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For Zoe and James?for seeing me always.

## INTRODUCTION

My hosts, who worked hard for their money and status, were some of the most down-to-earth and fun people I'd met. If you could change careers and have any job you wanted, what would it be?? You would think, based on their level of success and wealth, that these people would be satisfied and happy with their jobs; after all, they excelled in careers that the majority of us would covet. In fact, I don't just love my job; my work is an extension of who I am and pushes me to be who I want to be. Seriously, I look forward to work more than vacation, and when I am on vacation, although delighted, I'm eager to get back to work. While nutrition was a passion of mine, I discovered that working with people to help them build basic healthy behaviors was boring, and it didn't provide the right challenge for me. Even though I was bored with the work, I spent day after day filing invoices, and what I didn't finish during the day I would take home at night, trying to prove my worth to the CEO. I didn't know who I was and I didn't know what I was good at, but I knew I was expected to do whatever it took to get the job done. As I will say many times in this book, it's often a blessing when you get fired or get kicked out of a job. Capital One's philosophy was that you could learn on the job, which was great because I'd never done marketing before. I lacked autonomy?I had to respond immediately to clients' needs, which seemed never-ending, and I had little control over my day-to-day work. When it became clear that the job wasn't a good fit, I blamed myself: perhaps I wasn't as thorough in the interview process as I should have been, I had been starry-eyed about the possibility of working at Google, I didn't enjoy the job search and wanted to get back to work as quickly as possible. And because that job happened to be at Google, one of the most prestigious companies in the world, I didn't stop long enough to ask myself if it was the right job for me. I knew this job was not something I was good at, but I just couldn't stomach the idea of failure. When we are dissatisfied with work, we're taught to seek answers outside of ourselves, to rely on feedback, advice, and the opinions of others. He asked the crowd, "Can you imagine waking up every morning and getting on your hands and knees and being so grateful for the job and life that you have that you're almost in tears of joy every morning?? I wanted that feeling, and I knew I didn't have it, even though to the outside world it looked like everything in my life was going fine. I was there for nine months, but within a month, I knew that I was in another job that wasn't a great fit. I will never forget that day?I was escorted out of the Frank Gehry building and in that moment, I decided that if my dream job doesn't exist, I was going to create it from scratch. And when I dug deeper, over time I realized it wasn't the actual branding that excited me; it was discovering who my clients were and how they could use this information to enhance their overall career, not just growing their small businesses. I started working with individuals in large, medium, and small organizations, and helped them with their performance at work so that they could know who they were, own their performance, and build an exciting career, rather than aimlessly going from job to job. As I started to reject the assumptions I had about work and advice from others that didn't feel right, my whole life changed. My business grew through lots of trial and error, and along the way I realized that the moments when I enjoyed my work the most, when I was in the zone, occurred when I was asking people questions and seeing patterns in their responses that turned into insights and ultimately actionable steps they could use to create positive change. In the early days of starting my business, my parents were worried that I was never going to make enough money working for myself and that I was going to be homeless; my brother was telling me I needed to get an MBA before I put out my shingle. By using these tools, my clients learn that the key to achieving their best life and a job they love is to really understand who they are and what they are best at, and to take this knowledge and implement it inside of their work every day. To me, being successful is not about how much money you make or how many people you influence; it's when you feel great about the work you do every day. Whether it's anxiety about a stressful new role or assignment, a sense that the position their mentor

# CHAPTER 1

When you can access your genius at work, you'll find that it is a game changer: by understanding the way you work best and channeling that energy into your daily work, you will see that your job can become challenging in the best way possible, making it a joy instead of a chore. By tracking your performance every week over the course of a few months, identifying when you are using your zone of genius, and engineering your daily work to better take advantage of your innate strengths and skills, you will be able to turn these processes and ways of thinking into a good habit that takes advantage of your brain's innate ability to create shortcuts and effortlessly allows you to be more successful at work. In this book you're going to learn the five core performance principles necessary for effectively operating within your Zone of Genius and creating the success you want: Challenge, Impact, Joy, Mindfulness, and Perseverance—and the behaviors that accompany them. They don't realize that when much of their satisfaction at work comes from reaching goals—big salaries, coveted promotions, impressive titles—they're missing out on the energizing, everyday sense of joy they could get from a job that's aligned with their genius and purpose.

