

## When Desire meets Judgment—Achievement

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Thomas Alva Edison, America’s greatest inventor, said, “The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are, first, hard work; second, stick-to-itiveness; third, common sense.” Many organizations have brought onboard that new employee whom they believed had all of those “three great essentials”, who looked great on paper, remarkable credentials, an excellent interview, references, high hopes, high enthusiasm—but—it all went terribly awry. After a period of time, ranging from days to years, the second essential of achievement according to Edison, “stick-to-itiveness”, goes AWOL, missing. It’s an all too common narrative. We’re left to wonder why. If only we could identify those *with it*, and avoid those *without it*. This gone missing stick-to-itiveness can be a very big deal—it is not inconsequential. Individual and team productivity, accomplishment, and ultimately the organizational bottom line suffer, at times with devastating consequences. Resources must be devoted to personnel issues, rather than the organizational mission. At some point personnel changes must be made, and of course the hiring and rehiring process is expensive, time consuming, and often stressful.

If stick-to-itiveness was as easy to measure and predict as the tensile strength of a batch of concrete, organizations would be able to simply measure it, and assign a thumbs up, or thumbs down. Take a quick measure, and get a quick answer. But of course we know the answer is not so simple. There are many variables which weigh into, and have input on, the uniquely human characteristic of motivation, perseverance, dependability, intestinal fortitude, drive, relentlessness, pursuit of accomplishment, bias for action, etc., i.e.—Edison’s stick-to-itiveness.

At Athena Assessment Inc., the examinations of the judgment scores of tens of thousands of individuals and teams, confirms for us what we already intuitively know. Judgment matters. Value clarity matters. Common sense matters. As much as judgment becomes stronger, the likelihood for success becomes greater. Inherent in the esoteric notion of success, nestled among many other traits, is the drive and desire to accomplish and to achieve, of course within the context of each individual’s personal notion of success. We see it in the data, over and over and over.

In Mel Gibson’s 1995 movie Braveheart, Robert the Bruce says to his father, “I don’t want to lose heart. I want to believe...” Robert the Bruce had the passion for accomplishment, which for him was motivating others to follow, to reign, and to rule. He had a drive for success. He bided his time. His stick-to-itiveness lasted his entire lifetime. For others the specifics of accomplishment are entirely different, uniquely their own, but the passion for success and

accomplishment exists just the same. As employers, wouldn't it be grand to be able to identify those who "don't want to lose heart", who "want to believe", and also those who actually have an *ability*, not just the *desire*, to accomplish and achieve? There are those with one, or both, or neither, and employers want to be able to make that determination, hopefully before they are brought into the organization.

Unfortunately, even after the identification of the potential terrific employee is made, and then hired, the employer often tumbles back to square one, wondering why the individual who looked so great on paper, who is blessed with a desire to achieve, who "wants to believe" in himself and his future, doesn't succeed. The big question becomes, how does an employer not only identify those who understand the concept of stick-to-itiveness, but who will actually put those concepts into concrete actions. What can we understand about those who not only have the desire, but whose actions match their desire, whose walk matches their talk?

Within the context of the Athena Quotient Assessment Instrument (AQ<sup>ai</sup>), we describe *judgment*—or more specifically, *evaluative judgment*—as the ability, when presented with an issue or problem or situation, to observe and understand the dynamics of the situation, to determine what actions will make the situation better, and ultimately to take action to improve the situation. This judgment is measured via the AQ<sup>ai</sup>. Also, the assumption is made that in order to be successful in most jobs, even entry level jobs, there must be a basic minimum level of good judgment, and that the individual does indeed have a desire to be successful. Without this minimum level of good judgment, no matter what the desire for achievement, potential is lacking and the individual will likely fail. However, even making the assumption that the individual meets the minimum level of solid basic good judgment, what is it that allows some individuals to succeed, where others don't?

