Entrepreneurial Talent: Innate or Learned?

OK, here it is! In my last column I talked about the quote from Clifton and Badal who stated that “Entrepreneurs are born, they learn to use their innate talents, and then they succeed.” I summarized the Gallop data that concluded that early identification and development of entrepreneurial talents at the city level is the solution for a worsening job creation picture in the United States and the rest of the world. I closed with the question What kind of talents must these future entrepreneurs have?

Sangeeta Bharadwaj Badal, recounts that highly talented entrepreneurs exhibit behaviors that are markedly different from those of their less talented peers. In their research they asked some critical questions:

- What separates successful business owners from less successful ones?
- What are the traits and behaviors that drive an individual to start, sustain, and grow a successful company?
- Do entrepreneurial attitudes toward autonomy, risk, work, and income affect business outcomes?

Highly talented entrepreneurs, compared with their less talented peers, are:

- three times more likely to build large businesses and to grow them significantly
- four times more likely to create jobs
- four times more likely to exceed profit goals
- five times more likely to exceed sales goals

Now to the question….Innate or learned? Gallop’s study put it this way. “If innate talents are strong predictors of behaviors that affect business outcomes, then it follows that we can study individuals' behavior, identify their intensity of entrepreneurial talent, and then support them to speed the process of venture creation and growth.”

During their research, they found a tremendous variety of behaviors among successful entrepreneurs. For instance, successful entrepreneurs effortlessly cultivate deep relationships with customers and employees (trait = interpersonal), are laser-focused on business outcomes (trait = thought process), are creative problem solvers (trait = creative thinking), and are the best spokespeople for their businesses (trait = promotion).

But after analyzing the data and listening to hours of interviews, they distilled everything down to a list of 10 talents that influence behaviors and best explain success in an entrepreneurial role. Every entrepreneur uses some mix of these 10 talents to start
or grow a business.

The 10 talents of successful entrepreneurs are:

- **Business Focus:** You make decisions based on observed or anticipated effect on profit.

- **Confidence:** You accurately know yourself and understand others.

- **Creative Thinker:** You exhibit creativity in taking an existing idea or product and turning it into something better.

- **Delegator:** You recognize that you cannot do everything and are willing to contemplate a shift in style and control.

- **Determination:** You persevere through difficult, even seemingly insurmountable, obstacles.

- **Independent:** You are prepared to do whatever needs to be done to build a successful venture.

- **Knowledge-Seeker:** You constantly search for information that is relevant to growing your business.

- **Promoter:** You are the best spokesperson for the business.

- **Relationship-Builder:** You have high social awareness and an ability to build relationships that are beneficial for the firm's survival and growth.

- **Risk-Taker:** You instinctively know how to manage high-risk situations.

These 10 talents do not address every factor that affects business success. Non-personality variables such as skills, knowledge, and experience along with a host of external factors play a role in determining business success and must be taken into consideration when theorizing on business creation and success. But these 10 talents explain a large part of entrepreneurial success and cannot and should not be ignored. Understanding and acknowledging your inherent talents gives you the best chance at success.

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