# CHAPTER 2

I need to work on these development areas. When we're feeling uneasy at work, the default solution often is to try to become what we think our organization or industry wants us to be. If you feel your job is boring, anxiety-inducing, or overwhelming, I have good news for you: It's not you; it's your job. If you're feeling unhappy, unchallenged, or unfulfilled, those are clues that something about your current situation is not allowing you to use your genius—the unique problem-solving ability that makes you you. The next time you hear those disappointing words from HR, instead of thinking about what you've done wrong, think about how you can find work that is more aligned with the real you. This book is meant to help you figure out who you are, including your unique skills and underlying motivations, and to help you recognize when you're working in your Zone of Genius. By identifying your Zone of Genius and adjusting your work so that it revolves around your genius and purpose, you avoid the feelings of confusion and anxiety about work that many people can't escape. Before we further explore the concepts of genius and purpose, let's first figure out how things are going for you at work right now. If you're like most people, I bet you have at least a small amount of anxiety about your next performance review and what your manager might say about your work. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the pioneering psychologist and the author of the groundbreaking book *Flow*, has his own definition for this kind of challenge: "The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile." In other words, we are most engaged when we are doing work that pushes us beyond our comfort zone yet isn't so stressful that it inhibits enjoyment. In fact, Csikszentmihalyi's research found that people are happiest when they're working, as long as the work is something they enjoy and is sufficiently challenging. When I first read Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow, what stood out for me was that most people are meeting the first two criteria: they are setting goals and getting feedback. In fact, we're taught that a life of leisure—lazy days sitting on the beach, sipping piña coladas, or spending time not working—is the ultimate joy. Similar to the messages we've all heard about how we should work hard now in order to enjoy retirement later, we are equally inundated with messages about success. This is also why outside-the-box thinking is a rebellious act of stepping out of your comfort zone, and why creating a new kind of work that you'll love requires being a maverick. Personally, I'm not working toward the standard-issue retirement plan; I want to do the work that I love as long as I am mentally capable and save the relaxation for vacations. If you're dreaming of quitting everything and moving to a deserted island, the next set of questions will help you identify whether that dream is grounded in a true longing for a lifestyle shift—and that may well be the case—or the result of fatigue due to a poor work fit. If, on the other hand, you're not quite ready to turn in your company ID but you do have a sense that your job could be a lot more rewarding, rest assured that more fulfilling work is well within your grasp. Now that you know your job isn't the right fit, your path forward is a lot clearer than it might have been just an hour ago. If you had one or two yeses in the Bad Challenge section, it's probable that the work you're doing is most likely not in the sweet spot of challenge for you. By reviewing the answers to the previous questions, you should now have a sense of how good a fit your current job is and if you're being challenged in the right way. In fact, it's quite common for me to run across highly successful senior executives that acknowledge the wrongness of their jobs but don't proactively pursue change. But after a few months the job evolved to being more operational and less visionary, and he didn't have the skills that were required to do the work well. Even though he was aware that he was being forced to work in ways that weren't intuitive to him, Jim resisted the idea of change or leaving the company. I explained to Jim that when a job presents challenges that aren't aligned with your genius and your purpose, it will always take you twice as long to accomplish your tasks. Even today, he has difficulty accepting that work challenges can be stimulating instead of frustrating, and that he can be

# Now

When I sign on a new client, one of the first things many ask me is, "My credentials are top-notch, I've worked for the best companies, and I have a good job—so why am I miserable?" Every time, I tell them that happiness cannot be found in a single job, and it doesn't always come with a bigger paycheck. When we say to ourselves, "I'd be so much happier if I was richer or skinnier or in a different job," our powerful prefrontal cortex, the thinking center of the brain that pulls information from our memories, allows us to create a vision of what life would be like if only we could meet those goals. For others, their go-to way of thinking wasn't one that was useful in completing schoolwork and may have actually worked against them in school.

2. If you can't think of any moments when you were in the zone, you may not be using your genius very often in your current job. 2. There are hundreds of ways to rationalize taking a job that might not be the right fit: the money is good, it looks great on your resume, you are following some sort of plan that has been handed down by a well-meaning friend or family member, or you just don't know yourself well enough yet, so you choose the option that seems the most prestigious.

2. If part of your personality includes introversion, which means you derive energy from thinking through problems on your own, you may find that working alone is the right environment to maximize the use of your genius. An extrovert, or someone who likes to think and process by speaking with others, might have the same genius as you but feels more in the zone when she is working with a team of people. Your genius defines the kind of work you will be most successful doing, and your personality will help you find the right environment for you, including the kind of people you'll be interacting with and how the work you'll be doing will be applied. Within your current job, you can use your genius to maximize your potential, meet the challenges that you are excited about, and reframe or delegate the ones you aren't. If there is no possible way for you to create or find a project or set of tasks that is more aligned with your genius, that may be a sign that your job isn't the right one for you. If you're not able to use your genius in your current role as much as you would like but see a potentially better fit within your company, it might be worth it to bide your time and stick it out at your current job until you can get promoted or switch departments. Knowing that you can't fully use your genius now, but will in the future, is a much better way to operate than feeling like you don't know why you are feeling stuck. If you're struggling to offload tasks that aren't a great fit for your genius, start by analyzing the work overall.

