

YOUR GENIUS MIND

WHY YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A COLLEGE GRADUATE
BUT YOU DO NEED TO THINK LIKE ONE



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter 1

YOUR GENIUS JOURNEY 15

Chapter 2

YOUR GENIUS BACKPACK 29

Chapter 3

DEFINING GENIUS 39

Chapter 4

THE GENIUS OF CURIOSITY 65

Chapter 5

BUILDING GENIUS COMMUNITIES 89

Chapter 6

THE CURRENCY OF GENIUS COMMUNICATION 111

Chapter 7

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR GENIUS 137

Chapter 8

CHOOSING GENIUS 151

Chapter 9

FROM A NATION OF THINKERS
... TO GLOBAL GENIUS 161

POSTCARDS AND PIT STOPS 177

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 187

INTRODUCTION

(TO YOUR GENIUS MIND)

Everyone is a genius.

*But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree,
it will spend the rest of its life thinking it's stupid.*

—MATTHEW KELLY

Let me begin with a question. When you look at your life, are you happy with what you see? If the answer is no or you're struggling to come up with an answer, be encouraged. You're not alone. It's a sad curse of adulthood that we're expected to prove we know the secret to a successful life in front of an audience. On any other stage, performers have a chance to practice, but life seems to push each of us onto the grandstand before we're quite ready. And we often seem to follow someone whose performance looks better than our own. It's not you. (Okay, it is you, but not for the reasons you think.)

Life used to be much simpler than it is now. In the United States, you go to school until the age of 16

whether you want to or not. After that, it used to be that most people followed one of three paths with fairly predictable results:

1. Drop out of school, find a hustle and try to stay out of jail;
2. Graduate from high school and get a job; or
3. Stay in school, graduate from college and get a better job.

On average, people who took the second path did better than people who took the first and people who took the third path did better than the other two. You had a script to read from, a playbook to follow, and when it was your turn to step into the spotlight, you could feel confident that you knew what to do. But the paths aren't so predictable anymore. These days, people are dropping out of school and creating billion-dollar companies (see the story of the guy who invented Tumblr) and college graduates are either finding hustles, making fast money and going to jail for 150 years (shout-out to Bernie Madoff), or asking you if you want to supersize your burger meal. The script is missing some pages and the plays in the playbook aren't working.

The truth is that the rules of the game have changed. Welcome to life in a knowledge society. Call it the Bill

Gates lie, the Steve Jobs lie, the Mark Zuckerberg lie, the Henry Ford lie or name it after any other successful entrepreneur who never graduated from college. The success of these individuals and others like them seems to imply that college is irrelevant. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The need has never been greater for high-quality thinkers, with or without a degree. All their success shows us is that there are other ways to develop college-level thinking skills. In fact, college doesn't really develop those skills. It refines them. And make no mistake, a college or university is still the best place to go to make that happen. But there's a catch. The colleges that live up to their missions all assume that entering students are already thinking at the college level when they arrive at their doorsteps. If you read the biographies of any of the entrepreneurs I just mentioned, you'll find plenty of proof that they already possessed these skills in abundance long before they started their businesses.

All successful entrepreneurs share the same characteristic—they're better than others at thinking about ways to solve problems. That's the core of every good business idea. Identify a problem or a need that you can solve better than anyone else so that customers will pay you for your solution. In the pages that follow, I'll show you how

to the hotel, which fortunately, did have a vacancy. I checked in, which gave me access to a phone that would dial a U.S. number, and after leaving Derrick a message laced with language that I cannot include in a G-rated book, I took a shower and went to sleep.

Vocational schools train you to perform a set of tasks; college trains you to think — deeper, longer and more creatively. It's not a goal, it's a process, and it's the only way new problems are solved.

