



Quirky: The Remarkable Story of the Traits, Foibles, and Genius of Breakthrough Innovators Who Changed the World

Melissa A. Schilling

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The science behind the traits and quirks that drive creative geniuses to make spectacular breakthroughs

What really distinguishes the people who literally change the world--those creative geniuses who give us one breakthrough after another? What differentiates Marie Curie or Elon Musk from the merely creative, the many one-hit wonders among us?

Melissa Schilling, one of the world's leading experts on innovation, invites us into the lives of eight people--Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Elon Musk, Dean Kamen, Nikola Tesla, Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, and Steve Jobs--to identify the traits and experiences that drove them to make spectacular breakthroughs, over and over again. While all innovators possess incredible intellect, intellect alone, she shows, does not create a breakthrough innovator. It was their personal, social, and emotional quirkiness that enabled true genius to break through--not just once but again and again.

Nearly all of the innovators, for example, exhibited high levels of social detachment that enabled them to break with norms, an almost maniacal faith in their ability to overcome obstacles, and a passionate idealism that pushed them to work with intensity even in the face of criticism or failure. While these individual traits would be unlikely to work in isolation--being unconventional without having high levels of confidence, effort, and goal directedness might, for example, result in rebellious behavior that does not lead to meaningful outcomes--together they can fuel both the ability and drive to pursue what others deem impossible.

Schilling shares the science behind the convergence of traits that increases the likelihood of success. And, as Schilling also reveals, there is much to learn about nurturing breakthrough innovation in our own lives--in, for example, the way we run organizations, manage people, and even how we raise our children.

Quirky: The Remarkable Story of the Traits, Foibles, and Genius of Breakthrough Innovators Who Changed the World Details

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VW says

3.5 STARS

If you've read biographies of the individuals she profiles, you won't learn much new about them here. However, the framework of the discussion--examining the sense of separateness, self-efficacy, creativity, high idealism, drive, opportunities, and resources--is useful and and thought-provoking for those who possess one or more of these characteristics. I appreciated her acknowledgement of the differing roles of nature, nurture, and luck. Many works tend to over-emphasize one of the first two in the name of getting more readers. She also makes a point of recognizing the impact that such extraordinary lives had on others, for better and for worse. There are some bits of repetitiveness, but it's an easily-digestible read overall.

Jen Juenke says

A great and fascinating read on what sets serial innovators apart. The book looks at Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Edison, Curie, and Tesla about what set them apart to create great and wonderful things. The book was wonderfully laid out and was an easy read. I thoroughly enjoyed it and learned a lot of useful information!

Mariana says

Wonderful book, exploring common traits of serial breakthrough innovators such as Curie, Einstein, Tesla and Musk. The book explores the convergence of personal and external factors that lead to their great discoveries and achievements and the effort it took to persist in the face of adversity. It also gives us hints on how to foster weird or unconventional thinking and personalities in order to unlock an individual's full capacities. The well summarized mini biographies of all the innovators mentioned in the book are a great bonus and very well incorporated in the overall message of the book. Strongly recommend!

Daiya Hashimoto says

Melissa Schilling, Professor of NYU Stern School of Business, thoroughly review the five key factors below which were shared by the eight serial breakthrough innovators who changed the world, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Elon Musk, Dean Kamen, Nikola Tesla, Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, and Steve Jobs.

These are the five factors, five quirks of the geniuses.

1 A Sense of Separateness

2 Extreme Confidence

3 The Creative Mind

4 A Higher Purpose

5 Driven to Work

The author wrote that the serial innovators can think in different ways from the contemporaries because they are isolated from society. Actually, the innovators are almost super-creative social withdrawals.

An Einstein's friends said, "He had a shy attitude toward everybody. But I never heard even close friend call him by his first name. When someone did treat him with undue familiarity, he would shrink back."

The author introduces recent research which indicates the possibility that there is a biological difference between the normal and the genius. That is the constant amount of brain chemicals such as dopamine. In genius family lines, we often find many mental aberrations. If the amount of the chemicals is normal, man becomes an average person, if it is exquisite, man becomes genius. Really, there is a fine line between genius and madness.