**What to Do If You Can't Use Your Genius at Work** If you rarely use your genius at work, it's difficult to find ways to use it more frequently, and you don't have a clear sense of when you might advance within the company to a better-fitting role, it's probably time to change jobs. This may sound counterintuitive (i.e., If my genius is a Design Strategist, don't I have to work in a design firm? If you have spent years working in real estate, but you have a strong desire to shift to the health industry, show how you solved problems in real estate and apply that genius to the health industry or to a specific role you're interested in. Ben is now more content with his role because he knows how to deliver consistently, even on the parts of his job that aren't as exciting to him, while also spending most of his time doing the work that really fires him up.

work?

Genius Action Plan: Identify Your Core Emotional Challenge and Use It to Find Your Purpose

Are you as sick as I am of hearing about how important it is to "follow your passion"? Unfortunately, this well-meaning advice to find work we're passionate about has sent too many people on a frustrating quest to turn a hobby into a career. For many, following a passion might seem like an obvious quick fix to career dissatisfaction, but it often doesn't address the real problem: without focusing on their genius, these people really don't know what kind of work is right for them. You should open a restaurant. If I had less awareness of my genius and purpose, I'd seriously consider it, possibly thinking, Maybe they're right: I should ditch the hard work of running my own business and go to work for someone else as a chef. As wonderful as it might sound to find a job you enjoy within an area you're passionate about, I have found that the best fit is a job that involves the method of work you're exceptional at—your genius—combined with another aspect of your life that is perhaps even more meaningful and longer-lasting than your passions—your purpose. In each of these situations, Grant has found that employees who know why their work has a meaningful, positive impact on others are not just happier than those who don't; they are vastly more productive.<sup>16</sup> In one research experiment published in 2007, Grant surveyed employees at a public university's call center who were asked to phone potential contributors and ask for donations. Once I recognized my core emotional challenge, I knew that helping others be seen for who they were was my purpose in life. Most people don't know what their purpose is because they haven't taken the time to uncover their core emotional challenge, so it's no wonder that they are clueless about the impact they're having on other people, especially their colleagues.

**Identify Your Core Emotional Challenge**

While we've all faced and conquered a variety of challenges and obstacles, I have found that there is almost always one significant recurring challenge or theme that comes up in my clients' lives.

**Resolving Your Core Emotional Challenge**

Once I recognized my core emotional challenge, I realized that to be truly successful, I needed to address my own negative behavior that occurred when I wasn't feeling seen. As a result of the time and thought I put into addressing my core emotional challenge, when I feel like I'm not being seen, I am better able to manage my emotions so that I no longer become derailed by them. The second scenario I tend to see in my work is people who are aware of their core emotional challenge, have already begun the work of addressing it (whether consciously or subconsciously), are using it to help others, yet are not attaching this knowledge to the concept of purpose. While she couldn't have told you exactly what her purpose was when we started working together, once we identified it, Susan suddenly felt all the pieces of her personal challenges and the way she interacted with other people come together and make sense. She did have more work to do in terms of overcoming her core emotional challenge, which was exceeding expectations without support, but she could clearly see how she had been subconsciously using her own pain to fuel her interactions with others, and she was happy to take a more deliberate approach to addressing her core emotional challenge and building her confidence. These meridian points are located primarily on the face: the eyebrow, side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, and chin.<sup>18</sup> The basic technique requires you to focus on your core emotional challenge while using your fingertips to tap five to seven times each on twelve of the body's meridian points. Someone who struggles with being understood as their core emotional challenge might say, "I understand who I am despite being different from others." By turning the expression of your challenge into a positive statement and combining that positive language with physical tapping, you can quickly reprogram your brain to turn the negative struggle into a neutral experience. Her purpose was helping others fulfill their dreams, which stemmed from her core emotional challenge of not feeling supported in her future plans. In a way, Schultz's tremendous professional success is a tribute to his father, who died years later, and as Schultz writes, "never attained fulfillment and dignity

