

**The Genius and Beauty  
Found Within  
The Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes of Talent**

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*[Note: This was the last writing from Chip before his death on July 5, 2005. In it, he shares his thoughtful reflections on each of the Clifton StrengthsFinder themes, in terms of the “genius” he saw in each one. He presented this to the Board of Trustees of Azusa Pacific University.]*

Genius: spirit, fondness for social enjoyment

1. a. An attendant spirit of a person or place
- b. A person who influences another for good or bad a strong leaning or inclination; a peculiar, distinctive, or identifying character or spirit; the association and traditions of a place; a personification or embodiment esp. of a quality or condition. A single strongly marked capacity or aptitude. Extraordinary intellectual power esp. as manifested in creative activity. A person endowed with transcendent mental superiority; a person with a very high intelligence quotient.

*From my experience, each of the themes of talent identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder Inventory has a stroke of genius within it. The genius of our talents reflects what those talents enable and empower us to do to potential levels of excellence. The concept of genius refers to an extraordinary ability to do certain things, and as such there is great beauty in seeing what is done by the genius within individuals. Accordingly, what follows is the genius I see in each of the themes of talent identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder Inventory.*

### **ACHIEVER**

The genius of your Achiever talent begins with your tremendous motivation, drive, and determination. You are in constant motion to reach your goals. The second aspect of your genius is found in the types of goals you set. You have daily goals in the form of lists of things to do. Then you have future goals tied to your daily goals. Finally you have ultimate goals. Your ultimate goals are always tied to excellence. So the genius of your Achiever talent is the tremendous amount of motivation and drive you have to reach your goals and to move your goals toward being excellent in terms of performance, productivity effectiveness, and efficiency. No wonder this talent is called Achiever.

## **ACTIVATOR**

The genius of your Activator talent begins with the concept of action. You want action and you can make things happen. Most of all, the genius of your Activator talent gives you the ability to see how to make things happen. Whereas others have ideas that only swim around in their minds, you can quickly see how to turn ideas into actions, programs, and services. This points to the greatest aspect of the genius of your Activator talent. You are creative and very innovative. Finally, you have a tremendous amount of motivation, energy, and personal power when it comes to taking an idea and then putting it into action. You are particularly motivated to be innovative in turning your ideas into action, programs, and services. You are a dynamo in turning ideas into actions that generate revolutionary changes.

## **ADAPTABILITY**

The genius of your Adaptability talent begins with where you “live” in terms of your mind. You live in the present—even the present moment. Whereas others live their lives in their “rear-view mirror,” always looking to the past and being tied to the past, you are a right-here, right-now person. The genius of this perspective means that you can change and change quickly. Rather than being rigid, you are flexible; and rather than being tied to some pre-set plan, you can quickly change to meet immediate demands and circumstances that require attention. But the real genius of your adaptability is seen in circumstances that make others scramble and cower into some safety zone for security. Your genius talent of Adaptability comes to light in chaos. In fact, you not only deal with chaos, you get energized, come alive, and get a thrill out of chaos as you “ride the wave” and quickly make the changes that chaos requires. This then points to another genius aspect of your Adaptability talent. You can learn and change so quickly.

## **ANALYTICAL**

The genius of your Analytical talent begins with the way your mind works as it automatically formulates penetrating questions. Your questions have a common theme in that they are always “truth seeking.” Your genius analytical questions seem to drill down with question after question until the truth is uncovered. Questions of “How you know . . .?” “Why?” “What evidence do you have . . .?” and “Can you prove it . . .?” are constantly in your mind. But these questions only lead to the deeper aspects of your genius Analytical talent. The ultimate genius of the Analytical talent involves the quality of your decisions, problem solving and planning capabilities. Armed with the information generated through your penetrating questions, you get to the rock-bottom issues that form a basis for the highest quality of real decision making, problem solving, and strategic planning. Moreover, your questions give you the facts and information needed for excellence in decision making and planning.

## **ARRANGER**

The genius of your Arranger talent begins with what you can see and perceive. You can see patterns and perceive how things go together or could go together. Whereas most people only see things as isolated items, you see groupings and connections. The genius of your arranger perception comes to light in that you can take many different items, bits of information, factors, people, and/or events and then see patterns among and between them. This enables and empowers you to arrange items, facts and information, people, and the many things that must come together for successful events and activities. You are a genius at coordinating people and events because of your Arranger talent. Accordingly you can “multi-task” like few others. You can deal with chaotic situations by seeing how to combine and coordinate as you will see connections and linkages. But the ultimate genius of your Arranger talent is seen in what you do after you have completed a project. You go back and arrange and rearrange in your mind what you did. This results in increased effectiveness and efficiency each time you use your arranger talent.

