

TAPPING INTO GENIUS

How Purposeful Mindsets Drive Performance

An ongoing study of the mindsets of business leaders when delivering their most extraordinary results

By Pontish Yeramyan & Eric Jackson

SUMMARY

A large-scale study was conducted to investigate the mindsets of business leaders when they were at their most effective and delivering their best results. In-depth structured interviews were conducted with 667 executives over a ten-year period. Eight distinct mindset themes were identified, one of the most common being a “Purposeful” theme, exhibited by 82% of the leaders. A closer examination revealed two major subcategories of the Purposeful theme: 1. Impact on the World, and 2. God/Spirituality. The unique attitudes and beliefs associated with these subcategories were further categorized, and are described in this paper. The Purposeful mindset theme points to a contextual frame that is important to leaders, and seems to imbue them with a level of personal power and sense of mission that translates into high levels of accomplishment.

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, Gap International’s Leveraging Genius Institute has been testing the hypothesis that a leader’s mindset, at any given moment, has an overwhelming impact on their performance.

The Institute is committed to studying and elucidating the mindsets, or attitudes and beliefs, that are present when executives perform at their best, delivering exceptional results in the business and with their people. Gap International calls this “tapping into their Genius.” By conducting in-depth structured interviews, at least part of the puzzle has been solved: why the same person creates great things in some settings and not in others; and on some days but not all the time. Along the way, the interview findings resulted in numerous breakthrough business results for the executives studied.

The results of this research with more than 500 executives were reported in the paper, *Tapping Into Genius*¹, published by Gap International in 2014. The paper concluded that a person’s “mindset in any moment impacts their mood, their clarity of thinking, their sense of strength and wellbeing, and their ability to influence others to accomplish great things.” Researchers studied how executives operationalize their Genius mindsets moment by moment, with the hypothesis that doing so leads to superior performance. The research confirmed that when people perform at their best, certain types of attitudes and beliefs propel them to achieve exceptional outcomes. At any given moment, executives can lead in the context of their Genius—or not.

There were two seminal findings in the original research. First was that Genius mindsets exhibited eight definable themes (**TABLE 1**).

The specific expression of a Genius mindset looks different for different people. Each individual leader revealed some combination of the eight Genius mindset themes in different ways. Their effectiveness seems to come from leading in the context of the Genius mindset that gives them the most power.

¹ Yeramyan, P. and Jackson, E. (2014, October 7). Tapping Into Genius. Retrieved from <http://www.leveraginggenius.com/tapping-into-genius>

TABLE 1
Eight major mindset themes and their 25 subcategories

MINDSET THEMES	SUBCATEGORIES
Purposeful	Impact on the world God/spirituality
Other People	Helping others, care of people, setting people up to win Collaboration, contribution Connection, love, relationships Appreciation of others, people mattering and having potential
Me with Me	Self-acceptance, self-awareness Confidence, trust in oneself Ownership, accountability Integrity, wholeness, balance
Positive Outlook	Freedom, choice Possibility Optimism, positivity
Experience of Life	Fun, joy, ease, happiness Environment, space Appreciation, gratitude
Maximize Possibilities	Finding solutions Structure and logic Optimize, make the most
Growth/ Evolution	Learning, curiosity, discovery Innovation and creation Risk, challenge, "going for it"
Get it Done	Perseverance, persistence, follow-through Hard work, effort Outcome focus, winning

The second major finding was that leaders, when achieving their highest accomplishments, displayed two predominant mindset themes: "Purposeful" and "Other People." This finding substantiated the claim that most leaders are connected to a larger purpose, or something bigger than themselves, when their Genius mindset is active.

The research has since been expanded to include 667 executive interviews. Of these leaders, 82% expressed Purposeful themes within their Genius mindsets. This paper presents research findings related to how individuals experience and express Purposeful mindset themes. It explores how these expressions are unique to each individual, and often deeply personal in nature.

METHOD

As described in the *Tapping Into Genius* paper, the Leveraging Genius Institute trained 134 consultants to conduct highly-structured interviews ("Genius Inquiries") of business executives. The interviews were designed to uncover, study, and map the different combinations of ideas, perspectives and logic systems that were present when leaders were delivering their best performance. The purpose was to develop a precise and replicable understanding of these mindsets. The consultants received extensive training and certification to conduct the Inquiries, and participated in a rigorous annual recertification process.

Once a Genius mindset was identified as being present for a leader, the interviewers explored more deeply to determine how that person expressed their Genius and how it influenced them operationally. An interview was not complete until it was clear, to both the interviewer and the interviewee, as to how the individual's ideas, attitudes and beliefs were organized and linked to the results they produced. Every interview continued until the relevant themes were explicated clearly, and the logic system they governed made sense.