I share this story with you because it's an example of a common occurrence that everyone faces in life. I encountered a problem that looked at first to be too difficult for me to solve on my own, but since no one was around who could or would solve it for me, I had to figure it out for myself. You can do the same. People who invest the time and effort to acquire a college-level education do it all the time. All you have to do right now is keep reading. The chapters that follow are written for the sole purpose of showing you how to acquire that kind of education for yourself. The subtitle of this book says that you don't need to be a college graduate because some college graduates aren't college-level thinkers.¹ And every

single one of *those* graduates is the proud owner of a degree that is next to worthless. That said, let me be clear. Attending the right college with the right attitude is absolutely the best way to develop college-level abilities. Once you do, you will have everything you need to create the life you want.

What would you be willing to try if you knew you couldn't fail? What if you knew there was a hidden treasure—one that would change your life for the better in ways that exceeded your wildest dreams—and someone gave you a map with specific directions to where that treasure was hidden? Would you make the trip to find it? This book was written to be a treasure map, and your genius mind is that treasure. Everything you need to create a life of opportunity for yourself and the people you love is locked away in your own mind. The best things about this treasure are that it's behind a lock to which only you have the key, and it's a treasure that no one can ever steal from you. However, for most of us, it is very well hidden. The process of finding and growing your genius mind is a journey that will take time, effort and attention. If you're at least a little curious about what that might mean for you, then I invite you to keep reading—at least as far as the first paragraph of the first chapter.

And if you're wondering why Derrick wasn't at the airport when I arrived, so was I. I asked him when he came to the hotel to pick me up, and in the laid-back but loveable style that only he can pull off, he replied, "Oh, I was at a nightclub. I thought you were coming on Tuesday."

Let's talk — ygm.bz/intro

Chapter 1
YOUR GENIUS JOURNEY

*We don't receive wisdom;
we must discover it for ourselves after a journey
that no one can take for us.*

—MARCEL PROUST

If you read no further than this sentence then let this be your takeaway—college was never intended to get its graduates a job. That's what trade schools are for. The purpose of college is to improve the quality of your thinking. Period. End of takeaway. The world has produced organized settings for learning for thousands of years, but it's only been in the last two hundred years that we started treating a college degree as a career path. The problem with this way of thinking is that it skips several important steps in between. It is true that people with college degrees earn more over their lifetimes than people who have never attended college; and yes, they do have lower rates of unemployment than people with only a high

school diploma, even through periods of recession. But it's not the piece of paper that employers are looking for; they're looking for the abilities that a college education was always intended to develop. In short, they're looking for college-level thinkers.

Keep this in mind. Work that doesn't require thought has to be simple enough that anyone can be trained to do it—operating a machine, processing an order, sweeping a floor, typing a letter. Each of these tasks, and thousands like them, can be broken down into steps that can be catalogued and then taught. And when tasks are easy to perform, the employees performing them are easy to replace. Employers turn to college-educated workers for tasks that can't be made simple. These are the tasks that can't be defined with certainty. Any business that hopes to grow will encounter uncertainties along the way. How did Western Union, a company founded to deliver telegraph messages, remain a viable business once the telephone was invented? The iPhone wasn't born in a 6-week training program. It came from a company that hired thinkers.

Colleges and universities exist to produce better thinkers. They are incubators for growing genius minds, and that is really the only standard against which their performance should be judged. Unfortunately, it is now

possible to earn a college degree without acquiring the college-level abilities that go with it. You don't want to be one of those people. Anyone with a real college education will know when they are in the presence of someone without one within five minutes of speaking to them. If your performance does not reflect the skills that your degree is supposed to represent, no diploma on earth will be able to overcome that.

This book is called *Your Genius Mind* because no matter what kind of genius you have, your mind is where it will originate. But, even with assurances from others, I'm sure some of you can't or won't believe that everyone is a genius. How can they be? The answer depends on how you define genius, so let me be explicit about how I'm defining it. I'll use the word itself to help you remember.

Genius is:

- G**enerative
- E**xtraordinary
- N**eed-fulfilling
- I**ntentional
- U**nique, and
- S**ervice-oriented.

We'll take a deeper dive into this definition in the third chapter. The most important thing for you to remember

right now is that every person on the planet whose brain is not structurally compromised is capable of producing contributions that meet these standards. But it takes high-quality thinking to do it.