## **BELIEF**

The genius of your Belief talent starts with the fact that you have some very deeply-held beliefs about what is true, what is unchanging, and what can be, and always will be, dependable. These beliefs go very deep. They provide personal power to stand strong no matter what. This is central to your character. But the genius of your Belief strength is what results from those beliefs. From your beliefs, you generate meaning, purpose, and direction for your life and all you do. This meaning, purpose, and direction translate into a tremendous amount of power, drive, and motivation within you. So long as you revolve your life around your deepest values and beliefs, you will experience motivation, drive, and determination to make monumental impacts in the lives of individuals as well as groups and organizations.

## **COMMAND**

The genius of your Command talent begins with the fact that you can and will impact others, and you will do so with great power. Your genius strength of Command gives you great courage to boldly enter into a crisis and dangerous situations. It is as if you have even more clarity of thought about what needs to be done when there is an emergency. You have the courage to step in and take charge when people are threatened and when there are threatening circumstances. In emergencies, you have clarity, a willingness to voice your ideas and people appreciate your willingness to step up and confront dangers. In these situations you will impact all around you. Similarly, you are willing to see the way through conflicts and misunderstandings by bringing to light what is often hidden. While some get nervous because you can be so powerful, everyone is grateful when your strength of Command addresses emergencies, crises, conflicts, and danger.

## **COMMUNICATION**

The genius of your Communication talent is found in the profound fact that you can find words for your thoughts and your feelings. Whereas many people have lots of good ideas, they often stumble in finding the words that capture and convey their good thoughts. Even more people suffer from not being able to find the words that best describe and transmit their feelings. Yet, you can do this with ease. But the genius of your Communication talent doesn't end with your ability to find words for your thoughts and feelings. You can find words for the thoughts and feelings of others. This means that in interactions, you can help other people express their thoughts and feelings as is seen in the way that you can often complete people's sentences or find the word that they cannot find in expressing their feelings. As a result of these aspects of the genius of your Communication talent, you can form deep, meaningful, and bonded relationships and help others do the same.

## **COMPETITION**

The genius of your Competition talent begins with the tremendous energy, drive, and determination within you. You want to succeed. You demand success for yourself and you measure that success in terms of where you stand in comparison to others. For you, second place is sometimes seen as another word for "loser." But the drive to win, succeed, and achieve isn't focused on you alone. This can be a basis for leadership and impacting the lives of others. First, your "win attitude" is a model for others. Second, your competition is often turned into being a source of inspiration for others. Finally, you can use your competition talent to stimulate others to strive for higher levels of performance and productivity. You are someone who grabs the attention of others and they begin to believe that they too can achieve.

## **CONNECTEDNESS**

The genius of your Connectedness talent provides you with a very unique way of seeing events, people, and the world. To you there are no accidents. Your way of seeing events is to recognize that everything that happens is caused by something or someone. Likewise, what is happening right now will have a "ripple" effect into the future. Similarly, you see people in terms of the accumulative events and interaction that formed them and moved them to this moment. Accordingly, this moment and the attitudes that people take to their circumstances will form their future. Extending this way of seeing to the world in general, you see the past, present, and future as connected and you see that there is a "master plan" or "Master's plan" at work at all times. Your genius talent of Connectedness provides a way of "making sense of the nonsense" around us and generating meaning and purpose for yourself. When you share what you can see with the genius of your Connectedness talent, you help others gain hope as you help them see the past and "connect the dots" of their past in a more meaningful way. In like manner, you help people see possibilities for the future by making choices now that build a positive future.

## **CONSISTENCY**

Your genius strength of Consistency involves both the way you think and process information and the way you see what is fair and equitable. Whereas others often take a long time to determine what is fair and equitable, to you it is obvious. You can quickly determine what should be done so that problems are solved in ways that treat everyone in a just and equal manner. This process of determining what is equitable often involves processing a great deal of information. But the genius of your Consistency talent sorts through information and comes to equitable decisions so quickly that you may not see anything special about what you do because you do it with such ease. In your relationships, you strive to treat everyone equally and consistently. This helps you win the confidence of others. You are a great, fair, and just thinker because of your Consistency talent.

## **CONTEXT**

The genius of your Context talent is found in the way you think about the past and use that form of thinking to learn, plan, and solve problems. The present is important to you, but in your mind, the present is best understood by seeking to understand what has led up to the present. Thus, your mind often goes backwards and looks for what has caused what we are experiencing today. This look to the past gives great wisdom for understanding the present and forms a basis for making informed decisions and plans in the present and for the future. The genius of your Context way of thinking provides you with a basis for making high quality decisions and plans and for problem-solving. In addition, as you apply the genius of your Context way of thinking when you learn, you will learn with great understanding which results in high achievement.