RESULTS

The Genius mindsets of 82% of leaders interviewed (549 of 667) exhibited the Purposeful theme. The ideas and attitudes related to the Purposeful theme fell into two subcategories. Of 549 executives with a Purposeful mindset theme, 91% referred explicitly to their Impact on the World, 42% referred explicitly to their relationship to God/Spirituality, and 32% expressed both.

To clarify further the differences between these two subcategories, expressions of "Impact on the World" tend to be self-directed or self-prescribed. They are about making something in the world bigger or better, or doing something meaningful. Expressions of the "God/Spirituality" subcategory tend to refer to a higher power outside of the individual. These expressions are more about being part of something bigger or being put here (on Earth) for a reason.

Executives expressed the two subcategories of the Purposeful theme in attitudes and beliefs that fell into ten discernible types. **FIGURES 1 AND 2** show the specific types of attitudes and beliefs as a percent of the executives who expressed that Purposeful subcategory. Although similar in character, the groups of attitudes and beliefs within each subcategory are distinct, each with their own flavor and texture, and with little overlap.

The specific nature and expression of what Purposeful means is different for each person, and the way they operationalize this Genius theme in their day-to-day work and lives can vary greatly. For example, executives who had attitudes and beliefs in the "Impact on the World" subcategory may have said, "Make the biggest difference" or "Leave a legacy for future generations." Executives who had attitudes and beliefs in the "God/Spirituality" subcategory may have expressed, "I am here for a reason" or "Do God's will." Examples for the various types of attitudes and beliefs for each subcategory are shown in **TABLES 2 AND 3**.

FIGURE 1

Percent of executives expressing types of attitudes and beliefs within the Purposeful subcategory "Impact on the World"

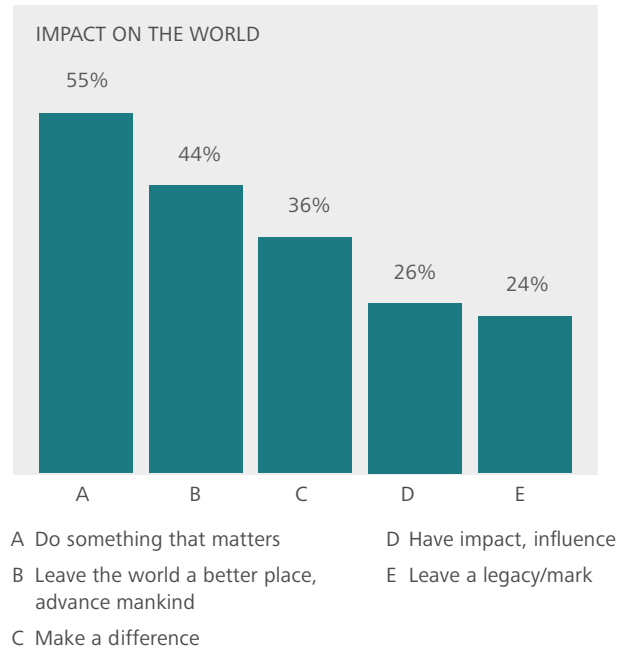


FIGURE 2

Percent of executives expressing types of attitudes and beliefs within the Purposeful subcategory "God/Spirituality"

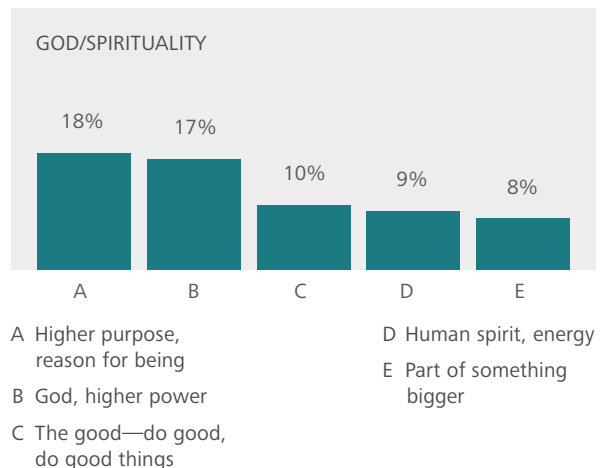


TABLE 2

Types of attitudes and beliefs within the Purposeful subcategory "Impact on the World," with examples

TYPE OF ATTITUDE/BELIEF	EXAMPLES
Leave the world a better place, advance mankind	Contribute to the evolution of humanity Make the world peaceful
Make a difference	Make the biggest difference you can Take a leadership role to make a difference
Impact, influence	Impact people Have an impact wherever you go
Leave a legacy/mark	Leave a legacy for the future generations Stand out
Do something that matters	Make life meaningful Have purpose