COLLEGE ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

Even though I wasn't yet of college age the first time I heard the phrase "college isn't for everyone," for some reason it always bothered me. It's not that the statement is false; the problem is in how widely it's applied. We've defined college as an environment that develops your ability to think at a more complex level, and there are clearly some people who do not have that capacity. But that group is much smaller than you think.

At any given time, roughly 3% of the population would be classified as intellectually disabled and another 7% would qualify as having borderline mental functioning.¹ So when we say that college isn't for everyone, that statement really only applies to 10% of the population, which means that 90% of the population possesses the capacity to develop their thinking. There's no question that complex thinking will come easier to some, but so does riding a bike, driving a car with a manual transmission or writing in cursive. Stated another way, the next time you hear someone say "college isn't for everybody"

substitute the word “thinking” for the word “college” and then see if you still agree—especially if you’ve been telling yourself that college isn’t for you.

**Do the difficult things while they are easy and
do great things while they are small. A journey
of a thousand miles begins with one step.**

– Lao Tzu

Researchers Richard Ryan and Edward Deci² have identified three basic needs that they believe we are all born with—the need to be connected to others (called “relatedness”), the need to direct our own actions (called “autonomy”) and the need to feel we know what we’re doing (called “competence”). We can see each of these needs play out early in our lives, but it’s the need for competence that may explain why some of us give up on thinking as an active pursuit.

If you think back on any activity that you spend a lot of time doing, you can probably identify a point in time when you determined that you were pretty good at it. Either you were naturally gifted at that particular talent or you got better and better because of the amount of time you put into it. On the other hand, I’m betting that

Lesson 5: *Do ... or Do Not. There Is No Try*

This is my favorite of Yoda's lessons. You could forget every other lesson and still reach your destination if you remember this one. Go or don't go, but if you're going to take the journey, don't stop until you reach your destination. This is another belief. It's a belief about your choices. Choose not to quit, because everything else is an excuse. When it comes to challenging journeys, it's best to remember this advice: When you find yourself going through hell—keep going!

THE JOURNEY TO FINDING YOUR GENIUS MIND

Before I became a college professor, I worked as a healthcare executive. I've been an employer, and I remember the difference between the employees I couldn't do without and the ones I couldn't wait to get away from. What's most instructive is that the same behaviors I saw in the poorest performing employees, I now see in the poorest performing students: students who come late to class become employees who come late to work; students who ask for extensions to turn in their assignments become employees who can't complete their projects on time; students who want everything explained to them instead of first trying to figure a problem out for themselves become employees who bring their supervisors

problems instead of solutions. Skills can always be taught, but to create the life you want, you need to develop the abilities of a college-level thinker, and to do that you must practice until they become habits—habits of behavior and habits of mind. That’s what the journey to find your genius mind prepares you to do. This book is your treasure map, but if you’re still interested in making the journey, first you’ll need to pack for the trip.

Let’s plan — ygm.bz/ch1

Chapter 2
YOUR GENIUS BACKPACK

*There is nothing like training and preparation.
You have to train your mind as much as your body.*

—VENUS WILLIAMS

We pack swimsuits and suntan lotion for trips to the beach, thermal underwear for trips to the ski slopes and sleeping bags for camping trips to the great outdoors. The journey to find your genius mind is no different. Each of the lessons we learned in the previous chapter, I have converted into a tool to carry with you in your genius backpack. I call them the five Cs:

1. To unlearn what you have learned, you will need ***Curiosity***;
2. To meet other Jedis who will help you find your inner Yoda, you need ***Community***;
3. To become your own interpreter, you need to master ***Communication***;

4. To stay focused and committed to the journey requires **Control**; and
5. Using these tools to find your genius is ultimately a matter of **Choice**.

Think of the five Cs in your genius backpack as a go-cart that you'll drive on your genius journey. Curiosity is the windshield you see through, community is the cart that holds you and communication is your steering wheel. Control is how you steer and choice is how you accelerate. Our success in life is directly affected by how we think about our choices, whether it's who we choose to spend time with, how we choose to communicate, or ultimately, whether we choose to do anything about our current circumstances.