## **DELIBERATIVE**

The genius of your Deliberative talent is found in the quality of your decisions, choices, values, and the directions you decide to pursue. Your deliberative genius involves thinking and the fact that you will take multiple things into consideration every time you make a decision or a plan. The genius of your Deliberative talent allows you to look at an issue from multiple sides. You will “play the devil’s advocate” as you think through alternatives, values, and propositions, and you will look at multiple sides as you are learning. You will slow down the process whenever you are learning, planning, or deciding. But this does not mean you are “slow minded.” Quite the opposite. This is part of your genius and results in very high quality decisions and a depth of understanding.

## **DEVELOPER**

The genius of your Developer talent begins with what you can see in other people. You can see talents, strengths, and potential in others that they often cannot see in themselves. But this is just the beginning. You can also see what people can do to develop their talents, strengths, and potential. It is as if you see “stepping stones” for moving people from where they are to higher levels of development. But it doesn’t stop there. You

become energized and determined to stimulate people to move, grow and develop to higher and higher levels of personal effectiveness. Next, you are particularly perceptive in noticing even the smallest amount of progress people make as they grow and develop. This leads to your mirroring back to people their progress. Accordingly, you are a great source of encouragement and a stimulator of personal progress as you can see ahead of time what people can become and as you note their progress. The great thing about all of this is how alive you become as you stimulate others with your Developer talent.

## **DISCIPLINE**

The genius of your Discipline talent involves your level of personal productivity and the accuracy with which you produce things. Your level of productivity and your level of accuracy stem from the way you can structure tasks and your environment. This ability to structure is key to you being productive and to your accuracy. You can take complex tasks with multiple stages and identify the steps needed to complete the tasks. Next, you structure the environment and organize the actions needed to complete the tasks. Finally, you begin organizing, re-organizing, and structuring each action step that must be complete in order to produce things accurately. Finally, the genius of your discipline talent identifies the fastest and most efficient methods while maintaining the highest quality.

## **EMPATHY**

The genius of your Empathy talent involves your ability to form high quality, deep, personal understanding and relationships with others. You have an unusual and beautiful ability to feel into what it feels like to be another person. You can often feel what someone else feels without them saying a word. As a result, you can form very close, intimate relationships with people. The genius of Empathy has profound effects on others because they feel so deeply understood. Many people feel like they come healthier and more at peace being in your presence because your understanding of people goes beyond the words they can find to express themselves. While it may be hard on you to hear the pain of others, they will feel deeply indebted to you because you can understand them at such profound levels. The genius of Empathy makes you a great lover of other people and they are fortunate to have you as a friend.

## **FOCUS**

The genius of your Focus talent begins with what you can do with your mind. You can focus your attention to an unusual level of concentration. That concentration enables you to amass facts and information, read with clarity of understanding, and solve problems with great precision. You can concentrate to the extent that people may come into a room you are in, and you may not hear or see them. While others pride themselves with their ability to multi-task, you know that for you, you are most productive when you concentrate on one thing at a time. Your focusing talent results in prolonged concentration to address and solve complex problems and planning processes. You learn

in great depth, and because of your focusing, when you learn, plan and solve problems, your recall is remarkable.

## **FUTURISTIC**

The genius of your Futuristic talent begins with your incredible ability to see the future. Your ability to envision the future provides an unusual and creative way of planning and problem solving. When confronted by a problem, you will envision where you are heading and then structure your problem solving so that each solution provides a stepping stone into the future. Likewise, all planning is done in light of the visions you have about the future. Of course your Futuristic talent genius gives you a powerful basis for leadership. As Robert Greenleaf noted long ago, the great leader has a ready answer to the profound question: “What are you trying to do?” You know what you are trying to do because your Futuristic talent gives you clear pictures of the future you want to build. Never forget that your visions of the future will excite the imagination of others and they will be inspired because of what your genius of Futuristic can help them see. Make your visions known to everyone because they give others hope and optimism.