# FULFILLMENT = IMPACT

Genius Action Plan: Measure Your Impact by Assessing How Often You're Using Your Purpose When I worked for Capital One, my colleagues and I would say regularly, "It's not like we're saving lives." This was how we articulated the lack of personal connection we felt to the impact of our work. I wasn't working within my Zone of Genius, and I was not making an impact that was meaningful to me. Genius Action Plan: Measure Your Impact by Assessing How Often You're Using Your Purpose Once you're clear on what your purpose is, and how you want to impact others, you can begin to assess how you can apply that to your work life. While connecting to a company's mission statement doesn't guarantee that you're going to be happy at work, it can help you hone in on the impact the company is having and make sure that you can make a personal connection to it. Option Two: A second way of ensuring that you're making an impact is to track the moments when you feel fulfilled at work, using the Performance Tracker. And clearly, her purpose was helping people understand the task at hand, because she would do anything to prevent others from feeling like they didn't have enough information to complete their work. When you're working within your Zone of Genius, you will feel fulfilled: you're making an impact that's meaningful to you, and even more powerfully, you feel that your work is your calling. Working within your Zone of Genius 100 percent of the time isn't realistic, but you can aim to use it often in your day-to-day life if you're conscious and proactive about it. If your job doesn't allow you to engage your genius as much as you would like, bringing the Genius Habit home is a great way to practice those skills and prepare for the time when you will be able to use them more at work.

## CHAPTER 6

**Genius Action Plan: Focus on the Process, Not the Outcome**

One of the ways that our education system is no longer aligned with the culture of the business world is that it doesn't teach us how to self-motivate or tap into our internal drive in addition to achieving goals. In the past, this wasn't as much of a problem for many workers, because the business world mirrored our education system: as an employee, you were told what to do, and if you didn't understand the task, you looked to your manager for direction. However, in today's fast-paced, competitive market, businesses are seeking ideas and answers to problems that require thinking that is entirely different than "business as usual." Yet our education hasn't prepared us with the skills the working world now requires, such as problem-solving, taking initiative, and proactively managing our own job performance and, in the bigger picture, our careers. It's clear that we live and work in a goal-oriented, achievement-based world in which we're told that job satisfaction comes from winning, in much the same way that you strived for good grades in school or wins on the sports field. If you're able to focus on enjoying the process of work, not simply accomplishing individual goals, you'll be able to get more out of your everyday experience and find your job to be more fulfilling. As he says, he "tap dances his way to work." The fact that Buffett has accumulated so much wealth yet doesn't care much for spending is a clear sign that he loves the process of his work just as much as, if not more than, the outcome of earning billions. These are clear indications that he is challenged "in the best way possible" by his work, and as a result he couldn't be happier. I am as I should be.<sup>22</sup> Ebert's many extraordinary achievements did not compare, in his mind, to his love of the writing process. If you don't tap into your genius and enjoy the process of work, you aren't really maximizing your potential—you're living for the temporary wins. They believe that the act of achievement makes them happy, because something achieved is a sign that they've met a goal: closed a deal, got a promotion, landed a prestigious job title, etc. That's not the experience of having real joy at work, and, despite what many people think, it's not the path to extraordinary success. I loved those perks when I worked there; in fact, they kept me in a job that wasn't right for me longer than I might have otherwise stayed. When you don't enjoy the process of your work, you have to consistently use willpower to keep going, which drains your energy, versus being driven by an internal desire, which is energizing. I'm loving the process of this project I am working on." The more standard conversation is "Wow, I had such a great week at work! Just as any unhealthy habit won't make you happier in the long term, working only for the goal of achievements will limit your potential and likely make your life miserable in the meantime. When you put your achievement junkie tendency in check, you can be just as energized and excited about doing the work that's in front of you every day as you might formerly have been about achieving a goal. Achievements are always fun to have, of course, but instead of being the only source of enjoyment, when you're operating within your genius, you'll be enjoying the rest of your job as well. During the time I worked at each company, the achievements I was chasing were the goals that were set for me to reach or the feeling of accomplishment I felt when I finished a project. At the time, I hadn't identified my Zone of Genius, and I didn't even imagine that it was possible to love nearly all the work that I did every day. Because I didn't know any better, I simply accepted that these feelings about work were as good as it was going to get. Because I have sought out work that allows me to use my genius and have the impact of my purpose every day, I'm intrinsically motivated and able to tap into endless sources of pure energy I didn't previously know I had. It's not something that I try to turn off on Fridays, and I no longer think of it as a job; I think of my work as a calling. When workers are happy, they're more effective collaborators, which I've mentioned is integral in today's business environment. In Dr. Noelle Nelson's book, *Make More Money by Making Your Employees Happy*, she explains, "When employees feel that the company takes their interest to heart, then the employees will



