



The advantage of disadvantage

The young artist who was told by their high school math teacher that they were lazy.

The son who was told he's going to screw up his life because he didn't want to become an accountant like his dad.

The employee who was passed over for a raise or a promotion and was, instead, given a growth plan to help them overcome their weaknesses in order to make it to the next level.

Even the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry – almost everything in this world is geared to point out what's wrong with us.

Customer complaints vastly outnumber compliments in most companies. Most employees complain about what their company does wrong before they rave about what their company does right. Politicians point out what the other party can't fix before offering their help to fix it.

It seems no matter where we turn, there is a whole crowd of people ready and willing to tell us what we're bad at, what we can't get right and where we're weak. It's a wonder anyone of us has any self-esteem left at the end of a day.

But there is huge advantage in disadvantage. The reason others see the failings in us is because they are looking in the wrong place.

Imagine if that the artist's math teacher realized his student had no natural aptitude for math and, instead of berating her, recommended she take more art classes to develop her natural abilities.

Imagine if the well intentioned father, realizing his son didn't want to follow in his footsteps, asked him what he did want to do and then did everything to support and nurture the things he wanted to do.

Imagine if a company devoted resources to helping us build on our strengths instead of pushing us to fix our weaknesses.



And imagine if psychologists identified the abnormal advantages we all have instead of labeling the abnormal disadvantages.

Take dyslexia, for example. A lot of really great entrepreneurs, like Richard Branson, are dyslexic. Instead of focusing on what he couldn't do, he figured out ways around it. He became a brilliant problem solver. A lot of dyslexics are good like that. It's a huge advantage they have.

Or the kid who is told at a young age that they have ADD - they are told they have a "deficit" and a "disorder." Why aren't they told that they have an amazing advantage - hyper-focus, a heightened ability to focus on something and devote an intense amount of energy to solving a problem or building something beyond what most people can do. They have an ability to get done in one day what takes others a week.

I have ADHD and it is one of the single greatest advantages I have. Sure it has its drawbacks. It's harder for me to focus on things that don't interest me. But all that means is I should focus on doing things that do interest me. I have an abnormal advantage and I feel sorry for all the people who aren't able to apply intense focus on something like those with ADD or ADHD.

The best teachers are the ones who tell us we can. The best parents tell us we should. The best companies show us what we can do. And the best politicians remind us what's possible if we work together instead of apart.

May we all discover what about us doesn't fit the norm and, instead of trying to hide or bury it, work to make that our single greatest advantage.