Expertise:* This is the body of knowledge where mastery and authority are demonstrated.

Soft assets are innate qualities people possess and which are likely to be reserved for the weekends and leisure time. Soft assets are comprised of:

- *Passions:* These include hobbies and favorite activities but also comprise daydreams. Play is frequently the greatest expression of passion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gina Amaro Rudan is the founder and president of Genuine Insights, Inc., a contemporary professional development and training practice. Before launching her own firm, Gina worked at Fortune 500 companies including Avon Products and PR Newswire.

- *Creativity:* Creativity is the ability to make new connections between existing ideas or concepts. It can be fueled by either conscious or unconscious insight.
- *Values:* Values refer to a belief, mission, or philosophy that is meaningful. It might be something concrete such as a belief in hard work and punctuality or something more abstract such as self-reliance or authenticity.

Most people consider genius to be a gift, a lightning bolt from the Gods that strikes a lucky few like Mozart or Einstein, but not the rest of us.

Discovering where the hard and soft assets meet and living life at that point requires a meshing of the professional and personal worlds. It means finding a new approach to work and life and tapping into both hard and soft assets in every situation., whether that is running an organization or playing softball. Employing practical genius is a multi-dimensional approach to life, and being successful at it requires three steps:

1. Making a conscious decision to marry hard and soft assets.
2. Utilizing hard and soft assets that comprise the practical genius.
3. Identifying new and stimulating experiences that offer the opportunity to explore and expand hard and soft assets.

Practical genius is about deliberate practice and painstaking hard work.

EXPRESS YOUR GENIUS

The single most important way for people to leverage their practical genius is by telling their story. Personal stories are not the same as the stiff biographies frequently offered in introductions at work or at parties. Instead, expressing practical genius is about expressing the passions and details that construct a multidimensional human being. Rudan suggests taking a day and noting all the different forms and descriptors that make up personal introductions and determining whether those details are a true reflection of the whole person or just regurgitated bits of facts and information. The understanding that every

exchange with others is an exercise in personal storytelling is crucial to expressing practical genius.

Every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is a narrative arc to interesting tales that allows the listener to be brought along and participate in the emotional transaction that takes place in the telling. On many levels, the narratives people repeat to themselves and others frame their ongoing experience, so it is important to only share the stories that enhance and promote practical genius.

The transfer of knowledge and insight is best experienced through the lens of others, and finally deciding to surround yourself with nothing shy of amazing is not a wish but a demand that practical geniuses must make of themselves.

Taking a moment to examine the ingredients of stories helps to ensure that practical genius is fully expressed. Start by looking at the *themes* of frequently-told stories. What universal ideas rise to the top? These themes or ideas go a long way in identifying and expressing values. Themes tend to be descriptors, including adjectives and adverbs, and they should encompass both hard and soft assets.

Vocabulary is a very important ingredient in stories that express practical genius. Just like each person's story is unique to them, their vocabulary should be unique to them as well. Journaling is a great way to discover unique vocabulary. Another important ingredient in personal expression is *illustration*. The illustrations in stories are the visual bits and pieces that reinforce, educate, and otherwise help make a story compelling.

Combining themes, vocabulary, and illustration together is one part of expressing practical genius and solid personal storytelling. Body language is another—non-verbal communications matter. If body language and words do not sync up, it creates dissonance that will be noted by others. It is important to practice personal storytelling in order to accurately express practical genius every time a story is told.

SURROUNDED BY GENIUS

Practical genius comes from within but is reinforced by its surroundings, including the people who are part of day-to-day activities. Look at the people that are frequently a part of both personal and professional

gatherings. Do these people reflect the same passions, curiosities, and energy? Are they hand-picked or there by happenstance? It may not be possible to choose every person that becomes an acquaintance or family member, but it is possible to choose our relationships with others more purposefully.

Rudan believes there is an effective process for courting genius that causes people to identify, initiate, seed, and grow successful relationships. Finding these people is not that difficult—it requires moving through the world with an open and receptive mindset that other geniuses will be tuned into as well. It is a kind of shared energy that is a combination of intense curiosity, smart hunting, and a natural confi-

dence that is accessible. By living in this manner, there is no limit to the number of extraordinary people that can become part of a person's everyday life. These extraordinary people can be classified into three categories:

1. *Yodas* are rich with experience and will act as teachers and mentors.
2. *Ambassadors* will act as connectors to other geniuses.
3. *Tribes* are wide-ranging groups of people who feed and inspire one another.

Yodas can be found in the workplace in formal mentor-protégé relationships, but a relationship with a Yoda may also be more informal and oriented more toward nurturing than toward a process or achieving a specific objective. Yodas can be hired, but an executive coach can also fill the role. The burden is not all on the Yoda; the protégé has a responsibility to be open, flexible, available, and invested in the relationship.

Practical geniuses rely on ambassadors to communicate and spread their agenda. Ambassadors are resourceful connectors who help practical geniuses create opportunities for growth, extend the reach of their message, and help seed new meaningful genius relationships for them. Ambassadors and practical geniuses get mutual benefit from the relationship because ambassadors' own genius shines when they

promote the genius of someone else.

Tribes are the people in life who give it color and texture, movement and change. Yodas and ambassadors can be members of a tribe, but a tribe is larger and encompasses many people—some of whom will never be seen face-to-face. They may be online connections or those who are interacted with infrequently. A tribe should always consist of the best people as measured against one's own values, passions, and strengths. There are three simple rules for engaging members of a tribe:

1. *No one night stands.* The intention should always be to cultivate meaningful, sustained relationships.
2. *Skip the 10,000 believers for ten true believers.* Cultivating a corps of geniuses requires showing discretion.
3. *No transactional behavior allowed.* Never initiate a relationship with the intention of getting something from that person.