## CHAPTER 7

Because of these deeply ingrained habits, it's no wonder that many career decisions today are more often than not made based on what others think. There are countless ways to rationalize following a suggested career move that isn't the right fit: the salary is significant, a job looks good on the resume, you would be following the same plan that worked for your brother, sister, father, friend, etc. If you are having trouble deciding your career path, it's OK to ask for advice or support. In this chapter, though, I'm going to teach you how to take newly gleaned information for what it is: advice, not a road map or a mandate. First, let's get clear on who a mentor could be and what role they might play in your career development. This is why for many people starting their careers, it's not easy to go out and find a mentor. Other people I have interviewed have credited much of their success to certain mentors, validating the idea that it can be a rewarding and essential part of some people's success formula. Just remember that having a mentor is not a guarantee for career success—it's just another tool that, if used wisely, can be a huge source of support as you chart your path. The relationship crumbled because the mentor was giving advice that didn't resonate, and the mentee didn't execute it, thereby removing the motivation for the mentor's involvement. With mentors working in a volunteer capacity, it's a good practice to discuss how long you're going to be meeting together to show you value the mentor's time and don't want to take advantage of it. Often mentors are leveraging their purpose by helping others, so it's good to hear from them why they're willing to do the work. As the mentee, it's always good to be clear with the mentor what your goals are and what you need from them. This is especially important if the mentor is actually someone with a high profile, as it can be intimidating to communicate clearly to someone who's powerful and experienced. But more often than not, advice that worked for someone else's career may not work for yours. A good mentor is probably going to give advice, while a great mentor will be more like a coach and offer support: they will take the time to learn who you are and provide thoughtful guidance and action items based on the unique circumstances of your life and career. The problem is that most people in leadership positions who serve as mentors don't really have the time, energy, or expertise to provide this kind of support. But once I started using my genius and my purpose to make decisions, the choices I needed to make that would put me on my unique path became obvious; I didn't need anyone's advice to make them. A supportive person will never tell you what to do or say things like "If you want to do X, then you need to do Y." A coach, a therapist, or career expert can be a great source of support, as they will take the time to understand who you are and use that information to help you through the process of making the right decision. If the advice is overly negative, such as "Hardly anyone is successful at what you're trying to do," "The competition is really high," or "I would stay clear," disregard it.

2. Everyone thinks they're a career expert, and this might be particularly true when it comes to your parents or other family members invested in your career growth. I knew I had enough experience in the corporate world to learn the mechanics of running a business on my own, and I decided to follow my gut and skip the seemingly "essential" step of going to school for a degree that didn't excite me. Instead of taking my brother's advice, I decided to use some savings I was fortunate enough to have to cover my lack of income while I started my own business. "Get Good Grades, Go to College, Get a Job" Doesn't Work for Everyone Our penchant for relying on other people's advice didn't just start in the workplace: it's likely that you can trace your experience back to high school when you decided to go or not go to college. Let's unpack this one piece of advice, consider the source, and see if it worked for you and your genius. But if you want to take the world by storm, start your own company, develop software, or freelance in the gig economy, you don't necessarily need a four-year commitment and the boatload of debt that often comes with it. If you didn't go to college, don't despair: some of the most successful people either left college early or skipped the college experience entirely. The

Source?You

In other situations, it's not as noticeable to others: a triggering event can increase your negative mental chatter, which can lead to a panic attack, high anxiety, or extreme worry, and then you're not able to operate well at work. Since then, she has told me that the more she practices overriding her negative chatter with positive thoughts, such as during those moments when she's not completely prepared for a meeting, she can guard against the emotional trigger and proactively bolster her confidence. In this article, the continued failure to break through the glass ceiling is viewed through the lens of women's acute lack of confidence. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, who authored the article, in addition to the book *The Confidence Code*, write: As we talked with women, dozens of them, all accomplished and credentialed, we kept bumping up against a dark spot that we couldn't quite identify, a force clearly holding them back. Linda Babcock, a professor of economics at Carnegie Mellon University, found that men initiate salary negotiations four times as often as women do, and that when women do negotiate, their lack of confidence leads them to ask for 30 percent less than a man in a similar situation would.<sup>32</sup> In comparison, men err on the side of honest overconfidence, a term coined by Ernesto Reuben at Columbia Business School to describe men's inherent and consistent ability to inflate their success.

