

Intelligence is only one sign of greatness?

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The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge, but imagination.
Albert Einstein

Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.
Stephen Hawking

Einstein was a genius. Hawking is a genius.

But even Einstein admitted that genius, unlike stupidity, has its limits.

In our modern society, we place value on certain human qualities. Among them are athletic prowess, business acumen and yes, intelligence. We are fascinated by the geniuses in our midst, those uber-smart people who can rhyme off a litany of facts, or solve complex mathematical problems in seconds.

We view young, musical virtuosos as geniuses or prodigies.

The human mind is so complex we have yet to grasp all of its intricacies. Sure, we can poke around a person's grey matter while they're awake on the operating table, but we have yet to understand memory, or how thoughts and emotions emerge from simple electrical impulses.

Is there such a thing as natural or inherent talent? Are geniuses born, or created?

Intelligence has historically been associated with greatness, but there are many examples to the contrary. There's no dispute that Einstein was super smart, but he used his influence against his own pacifism to convince the U.S. to develop the atomic bomb. His theory of relativity is still a go-to formula for modern scientists, but maybe one day it will be proven wrong.

Einstein did well for himself financially, and was reported to be worth \$1 million when he died in 1955 at age 76. But his estate made more money than he ever did. His estate earned more than \$20 million from a 2007 deal with Disney for the "Baby Einstein" brand.

Hawking pulls in a pretty penny and a lot of money came from his books. He admits, though that money is "a facilitator, as a means to an end" whether it is for ideas, or health, or security, but never as an end in itself.

Historically, geniuses who died destitute included Tesla, Van Gogh, Edgar Allen Poe, Socrates, Franz Schubert and Rembrandt. During my 30-plus-year career, I've met literally thousands and thousands of people. I've interviewed countless geniuses and millionaires. Most indicated that their success involved a lot of dedication, commitment, hard work, perseverance and yes, being in the right place at the right time = luck. Of course, they leveraged their skills and talents, mustered as much "smarts" as they could. But few said it was their intelligence that paved the way.

Thomas Edison was famous for coining the phrase "genius is one percent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration."

Most would agree that's true.

I have a colleague who is a card-carrying member of Mensa Canada, known as the "High IQ Society." While he brags about it

from time to time, I'm not sure if this fact alone has helped him achieve relative success.

I like to think my 'smarts' tend to be social, common sense wisdom, and not necessarily mathematical, problem-solving skills. In my case, this 'common sense is genius dressed in its working clothes' (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

When I think about all of those 'greats' I've written about, I think about the rags to riches tales; the risk-takers and unsung heroes. I think about the humanitarians and the social bridge builders. I think about the architects of change.

We all have it in us, you know. And we all learn differently.

All three of my kids are quite different in their styles and ways they approach 'book learning.' I can see the brightness of these young bulbs, but I can also see how the 'system' limits their potential. In many ways my kids are wise beyond their years but they all seem hemmed in by the rules, regulations and everyday realities of our modern society.

My oldest daughter Lexie is smart and compassionate. Her social skills and pleasant nature help define her.

My son is a bit of an anomaly. He can absorb knowledge like a sponge, but only when it suits him. He disregards what he deems irrelevant, mundane or stupid. He's quick to pass judgement on inequities and detests things like government waste and greed.

My youngest daughter Kyleigh is tough, assertive, vocal and yes, bright.

All of them have my razor-sharp wit and have learned from the master of sarcasm. I believe there's much more than brainpower that will help them succeed in life.

There are many ways in which we can all train ourselves and our brains to expand. There are no shortage of experiments and exercise to improve our aptitude.

I have found that word games, even the host of smart phone apps, can be good for the grey muscles. I like to play video chess, poker and yahtzee. I would encourage everyone to read 'books, newspaper and magazine articles, even blogs, every day. We criticize our teens for spending too much time playing video games, but there is evidence to suggest it helps in areas of coordination, problem-solving, memory, attention and concentration.

Most of us are not born geniuses. But we can all improve our mental agility.

Along with exercising our brain, it's a good idea to hone our compassion, zest for life and sense of humour, to achieve 'greatness.'