## **HARMONY**

The genius of your Harmony talent stems from what you can see and how you respond to what you see. First, you can see where people can come together when they are in conflict. Often those in conflict are absolutely blind to how to resolve their conflicts because their differences seem so insurmountable. But you can often see where people in conflict could come together and resolve their differences. The second aspect of the genius of your Harmony talent is found in the way you work with people who are in conflict. Usually, one-on-one and one at a time, you will meet with those in conflict and help each person to clarify their own position and come to see the point of view of the person with whom they are in conflict. In so doing, you help conflicting people move to reconciliations. The genius of your Harmony talent is greatly needed in families, small groups, and large organization. It is as if you are the “glue” that hold relationships together. Unfortunately you sometimes do not receive the credit you deserve, as much of you best work is done behind the scenes. But know that even if no one knows but you, you make a significant and a very positive difference in all of the groups and relationships that you are in.

## **IDEATION**

The genius of your Ideation talent begins with your love of ideas and the way you so quickly learn new ideas, concepts, and principles. But you are not passive. It is as if you take ideas and then begin spinning them around in your mind. With each new idea you learn, you tend to think about it over and over—spinning it around with the many other ideas you already have. The result of this thinking, turning, and spinning around of new ideas with what you already know does two things. First, you generate new connections and insights about ideas and their implications. Second, the spinning of your ideas often results in new ideas. Therefore, the genius of the Ideation talent is the creativity of

generating new ideas and insights as a result of contemplating and reviewing the ideas you have learned.

### **INCLUDER**

The genius of your Includer talent involves your ability to see outsiders and those who have been marginalized. You can see people who are physically on the outside, but most remarkably, you can discern who feels left out even though they may be physically in the middle of a group. But your genius talent of Includer does not stop with just seeing those who are physically outside and emotionally marginalized. You take action to bring people into the group. In fact, this talent seems to give you an enormous amount of courage to reach out and actively bring the outsider in. The beauty of your Includer talent is that you can build relationships with literally anyone. But your specialty in relationship building is with the “invisible people” and people who others ignore. You instinctively know what to say and how to include those who others ignore and leave out.

### **INDIVIDUALIZATION**

The genius of your Individualization talent is that you see each and every person and a one of a kind, distinct individual. But more than that, you see the particular factors, qualities, characteristics, thoughts, and perception that make each person distinct. You see each person as a mosaic of highly individual factors each of which contribute to a person’s distinctiveness. This includes both personal qualities and past events that have formed the person. You are curious about their individual characteristics and you find yourself thinking and asking questions about what makes each person so distinct. This results in people feeling special and prized by your attention. But all of this simply lays a foundation for the genius of your Individualization. Your genius is that armed with all of this thinking and question asking, you attempt to interact with each person based on their individual qualities. This leads to meaningful and very helpful relationships.

### **INPUT**

The genius of your Input talent is based on your curiosity. It is as if your curiosity knows no limits. You want to know about everything. Question after question propels you to learn more and more. You want facts, information, concepts, and principles. You become excited by your own questions and even more excited when you find answers to your questions. Sometimes you turn your curiosity to people and want to learn as much as possible about them, but for the most part you are driven to learn in general and in specialized areas of knowledge. As you learn, you try to keep your acquired facts organized, but this is a challenge since you continue to collect more and more information, and there is simply much to learn. Finally, the genius of your Input talent wants to share what you have learned. You can be a great communicator of what you have learned, and you get really excited about telling others about the latest thing you have learned.

## **INTELLECTION**

The genius of your Intellection talents stems from the quality of your thinking. You think about ideas, concepts, and principles in great depth. It is as if you hold discussions in your mind about ideas, concepts, observations, and new learnings. This results in deep learning, deep understanding, and deep appreciation for the best knowledge. Out of this deep processing, you often come to new insights and understandings. But the greatest aspect of the genius of your intellection is the wisdom that you gain from your in-depth thinking and internal discussions. You can think by yourself for hours, but never doubt what results: wisdom, clarity, and a firm foundation for action planning and decision making.

## **LEARNER**

The genius of your Learner talent begins with the fact that you love to learn in many areas. It doesn't matter to you what you are learning, just so that you keep on learning something each and every day. But the genius of your learning doesn't stop there. You have thought a lot about the learning process. You know how you learn and you know what best contributes to you learning effectively and efficiently. This self-understanding provides a basis for understanding and helping others learn. With little effort, you can analyze the learning habits of others and think through how they can learn most effectively. Based on this understanding of the learning process in yourself and others, you can establish ingenious programs and services to help others become better learners, high achievers, and be better prepared for the future.

## **MAXIMIZER**

The genius of your Maximizer talent starts with what you can see in people. You can see the strengths and talents, the potentials and the capabilities, and you can see the emerging abilities within people even before they can see them. But this is only the beginning of the genius of your Maximizer talent. You can literally see what people could be like if they were to fully develop and maximize the talents, potential, and emerging abilities within them. This results in you having an incredible impact in the lives of others. As you hold up pictures and mirrors of what you see in others, you help them form new concepts of themselves that build hope and motivation to achieve and be what they have the capacity to be. Moreover, you are a great "coach" in moving people to their greatest potential and in moving people into roles where their potential can be lived out.