1996: Ousted as CEO of his own company, Zip2, a company that licensed online city guide software to newspapers  
2000: Ousted from PayPal while on his honeymoon  
2001-2002: Attempted to buy rockets from Russia to start SpaceX but no deal to be had  
2006: First SpaceX rocket launch ends in an explosion  
2008: Both Tesla and SpaceX on the brink of bankruptcy  
2013-2015: More rocket explosions  
2014: Tesla Model S has problems with spontaneous combustion of batteries  
2018: Elon Musk's business is less than perfect, but he's worth \$14.8 billion

Musk has clearly had epic failures that at times have kept him from moving forward. A GROWTH MIND-SET + ZONE OF GENIUS = CONFIDENCE When you can believe in yourself despite any setback and acknowledge that there are aspects of your work that don't align with your strengths without losing confidence in your skills, you've combined a growth mind-set with your Zone of Genius. Shutting Down the "I'm Not Smart Enough" Conversation It's really easy to feel like you're not smart enough, especially if you were ever labeled as less intelligent than others in school or early in life. The children who were not told they were smart were more motivated to tackle increasingly difficult puzzles and exhibited higher levels of confidence.<sup>34</sup> The idea that praise can cause a lack of confidence may seem counterintuitive, yet Dweck's research proves the point. Ever since I started developing my Genius Habit, I have found ways to use my Zone of Genius at work, and I've become more confident. His pain of being neglected made his purpose clear: he loves helping other people feel like they aren't alone, either by giving them support or mentoring them through problems. Once we identified Steve's triggers, I helped create some new messages for him to say to himself that would address the negative chatter that created his self-doubt. The first was, "I can be a CEO and I am capable." The second message was geared toward his first trigger, as well as his ultimate goal of starting his own firm: "I can't take on work that takes me away from building my dream job." The third message was geared toward his second trigger: "When someone leaves, it rarely has to do with my capabilities, it means it wasn't a great fit." We also started working on developing Steve's growth mind-set. Mantras for Building Mindfulness and Confidence While it's important to create messages that speak to your particular triggers, many people struggle with similar issues.

# Well-Being

If you have an obsessive need to be an expert at everything rather than to deepen your sense of expertise and connect with your genius, you'll never be able to prioritize your work in the way that best aligns with your genius, and you'll always feel inadequate. When you're working in your Zone of Genius, even if you have a hard deadline, you are less likely to feel stressed because you will be tackling your work efficiently using your strengths, as well as employing methods of work that you enjoy. I know it doesn't always feel like it, but everyone has a choice about the way they want to spend their days and exert their energy. We want to seem busy, and one way we express that is by proclaiming how little sleep we're getting.<sup>36</sup> Achievement junkies succeed in the work world by staying late at the office and forgoing sleep. There are countless stories of workaholics who have found their way to the very top of their fields, but what we don't often hear about is the fact that they've sacrificed everything in order to get there, including relationships, family, joy, and sleep. Because it's not part of our culture to walk into the office and say, "Oh yeah, I totally got eight hours of sleep last night!" That is something we need to change. There's even research connecting sleep deprivation to mental health problems and depression.<sup>38</sup> Huffington calls the perceived benefit of working late into the night a modern delusion and writes, "Yet the myth persists that we can do our jobs just as well on four or five or six hours of sleep as we can on seven or eight." According to Rina Raphael, a writer for Fast Company, a loss of sleep not only impairs employees' moods and diet, but also hinders productivity, creativity, and decision-making.<sup>39</sup> For most jobs, exhaustion generally leads to subpar performance, whereas in fields such as medicine or transportation, sleep deprivation can mean life or death to innocent bystanders. He states, "I give myself a nonnegotiable eight-hour sleep opportunity every night, and I keep very regular hours: if there is one thing I tell people, it's to go to bed and to wake up at the same time every day, no matter what." Improving your sleep hygiene can be this simple. He speaks often about how the nine-to-five model doesn't sync well with our brains.<sup>43</sup> He believes, as I do, that it's not productive to work in long stretches, and it's not possible to engage in our best thinking by pushing through and working all day long. To optimize your thinking and productivity, make sure you're getting enough sleep when you're not at work and that you're prioritizing your well-being. They get off work, socialize, and stay up late because that's their only free time, and then their energy at work the next day is minimal. But once you start operating within your Zone of Genius, you'll find the joy you're looking for during the day so that you can relax at night and get the restful sleep you need. When you create work you love, you'll find that it's easier to focus on prioritizing your energy and your well-being so that you operate as best as you can during those work hours. Even if you don't get permission to opt out of the meetings, the exercise in and of itself is a useful way to demonstrate your ability to be more self-directing with your time and energy. Then I end the day with a final hour of alone time to think about my priorities for the next day.<sup>4</sup> Then I ask, "How different is your current day from your ideal workday?" Most often, everyone's real day is completely different from what they would like it to be. I have hired trainers many times, and because I'm an extrovert, it makes working out feel like a party. Regardless of your ability to continue or start a workout routine, keep in mind that exercise is one of the best ways to increase your energy and give your brain the boost you've been craving.