In this book, eight great innovators' lives are storied from public aspect and private aspect. In public side, they all have brilliant achievements. They made monumental inventions, won Nobel Prize, became heroes of the times, run a country, made an era in the world history. However, most of them couldn't lead to normal happiness. They are definitely away from the general happiness like getting married, being surrounded by children and grandchildren, spending time with intimate friends, enjoying slow life because they were merely not interested in such happiness.

The author's said, "The life of the serial breakthrough innovator is not for everyone. Many of the factors that helped them change the world in meaningful ways are inimitable, and many of us would not choose the kind of life they led even if we could."

Elon Musk, Dean Kamen, and Steve Jobs, the modern IT entrepreneurs' stories are good, but a bit familiar. I was interested in Marie Curie, who is the only person who won the Nobel Prize twice. From her early prodigiousness, social estrangement, serial great discoveries, revealed her adultery coincident with Nobel Prize, solitary research life, death of her husband, and to her own death from radiation effect, she looks an ultimate quark apart from the rest.

The says

Every now and then I come across a book that seems to be written just for me. Mellissa Schilling's book *Quirky* was one of those books. I first came across her when listening to Book TV. As she described her interest in what she calls quirky people it became clear that she has opened up a new and very productive vein of riches in studying these people down through recent history. I especially valued her insights about the common traits that identify such 'quirky' persons.

They challenge norms and paradigms and need time alone. Building self-efficacy seems inherent from early on and they often are inspired by grand ambitions. They excel in finding the 'flow' and are supported by having access to technological and intellectual resources often from unusual places and people. From experience I can affirm that living with quirky people can be very demanding. It isn't for the faint of heart. But we are all the beneficiaries of such gifted ones. You can listen to the interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP4KZ...>

Bulent Atalay says

Melissa Schilling's new book, *Quirky*, examines the lives of a finite number of individuals whose legacies have dramatically shaped the way we live and the way we see the world. Her subjects are eight innovators whose lifetimes span two-and-a-half centuries, from Benjamin Franklin the earliest to Elon Musk the latest. We have come to regard their inventions as necessities we could not possibly live without. As a physicist, I have long known the works of Marie Curie and Albert Einstein. I realized in reading Dr. Schilling's book that experimentalist Curie and theorist Einstein share certain strange and quirky traits with each other and with other members of this rare ilk of "serial innovators" (a clever characterization introduced by Schilling). Indeed, genius we see demands certain heavy penalties, including an aversion to authority, being isolated by their very own genius, and subjected to mistrust and suspicion by others who cannot possibly understand them. The author's lively narrative makes the book highly readable and informative while remaining authoritative. I would recommend *Quirky* enthusiastically to the intelligent general reader as well as to the scientist, engineer, and venture capitalist.

Bulent Atalay
www.bulentatalay.com

Lucas Weidner says

It's a pretty good read, basically a collection of short biographical stories of breakthrough innovators, their lives, childhoods, traits, etc. It also touches on why and how they are the geniuses they are/were, what variables influenced that, and how we can foster that in our own selves.

Overall I definitely recommend!

David Gaddis Ross says

Inspiring and Thought Provoking

This book is a comparative case study of several of the most famous and impactful innovators in recent human history (e.g., Benjamin Franklin, Steve Jobs). Synthesizing original source material, academic research on creativity and innovation, and the many in-depth biographies that exist of these famous innovators in science and commerce, Schilling isolates the commonalities in personality and circumstance that lead someone to become a breakthrough innovator. The result is a deeply-engaging and entertaining journey across time and place that will leave you wondering whether Schilling truly has found the secret sauce to making a breakthrough innovator.

Importantly, the author does not oversell her thesis. Although she identifies several common threads in the lives of those she profiles, she also notes exceptions where they arise. The book is written in a style that invites readers to form their own conclusions about how and why some rare people create so much that is new and wonderful for humanity.

On a more personal level, you will likely see much of yourself and, if you are a parent, of your children in the stories of those profiled herein. Thus, reading the book is also a journey of self-discovery.

All told, this is a book for readers who like to think for themselves and discuss what they've read with others who share a passion for discovering how the world around us works.

Artemis says

Insightful!! I admit that I picked it up mostly due to Nikola Tesla (whom I will *always* have a soft spot for), but I think I got more than what I wanted. I learnt so much more about Marie Curie and Elon Musk (which I didn't think I needed but I was more than happy to have had).