## **POSITIVITY**

The genius of your Positivity talent is found in the impact that you can and will have in the lives of other people. You see the best in people. You want to bring out the best in people. You organize environments so that people can become what they are best capable of being. But you do not "sit on the sidelines" and simply hope that these good things will just happen. You get into the middle of things and stimulate people to strive for the best they can be. As a result, people became more productive, effective, and grow because of

you. Your genius is found in the impact that you have on groups and individuals. Simply stated everyone gets better if you are nearby and interacting with them. As a result, you are a most valuable part of any organization and you have the talent to be a great leader, a great manager, and a great supervisor.

### **RELATOR**

The genius of your Relator talent is found in the fact that you can form relationships with virtually anyone. While you prefer relationships that are real and genuine, you have the capacity to form relationships with almost anyone. You can form relationships with people older, younger, or the same age as yourself. You can form relationships with people who have more, less, or the same status as yourself. You can also form relationships at different levels of closeness or intimacy. For example, you have at least four levels of relationships. At the fourth level, you have lots of acquaintances. On the third level are a group of relationships that are closer. On the second level, you have a group of friends. But you also have an even closer group of people, people in your “tight group.” While there are usually six or less in your tight group and many or few in the other three groups, the genius of your Relator strength is your ability to form relationships on these multiple levels of intimacy.

### **RESPONSIBILITY**

The genius of your Responsibility theme is found in the depth and the quality of relationships you are able to form with people. Because you are a person of your word, people trust you. It is this trust that bonds you to others and bonds others to you. Your ability to build trusting relationships is foundational to any influence relationship. Therefore you tend to have a highly persuasive and influential impact on people. This talent can be used in leadership as people will only willingly follow those they trust, and trust is what you have the genius to generate in others. The final aspect of the genius of your Responsibility theme involves the level of commitment you can generate in others. This stems from the fact that you make such deep commitments to others and from the fact that you make such deep commitments to their full development and personal fulfillment.

### **RESTORATIVE**

The genius of your Restorative talent is found in the way you can think and fix things. This is key to all problem solving. But your ability to fix goes beyond patching things together. The way you restore things involves bringing them back to life. Accordingly, you can have a restorative effect on relationships and in fact, entire organizations. The genius of your Restorative strength is that you are so good at figuring out what is not working, resolving that, and then guiding people to a way of being healthy and highly functional.

## **SELF ASSURANCE**

The genius of your Self Assurance talent begins with your confidence. You have a quality that is often called resilience. This means that you can “bounce back.” Accordingly, you have an attitude that no matter what happens to you, you will in fact “bounce back” and quite probably reach higher heights even if you momentarily fail. The genius here is that you not only have confidence, but an inner compass for deciding what you need to do and how you need to do it.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The genius of your Significance talent begins and ends with the difference you are determined to make. You cannot stand the thought of living and dying and there being no difference. You are bound and determined to make a difference and you want that difference to be significant. There is great energy, power, determination, and motivation within you to make a significant and lasting difference in the world. While others may consider you egotistical this is not your motive. You want to make a significant difference because there is a lot wrong in the world and you are trying to make the world better. At the same time, you want to be recognized for the difference you make. But the difference you make is the driving force.

## **STRATEGIC**

The genius of your Strategic talent involves the way you think and generate alternatives. When faced with a problem or a dilemma you can quickly generate multiple alternatives to circumvent obstacles that prevent your progress. Sometimes you think in a backwards manner by first visualizing the outcome you want to produce and then generating multiple alternative paths to get to that objective. But your genius of Strategic doesn't simply begin and end with generating alternatives. The real genius of this strength is found in the way that you can quickly sort through the various alternative paths and determine the one that will work best and most efficiently.

## **WOO**

The genius of your Woo talent involves the impact you can have on other people and the ease with which you can win them over. You have an incredible ability to meet new people and almost magically know what to say in order to draw others out. Other people love the attention you give them and the way that you can affirm a person so quickly. Of course you love the process and the challenge of meeting new people. And people love it when you connect with them. The genius of this talent is that you cannot only quickly connect with people but you can be a catalyst in helping people connect with one another. Make no mistake about it, when you enter a crowd, the crowd will be different because you were there. In fact, you have the capacity to transform a crowd of disconnected people into a group and this is no small accomplishment.