# OPPORTUNITY

To me, getting out of, or stretching, your comfort zone means identifying ways for you to exercise your genius at the next level up from where you're currently working. According to Anders Ericsson, researcher and author of *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*, it takes an average of ten thousand hours of focused, deliberate practice for anyone to become an expert.<sup>50</sup> The question I often ask my clients is, "How much fun are you going to have if you're spending more than ten thousand hours toward something that isn't aligned with your Zone of Genius?" I believe that deliberate practice—which involves creating a structured system of practicing and tracking your results—is meant to be a joyful journey.

## CHAPTER 11

**Genius Action Plan: Become a Job Search Ninja** If you are unhappy at work, remember to look for the root cause of your discontent. If you have determined that your job matches your Zone of Genius, even if you are facing adversity in your work, you feel confident that there is still an opportunity for you to be challenged and fulfilled by the job you're already doing. You could be in the right job but have a bad cultural fit, terrible colleagues, or a company that won't give you the autonomy you desire. Or, there may come a point where you simply say, "Is this still the journey I'm supposed to be on?" The key to knowing when to quit is to clearly identify what is causing your desire to leave. However, when you're focused and in your Zone of Genius, you will find that you will most likely achieve your vision faster, which will offer you the opportunity to continually think bigger. The more you match your Zone of Genius to your vision, the more resilient you'll be and the easier it will be to find a new job that you'll love. Now, fill in the following: My short-term vision (three to five years) is: My ultimate long-term vision (the objective of your entire career) is: Apply the Genius Habit to Your Job Search Being able to navigate a job search seamlessly is imperative in the changing landscape of work. A job search ninja is fearless about the prospect of navigating a change, and you are confident in your value so if it's clear that things aren't ideal in your current role, you start the job search with excitement and a plan. Once you know your Zone of Genius, there will be infinite possibilities for you to explore, yet sometimes it's the infinite possibilities that make finding a job so daunting. If the job has no opportunity for you to use your genius, it's not the right job for you. But if they are so desperate to leave their old job that they don't take the time to properly vet the new company and manager, they'll likely end up right back where they started—unhappy and looking for a way out. I have clients who come to me in despair saying they left their previous position and can't find a job; then I find out they're only reaching out to two or three companies a week, when they should be targeting ten, fifteen, or twenty. If you're not working, a job search should be your full-time job. If you're still employed, expect to do less job hunting work each day and recognize that the process of finding the right job will take more time. When you get to an interview, I wouldn't necessarily encourage you to say, "I'm going to tell you what my Zone of Genius is," since many people won't understand the terminology, but you can talk about your thinking process, what you bring to the table, and how you've identified the type of work that is meaningful and motivating to you. However, speaking up for yourself is part of the Genius Habit, and if there's anything on your resume that requires more explanation, such as a history of changing jobs or a gap in your employment, it's helpful to be able to speak clearly and confidently about your past opportunities and experiences, what you bring to the table now, and how you see yourself offering and bringing value to the job that's available. If you haven't done the work to create your brand yet, start thinking about ways you want to be known. The act of creating this content in the form of blogs or articles and posting it on your feed, along with commenting on others' posts, helps you create a brand identity and a virtual footprint, which is what comes up when people Google you. However, while building your professional network is an essential aspect to finding a new job, it doesn't have to be tortuous. If you're applying for a job along with a thousand other applicants, winning an interview is just as likely as holding a winning lottery ticket. People usually don't network until they're out of work, and when you have to do it in a pinch, it's a less effective strategy than networking all the time and making it part of the way you operate in the business world. Then we build out a vision so that we understand where they want to go, what's not working where they are, and what the absolute must-haves for their next opportunity are. If you're clear on your career vision and you're clear about what you're an expert in, you can start to interview people or talk to people about their perspective on that work. Are you interested? If there is someone in your organization you want to learn from, make the meeting social by saying, "Hey, I'm interested in the work you're doing, and

