

THE GENIUS OF PERSISTENCE: PART 2

It's a common fallacy that great endeavors are accomplished with effortless grace—that the talent, gifting and genius of some people is so great, and the opportunities so many, that outcomes are achieved “all at once” with little effort.

WE TEND TO FOCUS ON THE TEN PERCENT CALLED GENIUS AND FORGET THE NINETY PERCENT CALLED PERSISTENCE.

Nineteenth century psychologist and philosopher William James observed that people of genius differ from ordinary people not by any innate quality of the brain, but in the aims and purposes on which they concentrate, and in the degree of concentration that they achieve.

Biographer David Maraniss observed in *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*,

"The difference between men is in the energy, in the strong will, in the settled purpose, in the invincible determination."

Napoleon called this quality the mental power *de fixer les objets longtemps sans être fatigué*—the power to concentrate on objectives for long periods of time without tiring.

Thomas Edison is a monumental example of the power of concentration.

The incandescent electric light bulb is a familiar symbol for a “bright idea” or a breakthrough flash of genius. This symbol arises from its association with Thomas Edison, inventor of the commercially viable light bulb (working models of the light bulb had been invented decades earlier, but none were deemed commercially viable).

EDISON'S INVENTIVE GENIUS HAS TAKEN ON MYTHIC PROPORTIONS. KNOWN AS THE “INVENTOR OF THE AGE,” EDISON'S RECORD OF 1, 093 U. S. PATENTS IS UNSURPASSED.

While his life is an example of the break through power of bold genius, it is also a shining example of persistence.

The light bulb—at least the commercially viable light bulb—was no flash of inventive genius (no pun intended). Edison began working on the problem of electric lighting in September 1878. The most difficult problem faced by Edison and his researchers was to discover a commercially viable material for the filament of the light bulb—the thread of material that glows when heated by an electric current. In his Menlo Park, New Jersey laboratory, Edison and his team of researchers worked for two years, from 1878-1880, in a process of trial, error and discovery. Edison was convinced that the best filament would come from plants. So, he contacted biologists from around the world, and he and his research team tested the carbonized filaments of no fewer than 6,000 vegetable growths.

"Laboratory life with Edison was a strenuous but joyous life for all, physically, mentally and emotionally. We worked long night hours during the week, frequently to the limits of human endurance..."

After two years of persistent and painstaking effort, Edison discovered that a carbonized bamboo-derived thread would glow for over 1200 hours, and could therefore serve as the filament material suitable for a commercially viable incandescent electric light bulb.

But, quick commercial success eluded Edison. It would take he and his research team two more years of painstaking work to create the system of energy (an electrical power station, dynamo generators, light fixtures and switches, and a system of wires to run the electricity to street lights, businesses and homes) that would make commercial electric lighting a reality in lower Manhattan in 1882.

EDISON BELIEVED THAT THE SECRET OF HIS SUCCESS WAS NOT HIS INVENTIVE GENIUS, BUT PERSISTENT EFFORT.

I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident," Edison, declared. "They came by work."

His life backed up his claim, as he invested eighteen to twenty hour days in creative labor, often grabbing a few hours of sleep in the laboratory atop a small roll-top desk. He believed that persistent effort contributed more to his success than genius, describing his accomplishments as ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration."

Edison is a reminder that even great intellectual genius will come to nothing if not accompanied by the genius of persistent effort.

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