Besides giving us biographies of the 8 great innovators shortlisted, she examines the confluence of factors that lead to these successful innovators (for instance, intelligence, self-efficacy, perseverance, creativity). She also examines the habits of these innovators (self-education is very, **very** significant here) and sheds light on how we might one day become one ourselves. :')

The author was also slightly repetitive, especially when highlighting biographies. I swear there were some sentences she used the exact same phrasing for.

P.S. One tiny, insignificant point on which I was confused about: when generalising, the author tended to use "her" and "she" rather than "him" or "he". Not that I'm complaining! I was just confused because I thought it was standard to use "he".

Charlie Miksicek says

Heard about this book on CSPAN's Book TV and immediately wanted to read it. Illustrates the fascinating parallels among serial innovators like Ben Franklin, Einstein, Nikolai Tesla, Edison, Marie Curie, Steve Jobs, Elon Musk. Very well written although parts seem a bit redundant leaving you with the thought, "Didn't I just read this chapter." The author also has the habit, which becomes a bit annoying, of using only female personal pronouns throughout (she, her) even though only one of the innovators is female (as opposed to the current convention of alternating male and female pronouns). It just throws you a bit if she is talking about Ben Franklin in one sentence and in the next sentence she is generalizing about innovators traits and says something like "she would do this". I realize this is just a twist on the older way of using exclusively male pronouns, but it bothers you after awhile. Maybe that is the point.

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I thought I would. It became a task I felt I had to finish rather than one in which I eagerly looked forward to the next section. An important study however on brilliant people who changed the world.

Marks54 says

Melissa Schilling has written a collective biography (multiple case study?) of a group of serial "breakthrough" innovators who have changed the world. The subjects include: Thomas Edison, Elon Musk,

Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Dean Kamen, Steve Jobs, and Nikola Tesla. The intent is to focus on innovators with large numbers of successes, not just on innovators with only a few successes. The life details of these people are examined in detail, so that similarities and differences among them can be identified and discussed. The intuition is that by learning about shared traits among this sample of highly innovative individuals, lessons can be drawn about how to foster innovation among others and build the knowledge stock of society. After going through these cases, the lessons are summarized and presented. The first is that it is necessary to challenge norms and paradigms if one is to innovate. Innovators also need time alone to develop their creativity and not be stymied by the process losses associated with group innovation approaches. A surprise for me from this book is how innovation can be so readily tied to specific individuals. All that stuff about innovation being a team sport? That is so twentieth century! Innovators also need to build a strong sense of self-efficacy. Innovators need to recognize and have confidence in their talents so that their genius can triumph over the others who fail to recognize their value. Again, this is also very surprising. I never would have thought that serial innovators need to be confident in their abilities and skills. Innovators are also generally driven by idealism and are pursuing grand goals and not just individual self-aggrandizement. Innovators also need to have intrinsic motivation and get strong satisfactions from their work - what Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow". Oh yes, serial innovators also need to have sufficient access to the right technological and intellectual resources — they need to be in the right place at the right time if they are to succeed. Seriously??!

I was disappointed by this book. There are some snippets of insight and the central characters are all fascinating. While reading the book I had trouble maintaining that fascination. My problem is that I do not understand what the author wanted to accomplish from writing this book about these individuals this way. I just don't get it. I am familiar with all of these individuals. I have read a number of the biographies about them - the most recent ones I suspect, since all of these lives are thoroughly documented.

What are my issues?

1) Sampling on the dependent variable. The book wants to examine the traits and characteristics of breakthrough individuals and so picks a number of famous individuals who are extreme in their success and productivity. To make this club, one needs to have lots of innovations. OK - when you pick such a set of outstanding individuals, it is very likely that their traits will be unusual, since highly unusual individuals have been selected. What is quirky about any of these individuals? What results are unexpected or unusual? That these people are very smart? That these people are confident? That these people are persistent and even stubborn? That these people are dedicated to their work? How can you apply the lessons learned here to others when the selection criteria require large numbers of external innovative successes to be included?

2) What is new here? Which of the results of this study has not been raised elsewhere and more effectively than it is raised in this book? These are some of the most written about people ever and the reader is presented with some thumbnail sketches and highlight replays of their greatest hits of achievements and quotes.