SUSTAIN GENIUS

Sustaining is an art and involves a surprising variety of components that will feed and help grow genius. It is important to understand that practical genius is a self-selected lifestyle that helps set up a path to continued growth, gratification, and success. The simple secret of sustaining genius: it is all about choosing the right content for mind, body, and heart.

Feeding the mind is critical to practical genius and the approach to feeding the mind should be spending, not managing, time. Rudan believes that time management is actually a hoax. Time management encourages people to think that tasks represent the important work that needs to be accomplished every day. Ticking off the tasks is associated with proving market value—the more tasks that can be done, the greater the value. This is actually not a viable or even humane way to look at time. Attempting to manage time in order to increase output misses the point of time entirely. It is time itself that has the value, not the millions of tasks and chores and to-dos that are completed within it. Instead of trying to manage time

and focusing on output, think about spending time feeding practical genius. Managing time is an organizational pursuit; spending time is an expression of purpose.

Spending time feeding the practical genius within means spending time on personal edification and growth. At the beginning of each day, do not reach for the smartphone first. Instead, start each day by stimulating curiosity, doing something creative, or taking a walk—anything that is outside the scope of what has to be done during the day. Establishing this ritual at the beginning of the day will change the experience of each day. By leading with values and spending time feeding practical genius, everything that follows has a purpose.

Gone are the days when you could hide the personal you behind the professional you. Here forever are the days when you project a positive, powerful, purposeful narrative that puts your genius out there in the world.

After the day's stage has been set with a strong morning ritual that feeds genius, front load the day with tasks, projects, meetings, or conversations that require analytical ability. The goal is to work on tasks and projects that enable using both sides of the brain simultaneously, which engages practical genius—passions, creative abilities, values, skills, strengths, and expertise.

Feed practical genius during the day by doing one thing each day that represents a conscious effort to gain exposure to the extraordinary instead of the ordinary, the profound instead of the pedestrian, and the breathtaking instead of the mind-numbing. This practice will help with increasing awareness of how passion and work relate to one another. It just requires paying attention to what is possible. Tune your radar to find the quirky, playful, inspirational things that are all around. Some easy ways to do this are by subscribing to blogs or newsletters and taking advantage of museums, local playhouses, concert halls, schools, and universities.

Being completely engaged every day is extremely important to sustain practical genius, but it is equally important to shut down completely for some period

of time every day. Use this time to purposefully close off all the entryways into consciousness from the myriad digital gadgets and information that threatens to overload the brain. Too much connectedness and information can become a distraction threatening to kill productivity.

Feeding the mind is not all that genius requires; it is also important to feed the body. Sustaining genius requires making choices about what is consumed each day. In this context, eating and movement are not about weight or waistline—they are about how food and movement give the heart and head what they need to produce genius. A healthy body is integral to a healthy mind.

MARKET YOUR GENIUS

While the journey toward identifying, expressing, and sustaining genius is a largely non-transactional journey, there is a point where it does veer into the transactional realm. Before this point, however, it is important to first focus on developing, expressing, and growing genius in an authentic way. Once this has been achieved, it is time to market that genius. The four Ps of traditional marketing have always been product, price, place, and promotion.

When companies consider launching a product or service, they account for each of these areas in order to convince themselves that the launch will succeed. They also take each of these ingredients into account after the launch; tweaking one or another of the ingredients as the product or service grows, matures, and declines. These four Ps work well for products and services, but not as well for practical genius.

The truth is that in marketing practical genius there is just one P: paradox. A paradox is generally defined as a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that actually contains a truth. A paradox is often an opinion or statement that is contrary to generally accepted ideas that causes someone to consider things in a different light. By definition, a paradox defies conventional wisdom. Instead of marketing individual pieces or parts depending on the needs of a particular audience, the practical genius markets his or her whole, fully realized self. Whereas standard marketers have to do a massive analysis of the marketplace, the practical genius just needs to determine

how to strategically engage with their audience.

Marketing is all about acknowledging and leveraging what is unique within the practical genius. It is about isolating and identifying the essence of the practical genius and thinking of it as a premium asset. The most distinctive global brands became what they are today because of deliberate efforts to set themselves apart as a premium asset, not just as another product or service in the marketplace. This kind of differentiation creates perceived value and demand, attracts interest, and provides energy around the brand. The authenticity and consistency of the consumer experience closes deals, seals relationships, and holds the brand accountable to its own standards.

The “genius measure” of marketing performance is based on three indicators: attraction, engagement, and growth. What makes this approach to measurement different from traditional marketing is that it is as much focused on the satisfaction of the practical genius as it is on the audience. It is easier than ever to market practical genius today. Technology is the marketing partner for practical geniuses. Social media is the most cost-effective, efficient platform with which to express practical genius. It is also impossible to grow and spread genius without social interaction.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time 2-4 hours 202 pages

In **Practical Genius**, Gina Rudan uses personal examples, profiles of practical geniuses, and playbooks with practice exercises to show readers how to cultivate their own practical genius. The book challenges people to think about themselves and measure their abilities differently in order to transform themselves personally and professionally. For anyone who is looking to expand their knowledge, passions, strengths, and creative abilities, this book will help guide the way.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Kevin Carroll

Chapter One: A Spark of Genius

Chapter Two: Identify Your Genius

Chapter Three: Express Your Genius

Chapter Four: Surround Yourself with Genius

Chapter Five: Sustain Your Genius

Chapter Six: Market Your Genius

Epilogue: A Call to Genius

Acknowledgements

Index

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