# the Evolution of Your Genius



By using this focused approach for doing the work I'm best suited for, I literally can see and feel my expertise deepening. I've also found that this ability works faster and more efficiently every time I use it, and I require less information to come up with an answer. You may already see some subtle shifts in the way you are working, but many people can't really see their expertise sharpening because it happens so gradually. The Tracker provides the vehicle for you to not only reflect, but also plan ahead—it's the routine part of the habit loop. It is powerful for you to say, "This is what my genius is, and this is how you can leverage me to achieve your goals." Remember, it's in your company's best interest to maximize your performance, so you're helping them—and yourself—by cluing them into your Zone of Genius. In interviews, we tend to generalize when talking about ourselves because we're afraid of coming across as a bad fit for the job, but it's far more influential to be specific with the interviewer about what you're good at and what brings you fulfillment. After a while, you'll start to inherently observe the elements that are causing and preventing great performance and be able to make changes on the fly, not three months down the road. If after three months you've mastered the tracker and you want to take a break, great. I still use the Tracker pretty frequently, but I don't use it every week because the habit is so ingrained in me. You will find that by filling out the tracker, over time your awareness of who you are deepens, and you'll have a better understanding of how things are operating in your current job regarding your performance and how you're operating in your current role and organization. You'll also become aware of what's creating the joyful moments, the excitement, and the great things that are happening in your job.

### SEE HOW FAR YOU'VE COME

After a month of focusing on your Zone of Genius and completing the Performance Tracker, go back and review your performance and see how much you've changed.

### FEEDBACK FROM PERFORMANCE TRACKER FANS

Here's a glimpse into the discoveries a few of my clients made while using the Performance Tracker: Filling out the tracker on a weekly basis has been an effective mechanism to stay disciplined on tracking my goals, how I could have handled specific situations better, and what actionable steps I can take the following week to improve my performance. During the daily grind of work, it can be difficult in the moment to stay mindful, but increasing self-awareness and performance takes practice, and the weekly trackers have been a great exercise while events are still fresh in my mind. Having a personal tracker can feel cumbersome and formal, but taking time to write down what's going on in the busyness of each week can be a valuable way to become more self-aware. By tracking your joy and the days you're operating in your Zone of Genius, you can gauge whether you're having the experience you want and if your current job is taking you closer to your ultimate vision. When I was at Capital One, for example, there was a full week or two that was spent in meetings around the performance review, looking at people's scores, and coming up with a bell curve for raises and promotions. If, as a manager, you're waiting six months or a year to really dig into performance, you're not effectively developing people. This is one of the reasons why, more often than not, performance issues don't get resolved, or they are resolved with quick fixes that don't work because the actual problem has not been diagnosed correctly. I talk to hiring departments of some of the best companies to work for (companies that are walking their talk and creating people-first cultures), and I'm constantly asking them to define what their dream employee looks like. If you are a manager or team leader, knowing what you're great at is important, and it will be of even more value if your teams are equally self-knowledgeable. In fact, his version of leadership is all about ensuring that he's facilitating his team to operate at their best and lets them make their own decisions. When you're not telling people what to do, it opens the door for each of them to own their Zone of Genius and advocate for the work that is right for them. When team members can each identify their Zone of Genius and use the Performance Tracker, they can take ownership of their performance. They also

# AFTERWORD

When you fill out the Tracker every week, you will undoubtedly have one or more moments of saying, "Wow, I really see how my core emotional challenge comes up more than I expected?" or "I'm really using my genius this week?" this project is exactly the kind of work I need to be doing.

# APPENDIX

Score guidelines for determining your rating each week: 5 = Always 4 = 80 percent of the time 3 = 50 percent of the time 2 = 20 percent of the time 1 = 5 percent of the time 0 = Never Add those numbers to get your total section score. Total Section Score: 8 80% Once you've calculated the total score for each section, add each of your five section scores to get a total score for the week. Total Section Score: Divide Total Score by 10 TOTAL SCORE FOR THE WEEK TOTAL % PEAK PERFORMANCE: QUICK VIEW For a snapshot view of the week, fill out the boxes below with your totals from each section Category Effectiveness Challenge Impact Joy Mindfulness Perseverance Using the total percentages from your chart above, fill in the bar graph below so you can see your peak performance graphically.

# ENDNOTES

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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Stay Connected Sign up for my free biweekly The Zone newsletter at [lauragarnett.com](http://lauragarnett.com), where I offer free Genius Habit check-ins (for tips as you read the book), and advice for your career questions, along with sharing my personal journey and insights as I continue to navigate my own career. It would be great to explore the opportunity to work with your executive team and your leaders to help them learn the Genius Habit and become superstars at work. The Genius Habit talk or workshop is ideal for team off-site trainings, annual sales meetings, or any event that is focused on success or work performance.

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