In a context similar to Edison's "stick-to-itiveness", yet possibly more appropriate in some parts of today's culture, comedian Daniel Lawrence Whitney, better known as Larry the Cable Guy, rouses his audience with the phrase "git-r-done". His tag line, while funny, does make clear, and most people are able to easily conjure up real life examples of individuals in all walks and stations in life, from the highest levels of financial success to the most austere, of those with a propensity to "git-r-done", and those without. Whether an individual accomplishes, or not, is based to a vast extent, on their judgments and their values. Our study of thousands of individual judgment profiles indicates that both work judgments and personal judgments play a significant role in not only the desire to accomplish, but in whether that desire will move to the point of fruition.

For many, the desire to accomplish goes to the very core of who we are. There are several common threads:

## **1. Task Orientation**

In order to accomplish work, not merely a *desire* to accomplish work, but to *actually* accomplish work, an individual must have a strong task orientation, or in other words, a strong work ethic enveloped within strong tactical judgments. Tactical judgment, which is one of the three global judgments, must also be “relatively” strong as compared to the other two global judgments, the second, people or relational judgment, and thirdly, strategic judgment. Tactical or task judgment doesn’t necessarily need to be stronger than the other judgments, simply strong enough so that by itself and also in relation to the other judgments, that task judgments are being considered, and used, throughout the day, as decisions are being made.

Oftentimes exceptional senior and executive leaders defer their tactical judgments, and focus on their relational judgments, to inspire and motivate, and on their strategic judgments, to set vision, direction, and policy, and leave the tactical decision making to subordinates. Do not misconstrue a *deferring* of tactical judgments as a *diminishing* of tactical judgments. However, the undervaluation of tactical judgments, may serve to undermine the success of a junior or mid-level employee, where performance is gauged more often on accomplishment, on detail, on “getting things done”, not on setting organizational direction and vision.

## **2. Meaningfulness of Work and Morale**

In order to be successful in the long term, and especially in executive level positions and roles, an individual must feel a strong sense of personal gratification about work, and also be able to project that sense of gratification to others, i.e., high morale. A sense of personal gratification usually, not always, but usually slightly outweighs the projection of high morale in terms of long term success. However, those who project low morale, not simply a lack of high morale, but those who actually project low morale, usually fail. Employees of high morale rarely tolerate an individual of low morale.

Meaningfulness of work or the personal gratification of work is an extremely personal value, and how lucky for humanity that it is. Imagine how monotonous, and the lack of innovation, if all humans enjoyed the same type of work. Most of us have met people from varying walks of life who thoroughly enjoy their particular profession. The saying, “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure” is certainly true in the arena of meaningfulness of work. The individual who enjoys their work stands a much better chance for success and accomplishment, which is of course, completely intuitive and obvious.

Conversely, and unfortunately, there are many individuals who do not profoundly enjoy their work, yet due to today’s economic pressures, remain in their job. They often perform satisfactorily, but rarely achieve or accomplish to their full potential, due to a lack of personal meaningfulness in their work. They are simply not passionate about what they do.

## **3. Work / Life Balance**

It is no doubt a worn out cliché, but the AQ<sup>ai</sup> scores reveal over and over and over that for an individual to achieve long term lasting true success and happiness, that a great effort

must be made to establish at least a modicum of work / life balance. Surely there are times in any career when personal issues will temporarily hold second priority to work issues. But if an individual does not establish a sense of “who they are” which is at least marginally on par with “what they do” then without equivocation, the pleasure of living and the overall quality of life will diminish. Sooner or later, even if an individual has a *desire* to accomplish and to achieve success, the *ability* to accomplish and achieve will be undermined if personal judgments and decisions are, and remain, poor, and if personal choices always take a back seat to work choices.

#### **4. Self Image**

The ability to project or imagine yourself at some point in the future, more successful than today or in some way better than today, is a powerful internal motivator. A positive self-image will cause individuals to set goals, to have dreams, and provide the drive to achieve them. Individuals without a positive self-image usually have an accompanying lack of self-motivation, and are seen as those motivated by the stick, rather than the carrot, or as the saying goes, motivated “away from pain, rather than toward gain”.