Everything about your genius mind—whether you seek it, whether you develop it, whether you even believe you have one—is a choice. Embarking upon this genius journey will change your life. I know this because I've taught countless students who have allowed their education to do for them what a good education does for everyone who's been exposed to one. It transformed them and if you let it, it will do the same for you. That can be both exciting and frightening. Choosing to change yourself means taking risks. It means exposing the weaknesses in

yourself and in your relationships, but ultimately the choice to find your genius mind will rest on this question: When you look at your life now, is it a choice you can afford **not** to make?

I've structured this book around the five Cs in your genius backpack. Each has its own chapter that will explain in detail how they relate to each element of your genius. I'll define the elements of GENIUS in the next chapter. But before we embark, there's something else we need to take on our journey. Even the best-supplied traveler will get lost without directions. To make sure that doesn't happen to us, we need a map.

YOUR GPS (GENIUS POSITIONING SYSTEM)

Thanks to technology, our cars and phones come equipped with a GPS that shows us not only where we want to go but also where we are in relation to our destination. We'll need a GPS for this journey as well, but instead of a Global Positioning System, our GPS is a Genius Positioning System. The GPS that comes in our cars and smartphones relies on a series of satellites that orbit the earth. Because we know with certainty where these satellites are, the receiver in our GPS can calculate where we are based on our distance from the satellites, but it takes readings from multiple satellites to provide an exact

location because of a process called trilateration.¹ This is how it works.

Let's imagine that I wake up one day on a bench in Manhattan but I have no idea where. I can't see any street signs but there are people walking by so I call out to them. "Excuse me, where am I?" I ask.

The first person to answer as they pass (without even looking at me, because this is New York, after all) shouts back, "You're five blocks south of 54th Street."

Thanks, buddy. That tells me I'm on 49th Street, but where on 49th? If I ask again and the next New Yorker tells me that I'm six and a half blocks east of 12th Avenue, I have a better idea of where I am, but I still won't know my exact location. But if a third person tells me that I'm one block west of 5th Avenue and a fourth person tells me that I'm also ten feet in front of an ice skating rink then—eureka! I know exactly where I am. I am at Rockefeller Center. Because I know where each of the locations being shouted at me are, knowing where I am in relation to all of them at the same time allows me to slowly eliminate all other possible locations. But none of that information would be helpful to me if I knew nothing about the streets of New York. I am definitely oversimplifying how GPS actually works, but you get the idea.

make this promise to you without even knowing you because I already know the only thing I need to know about you—your genius mind is waiting for you and through hell or high water, we're going to find it!

Are you ready to take the journey? Great. Let's get started.

Let's pack — ygm.bz/ch2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. K. Candis Best is a passionate advocate of getting people to use their minds to find their genius. An inspiring thought leader in higher education, she has focused her attention on creating a movement around growing genius. Candis has helped hundreds of students and professionals to use their genius minds to leave a legacy through self-leadership and service. She is this creator of the Holistic Leadership model, which she used to found Learningateway, a social learning platform for non-traditional students who are at-risk for not completing their academic goals. In her first book, *Leaving Legacies: Reflections from the Prickly Path to Leadership*, she offered a glimpse into where her passion for helping others began. In many ways, *Your Genius Mind* is the next step on that journey. Candis' perspectives on transforming education have made her an in-demand speaker and expert in crafting educational solutions. But she isn't just a spokesperson

for post-secondary education she's also an enthusiastic consumer. She holds a law degree from Villanova University and is licensed to practice law in the States of New York and New Jersey and before the federal courts of the Eastern District of New York. In addition, she holds masters degrees in business administration and psychology and a Ph.D. in social welfare research and policy development. She holds board certifications in Healthcare Management and as a Human Services Practitioner and is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. She currently serves as an Associate Professor and the Brooklyn campus chairperson for the departments of Human Services and General Studies at St. Joseph's College. She resides in the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn, New York.

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