3) Why the great man (person) theory of innovation that is presumed here? Isn't there just a little bit of the fundamental attribution error at work here? Yes, these are amazing people, but the book reads as if there are decks of innovator baseball cards available to support the book's arguments. The situational context argument, when it shows up in the last couple of chapters, is fairly weak.

4) Why this sample? So we have new economy titans but there was not important innovation prior to the US Civil War (Franklin is the exception)? Leonardo is excluded but Isaacson did a recent bio of him (and one of Franklin). A few more passing references to Newton or Galileo perhaps? The sample appears to have a bit of

convenience to it.

5). What is the point of bringing in motivation theories? Why simplify complex lives after all the trouble of mining the biographical details associated with each case? Did anyone seriously doubt that generic motivation theories could be made to fit their individuals? What would the argument against it even look like? Again, what is surprising here? So much seems obvious to anyone with some familiarity with these cases. How is the concluding chapter informative about anything?

Innovation and innovators are fascinating, as are serious business biographies of major innovators and managers. This fascination did not carry over to this book - and that is unfortunate.

Lecy says

Chock full of research about some of the world's greatest creative geniuses like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Marie Curie, this book is like a mini-biography of the idiosyncrasies of these brilliant people, and what made them different from any other person. Although I found the stories shared to be quite interesting, it was quite redundant in places. *ARC provided by the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

Kyle says

I received an ARC of this book via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.

I found this book to have an interesting concept. On the surface, placing each of these innovators into the same strata would be a bit of a stretch, but the author does this grouping masterfully. There is enough information on each individual to gain a true sense of who they are without becoming a full-length biography on each. The reader easily flows from Musk to Jobs to Curie without being lost or bogged down with superfluous prose.

Meg Berg says

This book turned out to be quite different than the one I thought I would be reading. I was expecting an exploration of neurodiversity, but this turned out to be an exploration of traits shared by 5 famous innovators. There were some interesting bits. I realized that there were quite a number of biological details about each of the subjects that I'd never learned, or had forgotten. It was enlightening to see the ways in which some personality traits that others might see as "less desirable" played to their advantage. I had a bit of trouble finishing this book, however, for two reasons. This is one of those books in which the author feels the need to convince the reader that she has written a revolutionary text. It doesn't feel revolutionary and her repeated attempts to convince me otherwise became tiresome. The book is also extremely repetitive. In an effort to make each chapter stand alone, a reader who starts at the beginning and commits to reading the book in its entirety has to wade through endless recaps. How many times should I have to read the same vignette about Marie Curie in one book? It is worth reading for someone who is looking to bring more innovation to a company or workplace, but may be hit or miss for the rest of us.

Janet says

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

From the publisher ---

From historical figures such as Marie Curie to contemporaries such as Steve Jobs, a handful of innovators have changed the world. What made them so spectacularly inventive? Melissa A. Schilling, one of the world's leading experts on innovation, looks at the lives of seven creative geniuses--Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Elon Musk, Dean Kamen, Nicola Tesla, Curie, and Jobs--to identify the traits and quirks that led them to become breakthrough innovators.

Though all innovators possess incredible intellect, intellect alone does not create a serial innovator. There are other very strong commonalities: for instance, nearly all exhibit very high levels of social detachment. They all have extreme, almost maniacal, faith in their ability to overcome obstacles. And they have a passionate idealism that pushes them to work with intensity even in the face of criticism or failure. These individual traits would be unlikely to work in isolation--being unconventional without having high levels of confidence and direction, for example, might result in rebellious behavior that does not lead to meaningful innovation. Schilling reveals the science behind the convergence of traits that increases the likelihood of success, and shows us how to nurture and facilitate breakthrough innovation in our own lives.

I LOVE the word quirky!! I am proudly quirky whereas the world probably sees me as weird ... whatever ? These quirky people are what make the world go round right here and right now. I admit that I had to look up who Dean Kamen was and I learned so many new things about the other historical figures – as a librarian I am a knowledge junkie! Schilling has written a wonderful book about how innovative people made our life “livable” today – can you imagine what the world would have been like without electricity or computers or ways to cure cancer? I certainly can’t.

My nephew is currently reading this book on my kindle and wants you to know that he has pre-ordered it for his “Outlier Book Shelf” – what a fantastic book!