One interesting nuance of self-image is its relation to station in life. If an individual is in the early to mid-stages of their career, a positive self-image is crucial, for without a positive self-image they will likely be seen as the classic “slacker”, simply lacking ambition, motivation, and the drive for success.

However, it is not uncommon for accomplished executives in the twilight of their careers to develop a diminished self-image. In this instance, it is likely due to a profound sense of gratification at their current stage in life, not necessarily a feeling of entitlement, which they may or may not have, but with the pleasure that they have completed the journey, they have achieved success, and are somewhat content. They are often able to enjoy, and work in, the moment, without the need to seek the next rung on the ladder. This may also allow them to guide their organization in a more tempered, thoughtful path to success. Of course depending on the organization, this may or may not be what is needed for long term future success, but a slightly less positive self-image in a senior executive may serve as a calming, more deliberate voice for the organization.

#### **5. Sense of Priority**

A strong sense of priority, what I “should” or “could” or “ought” to be doing, as with many strong judgments, has an upside and a downside. Those who possess a strong sense of priority are more likely to get the “most” out of life. They are more likely to feel a sense of “calling” within their work, and are more able to experience the simple pleasure and joy of living, if—and this is a big if—they are doing what they feel they should or ought to be doing, i.e., satisfying their strong sense of priority. However, if they are not satisfying their strong

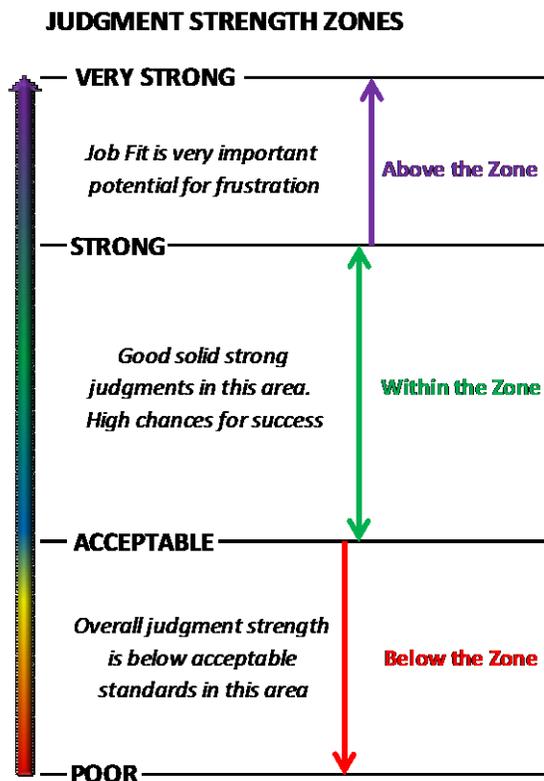
sense of priority, they are more susceptible to burnout or at least a sense of angst within their life and work, sometimes manifested as a midlife crisis.

Individuals without a strong sense of priority tend to be less concerned with “what they do”, and possibly even less concerned with “who they are”. An individual with a not so well defined sense of priority will often mutter the phrase, “Hey, it’s just a job, it pays the bills. I’m ok with it, whatever.” The upside here is there is less chance for burnout or angst. The downside is that there is usually a diminished sense of overall contribution, and an accompanying diminished sense of the pleasure of living, not necessarily an unhappy life, simply a lack of intensity of pleasure and fulfillment as compared to those with a strong sense of priority.

Individuals with a bona fide weak sense of priority experience a multitude of personal issues which fall outside the scope of this document.

## 6. Frustration and Job Fit

Most adults either know, or have experienced, individuals with varying degrees of judgment in each of the areas in the Judgment Strength Zone chart below, ranging from poor to very strong. Individuals with overall poor judgment, no matter how desirous they are to be



successful, will struggle in a judgmentally demanding job. No matter how hard they try, they just don’t “get it”. Those with stronger judgments will tend to be more successful. So it stands

to reason that those with very strong judgments will tend to be the most successful. In many situations this is true, but again, as is often the case, very strong judgments require additional consideration, to avoid two of the most common pitfalls, job frustration, and poor job fit, which if manifested can be the death knell of achievement.

