

The Gifted Adult:
A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius
by Mary-Elaine Jacobsen, Psy.D.

Read and discussed on-line by Dorothea Panosh, Nan Brennan, Molly Craker, and Juli Baker

This book is written as a self-help tool for the millions of people who may not have been identified as “gifted” or “talented” in school, yet may possess special gifts or talents. Often these areas of giftedness are accompanied by a set of personality traits and behaviors which if not properly supported and channeled can lead to a variety of school, work, and relationship concerns in one’s adult life.

It is easiest to assess oneself while reading this book, but it is hard to avoid thinking of others, both colleagues and students, who fit the descriptions as well. When reviewing the author’s checklists, we will all find areas where we see ourselves, but what sets Everyday Geniuses apart from the rest of us is a combination of Intensity, Complexity, and Drive.

Jacobsen describes Intensity as an umbrella trait that “encompasses verbal agility, excitability, a strong sense of humor, exceptional concentration, empathy, emotional sensitivity, and high energy.” “It is the result of a sensory, neural, and emotional network that is more receptive and more responsive, extending higher, deeper, and farther than that of the average person”(258). She describes this as a quantitative difference.

Complexity on the other hand is described as a qualitative difference. Everyday Geniuses are complex thinkers who are able to process information on a variety of levels simultaneously. They often have flashes of insight several steps ahead of the rest of their colleagues. This often leads others to perceive them as having far out ideas that later seem to be right on target.

Everyday Geniuses are also motivated differently, which is what Jacobsen terms Drive. These people are not merely driven to succeed, but rather they are driven to be change agents. They have “insatiable curiosity, high standards (perfectionism), perseverance, independence, and self-motivation” (279). They make excellent teachers, and therefore we may see many Everyday Geniuses (EG) among our faculty.

We may also see many EGs in our classrooms. They may be harder to identify though, because unsupported or unrecognized EG can lead to masking behaviors. Jacobsen provides lengthy descriptions of what she terms “collapsed” and “exaggerated” behaviors which result from EGs trying to fit in as normal

people all their lives. They may appear to be underachievers or they may display attention getting behavior.

While this book was an interesting read (although sometimes painfully redundant and a bit obtuse) it works better as a tool to identify and understand the behaviors of Everyday Genius than it does to show us how to help them.

Considering the length of the book (almost 400 pages) and the complexity of her explanations, this is not a book our group would recommend to someone for a casual read. If, on the other hand, you suspect you are an EG, or you have a student who you would like to better understand, it could be an illuminating source of information. We believe that many of the students we work with, including those seeking GED/HSEDs, may fall into this category. It may be their unsupported or unrecognized giftedness that made it difficult for them to conform to the requirements of the school system.