TABLE 3

Types of attitudes and beliefs within the Purposeful subcategory "God/Spirituality," with examples

TYPE OF ATTITUDE/BELIEF	EXAMPLES
Higher purpose, reason for being	I am here for a reason Find what you're meant to do
God/higher power	Do God's will Stay close to God
The good—do good, do good things	Always do good for others Good leads to more good
Part of something bigger	Contribute to the whole You are part of a bigger picture
Human spirit and energy	The energy you put out will come back to you There is nothing stronger than the human spirit

One fascinating finding throughout this research was that while operative mindsets felt comfortable, or even obvious, to the executive, most leaders were surprised and intrigued by the clarity and specificity of their own attitudes and beliefs. While operating powerfully in the background, these attitudes and beliefs were not necessarily consciously applied in the foreground. When executives came face to face with their own logic system, including a detailed mapping of their own Genius, it was often like meeting their true selves, or getting to know themselves in a new way.

DISCUSSION

"Leading with purpose" is a frequent topic in current business literature. It is often said that many effective leaders are purposeful, or that leaders might benefit from leading purposefully. However, it is harder to explain exactly how leading with purpose is activated to influence what leaders see, what they consider important, the decisions they make, how they lead people, and the outcomes they achieve.

A mystery shared by many executives is why they feel so powerful and unstoppable on some days or at some moments, and so much less effective at other times. How can they be so disciplined in delivering work products day after day, and so undisciplined with their own exercise program? How can they learn to be open-hearted and gracious with some people and not with others?

This research demonstrated that when operating at their best, most executives do so in the context of a Purposeful mindset theme. Within this theme, they have ideas and attitudes that guide them through their day—whether they are consciously aware of them in any moment or not. Addressing the Purposeful mindset theme, the *Tapping into Genius* article concludes, "Sustaining this kind of mindset in the midst of difficult circumstances or even crises seemed to give executives a powerful perspective on making the kind of difference they want to make. It is speculated that the frequency, intensity and duration of a Purposeful mindset theme provides important context for decision-making and leading."

In terms of its power and influence, it seems as though the Purposeful mindset theme may govern other themes within a person's Genius. Certainly, when an organization's purpose captures employees' hearts and minds, it can leverage a previously untapped reservoir of engagement, energy and Genius that can propel the organization to achieve breakthrough performance.

CONCLUSION

Mindset has a significant impact on performance. When people perform at their best, they are governed by certain types of attitudes and beliefs that propel them to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

As with all Genius mindset themes, the Purposeful theme can be activated moment by moment, and doing so seems to lead to superior performance. This common theme takes many forms when expressed by individuals, but unmistakably represents a meaningful or higher purpose for being, and a commitment to make an important contribution to people or the world, beyond the leader's self-interest.

Not all highly successful executives were found to have Purposeful themes in their Genius. Further, most leaders who did also had additional mindset themes that fueled their inspiration and achievements. Part of the profound power of this work resides in the possibility to tap into a variety of Genius mindset themes, at will, to drive exceptional performance.

This paper advances Gap International's commitment and progress to study high accomplishment in a non-traditional way. The Leveraging Genius Institute is continuing its research to advance the understanding of how Genius mindsets shape extraordinary performance and outcomes.

THE LEVERAGING GENIUS INSTITUTE

The Leveraging Genius Institute provides research, insights, tools, and programs that support leaders to discover their Genius, develop their people, and grow their organizations to deliver exceptional results.

Our multi-disciplinary research team is dedicated to studying the science behind our concept of Genius and expanding its reach and application through products, programs and methodologies. Team members include researchers with advanced degrees in linguistics, psychology and neuroscience, who share the passion for all things Genius, and a dedication to bringing that knowledge to business performance and leadership.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Pontish Yeramyian Founder and CEO

For more than 30 years, Ms. Yeramyian has worked with CEOs of Fortune and Global 500 companies in leading major growth initiatives that change the trajectory of performance. She has created groundbreaking programs in organizational alignment and leveraging the Genius of leaders and teams. She has dedicated her life to individuals and organizations making a difference in the world and going beyond the limits of what they see possible.

Eric Jackson, Ph.D. Chief Innovation Officer

Dr. Eric Jackson leads the Leveraging Genius Institute, a team of multi-disciplinary researchers in the fields of linguistics, psychology and neuroscience. His creativity and leadership have been instrumental in developing new tools and approaches to accelerate business growth and impact leadership. Prior to his current role, Dr. Jackson led research and development for all of Gap International's programs and services.