Fortunately, in addition to the presence, or lack thereof, of judgment, which the AQ<sup>ai</sup> measures with concrete accuracy, the AQ<sup>ai</sup> is also adept at measuring the potential for frustration, which is often exacerbated by poor job fit. For example, it is common for extremely task dominant or task oriented individuals to enjoy manufacturing work. They often enjoy repetitive tasks, and to-do lists, whereas an intrinsic dominant or “people person” would likely find this work simply unbearable. We’ve all heard utterances similar to, “I don’t know how you do that work. It would drive me crazy!” Again, one man’s trash is another man’s treasure, and differing value tendencies make all the difference. Of course the AQ<sup>ai</sup> does not take the place, especially when dealing with an individual with very strong judgments, of a detailed thorough interview.

Individuals with poor judgment often lack the judgment capacity to handle the judgment demands of the situation. They find the work “over their head”. But what happens if the judgment demands of the job do not stimulate an individual’s very strong judgment capacity? Sometime, not all the time, but sometime, frustration will set in. This may manifest itself in a variety of ways in someone who was originally a model employee, such as job boredom, displeasure with superiors or subordinates, laziness, arrogance, refusal to follow procedures, declining performance, etc.

Individuals with very strong judgment must make sure that they have developed the personal mechanics, and they are firmly in place, to deal with the potential for frustration. Those who “get it” quicker than others, if not careful, will drive themselves and those around them a bit nuts, often allowing minor issues to become major issues for no reason other than an inability to deal with frustration. Frustration is, and always will be, one of the biggest detriments to the use of good judgment and good decision making, and ultimately, a detriment to the ability to achieve and succeed. Frustration is also a judgment call, under our control. We can choose to be frustrated, or we can choose not to be frustrated. It is a choice we make, albeit at times not an easy choice, but nevertheless, it is a choice.

When an employee is immersed in frustration, the core issue—aside from the individual regrettably letting frustration cloud their judgment—may be, and often is, a job fit issue. In the right job, a job which the individual enthusiastically embraces, the individual will bring strong judgment and decision making to issues and problems and will be a motivated, achieving, and accomplishing employee. Therefore, when an individual is identified as having very strong judgment, it becomes absolutely essential to discuss, almost to the point of ad nauseam, job specifics and details and requirements, to improve the chances that the employer and the

employee and the job are a good fit. Both employer and potential employee will benefit from an open honest detailed conversation.

Individuals with very strong judgment may be keenly adept during interviews at saying “all the right things”, not necessarily to deceive, they are simply good at saying the right things, i.e., using good judgment. Employers, especially those desperate for quality employees, want to believe, and again, this is not to imply that those with strong judgment are deceptive, but merely to indicate that it is very important when considering an individual of very strong judgment to make certain that the specifics of the job are fully understood and embraced. An individual may sincerely “need” a job, but over the long run, an employee in the wrong job is a setup for failure.

### CONCLUSION

As perplexing as the identification of those with stick-to-itiveness may be, there are some clearly identifiable value tendencies. These tendencies are all intuitive and easy to comprehend, and frankly, easy to measure via the AQ<sup>ai</sup>. Strong scores in task judgment, meaningfulness of work, morale, self-image, and the understanding of personal priorities help to identify those individuals with not only a desire to work hard and achieve, but those who will actually do it. Hall of fame college basketball player and coach, John Wooden profoundly said, “Don’t mistake activity for accomplishment.” Of course it helps to be able to make a good decision, but without the desire to achieve and to accomplish, all of the ability and potential in the world will often go unrealized.

It is a quintessential human trait to want to help those who help themselves, and to not want to help those who don’t help themselves. Employers tell us repeatedly that they would rather have an individual with a little less judgment, not weak judgment, but a little less judgment, or a little less decision making ability, but who have a strong desire to achieve, over an individual with an abundance of judgment, but lacking in desire. Of course what employers really want is an employee with both desire and judgment, for when you get both, you get accomplishment.